New Perspectives on Healing Collective Trauma

Towards Social Justice and Communal Well-Being

Edited by Scherto R. Gill

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON HEALING COLLECTIVE TRAUMA

This book examines how historical injustices, especially enslavement, colonialism, and systemic racism, continue to impact societies today. Drawing on global case studies, from the legacies of transatlantic slavery and colonialism in the Americas to Indigenous experiences of reconciliation in Canada, racial healing initiatives in the United States, and community intergenerational dialogues in Africa, it explores how past traumas are transmitted across generations, shaping contemporary inequalities.

The authors argue that addressing these enduring harms requires collective healing, involving processes of acknowledging the wounds, truth-telling, reparations, reconciliation, and inclusive dialogue across diverse generations and communities. Innovative frameworks presented include "Emotional Justice", which emphasizes relational well-being and narrative transformation, and "intergenerational dialogue and inquiry" that reaffirms human dignity and restores traditional wisdom and communal resilience. The book also introduces ideas of "healing architecture" and "politics of dignity" that outline structural features of a just society, showing how institutions can be intentionally designed to respect the equal intrinsic value of all persons, nurture social justice, and foster collective well-being.

Gathering interdisciplinary perspectives and renowned global scholars in one volume, the book offers practical strategies and hopeful narratives that demonstrate how societies can move from entrenched division towards communal healing and shared flourishing. It is an essential resource for anyone interested in creating more just, empathetic, and inclusive societies in our increasingly interconnected world.

Scherto R. Gill is Research Professor and Director of the Global Humanity for Peace Institute at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. She is a Visiting Fellow at the University of Sussex, a Life Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, and a laureate of the Luxembourg Peace Prize. She is the author/co-author and editor/co-editor of many books on the theme of positive peace, dialogue, good governance, and educational transformation.

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INTRODUCTION

Scherto R. Gill

The urgent crises of our times, ranging from geopolitical instabilities and global inequalities to institutional racism and ecological degradation, are exacerbating a profound and widespread sense of ill-being. To fully grasp the depth of these challenges requires situating today's calamities within a broader historical arc. Similarly, understanding localized injustices demands a global perspective. Without such historical and global contextualization, it becomes impossible to meaningfully address the structural injustices that continue to underlie and sustain contemporary global suffering.

This need for contextualization became especially evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, which starkly exposed and intensified global inequities. Its aftermath revealed how structural inequalities, many rooted in the transatlantic slave trade, colonial exploitation, and the violent displacement of Indigenous communities, remain deeply embedded in our social fabric. Racialized hierarchies instituted centuries ago continue to shape contemporary access to resources, education, public health, and economic opportunity, particularly for descendants of enslaved peoples and Indigenous communities.

Responding to this heightened awareness, in 2023, UNESCO's Routes of Enslaved Peoples programme and its partners convened a series of international webinars. These gatherings brought together leading thinkers, scholars, researchers, politicians, and activists to explore new perspectives on today's interconnected crises and their historical antecedents. This edited volume arises from those dialogues. It curates a rich tapestry of conceptual frameworks, cutting-edge research, and grounded practices

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that collectively seek to: (1) illuminate the connections between past atrocities and present injustices; (2) highlight cultural resources and intercultural wisdom that strengthen resilience, healing, and regeneration; and (3) advance new conceptualizations of human dignity and well-being as ethical pillars for structural justice and institutional transformation.

These aims frame the deeper intention of this book – to explore our shared humanity through a rigorous and relational lens. Recognizing our interconnectedness across time, cultures, and ecosystems, the contributors offer historically grounded analyses, innovative conceptualization, and empirically informed insights that address the multifaceted harms of systemic dehumanization. Fifteen distinguished contributors draw from diverse disciplines to examine the enduring legacies continuing to plague our societies, not least transatlantic slavery, colonialism, contemporary racism, and the transgenerational trauma they engender, culminating in a widespread pandemic of ill-being. They have advanced theories and practices of collective healing not as abstract ideals, but as necessary responses to systemic injustice. It offers tested strategies and imaginative possibilities for repair and co-flourishing at personal, institutional, societal, and global levels.

The structure of the volume reflects its thematic progression. Part I, "Structural Injustice and Ill-being" investigates the historical foundations and contemporary consequences of systemic dehumanization. These chapters do not simply recount history – they examine how its legacies persist in today's social structures and collective memories, and why reckoning with this inheritance is essential for meaningful justice.

Building on this foundation, Part II, "Collective Healing: Case Studies from around the World", turns towards pathways of transformation. From the Emotional Justice framework rooted in African traditions to Indigenous approaches in Canada, from grassroots trust-building in the United States to intergenerational dialogues across continents, this section offers compelling case studies and strategies for relational repair and community regeneration. Dialogue, empathy, and reparative action emerge as vital practices for healing collective wounds.

As the chapters unfold, a clear throughline emerges: the imperative of affirming the intrinsic value of all persons as the basis for a just society. Extending the vision even further, Part III, "Architecture of Just Society and Communal Well-Being", presents frameworks for embedding these healing practices into the moral imagination of structural justice and the design of our social institutions. Contributors articulate ethical foundations for a new architecture of care, emphasizing mutual belonging, ecological attunement, and politics of dignity and the well-being of all as central to global institutions and their processes and practices. These chapters reimagine global systems not as engines of extraction and domination

but as an architecture for a just society, relational renewal, and planetary flourishing.

Bridging scholarly inquiry with lived experience, this volume weaves together insights from history, philosophy, sociology, trauma studies, public health, education, grassroots activism, and international relations. Its interdisciplinary reach and inclusive ethos respond directly to contemporary crises by linking structural injustices to visionary responses rooted in human dignity and collective repair.

By gathering a constellation of international voices, *New Perspectives on Healing Collective Trauma* invites readers – scholars, practitioners, policymakers, and communities – to join in a shared endeavour: to redress historical harms, to transform unjust structures, and to co-create a world where all can flourish.

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PART I

Structural Injustice and Ill-being

Contextualization and Conceptualization

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1

MINDING THE HISTORIC VOICES OF THE ENSLAVED, DESCENDANTS, AND THE CALL FOR REPARATIONS

Myriam Cottias

Between the 16th and mid-19th centuries, 12.5 million men, women, and children were deported from Africa to the Americas. To this number must be added the more than 2 million captives who died on the trade routes crossing continents. On the coasts of East Africa and the Indian Ocean, the trade has been estimated at over one million men and women. In an area between Senegambia and Central and East Africa, people were deported mainly to Brazil (40% of trafficked captives) and the Caribbean islands (60%), and through internal trafficking to the United States, constituting the "peculiar institution" as Kenneth Stampp put it in 1956.

African Slavery and the Global Economy

Slavery, as it developed from the end of the 15th century onwards, was linked to globalization, mainly within the Atlantic complex. The first "world economy" – as defined by Immanuel Wallerstein – understood as the transcontinental linking of societies, was based on two elements. First, the slave trade (formerly "commerce") of populations from African societies, and second, the demand in Europe for new consumer products such as tobacco and sugar, which replaced honey after the Crusades. The so-called "plantation economy" – the production of sugar cane by slave labour – was first developed by the Portuguese in the Azores, São Tomé, and the Cape Verde Islands after 1486, then in the Americas. The colonization of the spaces and societies of the Americas as "discovered" by Christopher Columbus in 1492 with the support of the Catholic Spanish sovereigns Isabella and Ferdinand was influenced by the Portuguese

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experience of combining sugar production and the African slave trade. This globalized world was initially divided between the Portuguese and the Spanish. Indeed, in the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1492, Pope Alexander VI divided the world into a Spanish zone corresponding to the Americas and a Portuguese zone comprising Africa, Brazil, and the Moluccas. Later, in the 16th century (1533 for France with François I), the other European maritime powers also embarked on globalized trade. Until the early 18th century, the slave trade was organized by a Spanish international trade act known as the "Asiento" (or the Asiento System). In return for a fee, Spain granted individuals or companies the exclusive right to trade slaves. Portugal, England, Holland, and France successively held this right. The trade was organized according to different timeframes and two modes of seafaring traffic: triangular or straight.

In the North Atlantic, the so-called "triangular trade" prevailed. Shipowners or private or state-owned trading companies established in Europe's major ports armed ships with goods that could be traded on African coasts in exchange for captives. The products that enabled Europeans to establish trade relations with African royalty were high-quality manufactured goods, resulting from the global circulation of alcoholic spirits, horses, and guns, but also fabrics (called "indiennes" because they were originally imported from the Asian subcontinent), and cowries or shells, which served as currency among African royalty and were also imported from the Indo-Pacific region (Mozambique, Kenya, Zanzibar, Maldives, South India, Philippines, and Malaysia). French textile products were a second choice. Upon arrival at the trading ports on the West African coast, these goods were bartered for captives who, after crossing the Atlantic, were sold in the ports of an area between the Chesapeake and Colombia. Their price was converted into colonial commodities, which were then sent back to Europe to be traded.

In the South Atlantic, straight trade was used, especially from the mid-18th century onwards. Without passing through the colonial metropolises, captives were exchanged for colonial goods, first from Senegambia and the Gulf of Guinea, and then from Angola to Brazil, in the area between Pernambuco and Rio de Janeiro. Bilateral trade between Bahia, Pernambuco, and the Gulf of Guinea was organized around cassava flour, tobacco, and sugarcane brandy. In the Indian Ocean, the trade was organized from the coasts of Madagascar and East Africa to Madagascar, the Mascarene Islands (Ile Bourbon and Ile de France), the Comoros, and the Empire of Oman. Over two centuries, African slave labour was used to cultivate crops in demand: in the 18th century, the sugar plantation economy dominated; and then, in the 19th century, there was the development of clove, coconut, and cereal plantations, especially in Zanzibar, and date plantations in Oman.

Colonial states and empires integrated processes and production systems, blending several dimensions – global, regional, national, and local – because despite the circulation and connections brought about by the slave trade, slave systems, and their codification and legislation were mainly developed within, for example, European national frameworks.

The Entrenchment of Social Relations

The African slave trade and the enslavement of Africans in these globalized economies gave impetus to particular relationships and entrenched social relations based on domination and structural and symbolic violence that have been passed down from generation to generation.

From the end of the 18th century, the systematization of slave labour in modern economies based on the circulation of people and capital led to a Eurocentric worldview in relation to which peripheries were defined. It covered all areas of thought and conception of the Other. The colonial experience of slavery gave new semantics to the notion of race. From a marker of belonging to a group, to a whole, the term designated people with the "same" physical appearance and, originally, the "same" civil status: slave or "slave-owner".

Combined, however, with servile or "free" status, in each colony of the Americas, it created a local racial hierarchy along a continuum in which the "white-free-slave-owner" was placed in a position of superiority over the "black-slave", who was at the bottom of the ladder. In discourse, all intermediate categories were placed according to criteria in which the racial factor (more or less "white") took precedence over the social factor (more or less wealthy). In reality, however, the perfect overlap between colour and civil and racial status was complicated. By mixing populations – and it must not be forgotten that sexual violence against female slaves played a significant part in this – inheriting property, economic skills, individual talents, and inventiveness, de facto fluidity between individuals of different civil status arose, and complex categories were created. For example, in 18th-century Santo Domingo, freedmen and "coloured freemen" were infinitely richer than "whites". In mid-19th-century Martinique and Guadeloupe, slaves owned slaves. "Whites" depended on the wages earned by their slaves in small urban jobs.

Western philosophical thought, based on a global analysis of the phenomena of slavery, ignores this subtle development, all the more so as it is a slow, highly individualized phenomenon. In the name of universal reason, which provides access to Truth and Happiness at the same time, philosophers constructed a paradigm centred on Europe where Progress in a material, intellectual, and moral sense was possible. Based on these principles, a hierarchy of worlds was established. Following the initial criticisms

voiced by Diderot and Abbé Raynal in the name of a universalist conception of humanity and the social justice owed to enslaved Africans, abolitionist thought developed in England and the United States, born within philanthropic societies. While in the 18th century, abolitionism was conceived more in a national context and focused primarily on the abolition of the slave trade, after the Saint-Domingue slave uprising in 1791 and the French colony's independence in 1804, the framework changed. England, which enacted the abolition of the slave trade at the same time as the United States, sought to impose abolition through international treaties such as the Treaty of Vienna in 1815. However, these were only gradually applied. It wasn't until the 1830s that transnational networks organized around the abolition of slavery, first transatlantic, then worldwide. The new English Society for the Abolition of Slavery, founded in 1830, had correspondents throughout the Western world (Europe and the United States). However, its objectives went beyond this geographical framework, and it denounced slavery in Russia, Muslim countries, the Iberian colonies, and new Latin American states such as Brazil and Venezuela. Activities around abolition in Europe and the Americas during the 19th century spanned the period from 1823 in Chile to 1888 in Brazil. England voted for gradual abolition in 1833, and France for the immediate abolition of slavery in the French colonies in 1848.

However, the connections pushing for abolition were not only those of states, organized societies, or Christian churches, with the circulation and dissemination of ideas based on religion, first Protestant, and then Catholic. The main subjects, the slaves, were also actors in this international pressure exerted on Western states from the 18th century onwards. This pressure was reinforced by the example of Haiti's insurrection in 1791 and independence in 1802, of which the Atlantic world and beyond, all the way to the Indian Ocean, were well aware. Freedom became a shared horizon of expectation. Slave revolts, demands for emancipation or land ownership in the form of reparations, spread from colony to colony, echoing each other, shaking European colonial empires while ignoring political sovereignties. These ideas circulated with the slaves, free men of colour, and ordinary travellers who crossed these colonial spaces. They linked Jamaica with the United States, Martinique with Louisiana, or followed multiple itineraries that ultimately constituted a political imaginary among the enslaved that was centred on the abolition of slavery. It was precisely around this freedom that European states asserted their moral unity and justified their colonial intervention in Africa at the end of the 19th century at the Berlin Conference of 1885. Officially, the aim was to eradicate slavery from African societies, but certain ideas prevailed: the evolution of both individuals and societies is determined by laws; societies

must be organized on a scientific basis and reconcile Order and Progress; and the first true theories of colonization were based on a duty to civilize and Christianize non-Westerners in the name of Western superiority.

Developed within imperial frameworks – as Great Britain and Belgium adhered to it just as much as France – and supported by the experience of slavery, which polarized power relations, the Western ideological superiority on display at the end of the 19th century was transcribed into "scientific racism". Geographical and anthropological societies throughout the West worked to prove, through anthropometric experiments whose results were widely circulated, that the inferiority of non-Europeans, of former slaves and the newly colonized, was rooted in both bodies and minds. Strong cultural variations are linked to these racial differences. The equality of the human race and freedom take on a very Western meaning, and the arrangements with slavery relations that remain on the African continent bend before the commercial interests of the European powers, supported by this colonial otherness that science claims to prove.

States and the Memory of Slavery: From a Globalized Past to a Global Issue

African slavery has played an important role in the history of states, particularly in Europe and the United States. It built their wealth, shaped their ideologies, and influenced their philosophical principles, but this importance has not been fully recognized, nor have the legacies produced by the history of slavery. The resurgence of the question of reparations is a sign that the process of establishing equality between social actors has not been completed, and that social inequality has been maintained.

In 2001, the United Nations held the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance in Durban, which aimed to combat racism (United Nations, n.d.). However, it failed to secure a consensus among states in favour of an apology. Despite this, several governments have since issued apologies: in 2007, Great Britain for its role in the slave trade; in 2017, Denmark; in 2019, the European Parliament for the "suffering inflicted on millions of men, women and children in the transatlantic slave trade" (Resolution 2018/2899); in 2022, the Netherlands for its role in the history of slavery; in 2023, Portugal.

With the shift in the balance of power since the 2000s, national dates for commemorating the memory of slavery have been established. Internationally, 25 March has been designated "International Day for the Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade" by the United Nations, while 23 August is "UNESCO's International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition" (in reference to the Saint-Domingue slave uprising in 1791). In France, 10 May has been

established as a *Journée des Mémoires de la Traite, de l'Esclavage et de leurs Abolitions* (Day of Remembrance of the Slave Trade, Slavery, and its Abolition), and 23 May as a tribute to the victims of colonial slavery. Senegal has set 27 April as the date. In Brazil, two dates have been chosen: 13 May, the day Princess Isabel abolished slavery (albeit with little effect), and 20 November for the "National Day of Black Consciousness", which is the anniversary of the death of Zumbi dos Palmares, the leader of Brazil's largest maroon village. The Netherlands has instituted *Keti-koti* (from the Surinamese word for broken irons) every 1 July to commemorate the end of slavery in Surinam (formerly Dutch Guyana) and the Dutch Antilles. In Jamaica, as in Trinidad and Tobago and all the former English colonies, Emancipation Day on 1 August celebrates the abolition of slavery and the independence of these countries. Mauritius celebrates abolition on 1 February at Pointe Canon. In the United States, as in Great Britain, Black History Month allows for the organization of cultural events and educational activities throughout the public school system. In 2021, Juneteenth (19 June) was established as National Independence Day to commemorate the end of the Civil War and the Emancipation of Black Americans from slavery in the United States. All these official events constitute political recognition, but it is difficult to measure their social impact. Rather than considering the memories held by the heirs of this history, commemoration expresses the political use made of the past.

The idea of the "return" of former slaves to Africa (various "Back to Africa" movements), after having been the project of colonial, abolitionist, or slave-owning authorities – for example, the American Colonization Society of 1816 "repatriated" 15,000 African Americans to Africa and created Liberia in 1847 – was taken up again in the 20th century by the Afrodescendant diaspora and African states. Thus, in 1955, Haile Selassie I, Emperor of Ethiopia, decided to give the lands of Shashamene to "Blacks all over the world", but only the Rastafarians of Jamaica responded to this appeal for politico-religious reasons (Bonacci, 2008, p. 760).

If the return to Africa as the original and ancestral homeland of populations deported to the Americas was supported by a shared vision and hope for freedom, egalitarianism, and the absence of racism, the 20th century reinforced these expectations with scientific techniques. To the genealogical question of origins, which is marked by the breakup of family and cultural ties (a major theme in literature, philosophy, and artistic creation) and to emphasize transportation and exile far from Africa, genomic analyses have attempted to answer and bridge what Edouard Glissant called the void or "gulf" of the Middle Passage. The approach described by Alex Haley in his book *Roots* (Haley, 1994), in which he recounts how his research based on his family's oral history enabled him

to trace back to the Gambian village of an ancestor who was allegedly enslaved at the end of the 18th century, has more recently been overtaken by a method based on science.

From 1992 onwards, genetic ancestry tests, which are becoming more and more specific, have aimed to fill in the silences of a history that failed to record the identity of deported slaves. A major industry is thus developing in the United States and Western Europe to enable individuals to decode their genome in order to discover their "true" ancestral origins, their "genetic ethnicity", thus bending the trauma of the absence of origin (Abel, 2016).

The notion of "return" has thus taken on another dimension. On the one hand, numerous memorial trips have been organized – in particular by the African Ancestry company on the basis of genetic test results – from the Americas to the countries of supposed origin (Nelson, 2016). In 2010, for example, a trip was organized as part of an Ancestry Reconnection Program with people whose genetic origins were Cameroonian, such as film director Spike Lee, music producer Quincy Jones, and former US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. These returns to one's scientifically determined origins have also led to the valorization of heritage sites such as Bimbia, discovered in 1987, and listed as a national heritage site in Cameroon, although its authenticity is disputed (Sinang, 2018).

On the other hand, these genomic links woven across the Atlantic have led to specific political decisions aimed at strengthening the ties, both spiritual and economic, between certain African states and their diasporas. For example, in 2010, after the earthquake in Haiti, Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade offered Haitians a "voluntary return" to African soil.[1] In Sierra Leone, citizenship is granted to those who can prove their links with the country through DNA testing. The same is true in Ghana, where nationality can now be acquired by this genomic proof, whereas in 1961, W. E. B. DuBois had moved to Ghana when Kwame Nkrumah was Ghana's first president and obtained Ghanaian nationality by asking for it upon arrival. In September 2018, Ghanaian Head of State Nana Akufo-Addo inaugurated the "Year of Return", with festivals and events organized to commemorate the victims of slavery. At the international level, on the sidelines of the 73rd session of the United Nations General Assembly in 2019, the time to return was seen as a historically won right. This right was already enshrined by the African Union, which in 2014 recognized that the "sixth region" of the African continent is not geographical but is made up of the diaspora of people of African descent. These decisions are somewhat the reverse of the memorial monuments centred on the symbol of "no return".

The memory of slavery has thus been put into discourse, images, and heritage. UNESCO's Intangible Heritage of Humanity listings reflect this, for example, Maloya'dance of Reunion Island, Gwo Ka'drums in Guadeloupe, the text Mandèn Charter in Mali, and Tumba francesa'dance in Cuba. The Atlantic circulation of black populations has also been recreated as a creative experience within the "black" diaspora in 20th-century culture. Considered through notions, such as "métissage", "transculturation", "créolisation", and "hybridity", themselves based on "encounter", "violent opposition", cultural "creation", and "reinterpretation", transnational cultural genealogies have been established. Music, dance, literature, and religion are all cognitive expressions of the "Black Atlantic", which links West and Central Africa with the Americas, ignoring nationalist borders. In this "counterculture of modernity", as Paul Gilroy puts it in his book *The Black Atlantic*, memory plays an essential role; a transcontinental memory of slavery whose discourse, images, and heritage are regularly influenced on both sides across the continents, thanks to the circulation of information.

Museums and heritage sites also express the experience of those subjected to slavery, albeit differently. In Ghana, the museums of Cape Coast and Elmina, former slave-trading forts, evoke the history of the slave trade. In Porto Novo, Benin, next to the House of Afro-Brazilians, and following Ouidah 92, the world's first festival of voodoo cultures, major projects have been developed, such as the Slave Route, which reconstructs the journey of captives to the Door of No Return, marking their departure from the continent. In Senegal, the Maison des Esclaves in Gorée has become a place of pilgrimage and an international symbol of awareness of the atrocities suffered by Africans during the European slave trade, while the Musée des Civilisations Noires in Dakar promotes a broader view of Africa. The message sent out by all these African sites is resolutely outward-looking, particularly towards the diasporas.

On the other hand, across the Atlantic, the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC, is focused on recognizing the importance of African Americans in the construction of the American nation. The aim is to rewrite the history of the United States by highlighting the contributions of African Americans through slavery. In Europe, the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool was the first to open on the continent. However, as some associations of people who bear witness to the memory of slavery have pointed out, the main memorials have been organized around the abolition of slavery: the Arch of Return in New York; the Nantes Abolition Memorial; the National Slavery Monument in Amsterdam's Oosterpark; the ACTe Memorial in Point-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe; the Slave Memorial in Cape Town. This focus

does not consider the suffering and injustice engendered by the history of slavery.

The memory of slavery has also been considered by states through the establishment of so-called "memorial" laws. For example, in France, the Taubira Law of 20 May 2001, named after the deputy who brought it before the French National Assembly, by which France recognizes slavery as an act against humanity. In Senegal, the Senegalese law of 27 March 2010 criminalizes slavery.

However, these symbolic, legislative, and educational public policies are not enough to combat racism and discrimination. They do not provide a sufficiently effective response to demands for justice and equality; on the contrary, they provide the basis for demands for reparations, as questions about the effectiveness of the "end of slavery", the continuity of economic and social inequalities, and racialized and/or hierarchical social relations inherited from slavery continue to be acute.

In September 2013, under the aegis of Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Caribbean states launched a campaign aimed at Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom to obtain reparations. The states, including Haiti, took these countries to court, demanding reparations for the damage caused by slavery and colonization. In the United States, the demand for reparations reemerged in a radical way during the Ferguson racial clashes of 2014/2015 and Charlottesville in 2017, with the "Black Lives Matter" movement initiated in 2012 reactivated. Justice – in the ethical sense and in that of judicial reform – and equal treatment, which form the principles of the demands, were put into perspective with a global demand for reparations for slavery and public policies in favour of African Americans. The responses to these global demands for reparation are diverse. In the Netherlands, the government has decided to set up a fund of 200 million euros to address the contemporary effects of slavery, while in the United States, private banking institutions such as Chase Manhattan Bank and Harvard, Columbia, and Howard Universities, among others, have chosen to fund specific scholarships for Afro-descendants and to join the African American Redress Network to build a more just society based on the wounds of history, their contemporary consequences, and forms of reconciliation and reparations. Though these programs may today in 2025 be in danger of elimination, some institutions have already accomplished a significant amount of research on their connections to slavery.

In 2020, Europe called for the adoption of national plans to take into account the colonial past and combat structural racism. Changing how history is inscribed in public spaces is also a question of reparation. Changing the names of streets bearing the names of slavers and removing

statues representing slaveholders and the enslaved in cities are ways of changing how history is written, taking into account all actors in the history of slavery.

Reparations, in all the polysemy of the term, help restore justice for a more egalitarian world. Voices today are calling for various forms of reparations, be these in the form of cultural heritage from museum collections, recognition and apologies, monetary developmental funds, or rewriting history with a polylogue inclusive of the diversity of the African experience of the enslaved and their descendants worldwide.

Note

1 This proposal consists of making a portion of land available in Senegal and welcoming 160 Haitian students to Senegal, considered as "our brothers in blood and milk" and "out of a duty of remembrance and gratitude to this country and this people whose struggles for human dignity are exemplary". Amadou Lamine Ba, Senegal's Minister of International and Humanitarian Affairs. Richard Anderson and Henry B. Lovejoy, *Liberated Africans and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1807–1896,* eds. (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2020).

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2

HISTORICAL TRAUMA AND ITS AFTERMATH

Creating a Path to Healing

Joy Angela DeGruy

Introduction

Humanity stands as a unique convergence of nature's domains – mineral, vegetable, and animal – crowned with an unparalleled capacity for rational thought. Through intellect and consciousness, humans have achieved mastery over their environment in ways no other species has matched. Our ability to learn, create, and innovate has led to extraordinary achievements across all fields of human endeavour. Through dedicated study and practice, we have unlocked the secrets of science, probed the depths of philosophical thought, created transcendent works of art, and developed technologies that would seem magical to our ancestors.

We have learned to heal the sick, traverse vast distances across land, sea, and air, and even venture beyond our planet's boundaries to explore the cosmos. We humans carry within us the seeds of unprecedented advancement for global civilization. Our collective knowledge, creativity, and innovative spirit have the potential to solve humanity's greatest challenges and usher in an era of progress across material, social, and spiritual dimensions. Yet, this same remarkable capacity for creation and progress is matched by an equally potent power for destruction. The same intelligence that allows us to build cities can devise ways to destroy them. The technology that connects continents can also be turned into weapons of mass devastation. Our ability to harness the planet's resources for development also gives us the means to lay waste to the delicate ecosystems of our blue marble Earth.

This duality defines the human condition; we are beings of both magnificent potential and terrible capability. Our reality encompasses both

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humanity's highest aspirations for advancement and our darkest capacities for horror. The path we ultimately take will depend on how we choose to direct our extraordinary powers. In this critical moment of human history, when in America, the divisive forces are gaining unprecedented momentum, threatening to rip the nation apart and contraindicate its core values of democracy and freedom, we face the profound responsibility of choosing which aspects of our nature we will nurture and express. Our future hinges on our collective wisdom to channel our capabilities towards progress while restraining our destructive impulses, to build rather than destroy, to heal rather than harm, to unite rather than divide.

Throughout human history, people have subjugated, enslaved, and at times annihilated one another. These acts have been committed in various names: those of monarchs, tribes, nations, and most recently, in the name of racial supremacy and material dominance. Yet invariably, their true purpose has been to consolidate and expand the power of a privileged few. In this pursuit, countless lives have been needlessly sacrificed and even more have suffered to satisfy the appetites of those in power. These crimes against humanity persist across our planet to this day.

This pattern manifests as a seemingly endless cycle: the powerful oppress the less powerful, who in turn oppress those even more vulnerable than themselves. These cycles of oppression leave lasting scars on both victims and victors, wounds that embed themselves in our collective psyche and pass through generations, diminishing our humanity. How can one be truly human while bearing the weight of oppression that condemns them to torment, strips them of their future, and depletes their free will? And likewise, how can one achieve true humanity while profiting from the pain and suffering of those they oppress or exploit?

Some may argue that these conditions are simply part of human nature. Perhaps. Yet, history offers us figures like Ida B. Wells, Nelson Mandela, and Chief Joseph, who help their people break free from these cycles, if only for a time. Now we face our own moment to follow their example to break this cycle and reclaim our humanity. This transformation demands effort from us all. Those who have endured years, decades, and centuries of oppression must heal from both direct injuries and those inherited through generations. Those who have perpetrated these unspeakable acts, and those who continue to benefit from them, must honestly confront their deeds and heal from the psychic wounds that come with being both the cause and beneficiaries of such profound suffering.

Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: The Need for Racial Healing

Racial healing is necessary because of the deep and lasting impacts of historical and ongoing racism on both individuals and communities.

The traumatic legacies of slavery legislated racial segregation, and ongoing systemic discrimination has created deep intergenerational wounds. These wounds manifest in traumas over generations in the areas of mental health, stress responses, and non-productive behavioural patterns (Suite et al., 2007). The impact is highly visible in disparities across health, wealth, education, housing, and law enforcement.

I have chosen to focus my work specifically on the African American experience. My book *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing* suggests that the enslavement of African Americans and the subsequent systemic racism and discrimination they have faced throughout history have had long-lasting effects on individuals and the collective community, with every major institution in America tainted by this systemic malady (DeGruy, 2017).

Science

Science presents itself as a bastion of objective truth, a discipline founded on careful observation, rigorous experimentation, and the precise application of established principles. Its methodology claims to transcend human bias, offering a pure pursuit of knowledge through empirical evidence and systematic study. This noble ideal, however, masks a darker historical reality where scientific authority was used as a weapon of oppression. The stark contradiction between science's stated principles and its historical practice is evident in the development of scientific racism (Isaac, 2004).

Carl von Linnaeus, renowned as the father of modern taxonomy and anthropology, exemplifies this perversion of scientific inquiry (Linnaeus, 1735). His supposedly objective classification of human beings included deeply racist characterizations of Africans as *black, phlegmatic, cunning, lazy, lustful, careless, and governed by caprice*. These weren't mere casual observations, but pronouncements made with the full weight of scientific authority.

This pseudo-scientific framework provided the intellectual foundation for the transatlantic slave trade and centuries of racial oppression (Dennis, 1995). Those who profited from enslaving Africans eagerly embraced these "scientific" classifications, using them to justify their brutal enterprise. The thin veneer of scientific legitimacy transformed base prejudice into fact, creating a framework of dehumanization presented as objective and unbiased truth.

The impact of this scientific racism extended far beyond the ivory tower of academia. It became deeply implanted in social institutions, legal frameworks, and cultural beliefs, creating a legacy of harm that continues to reverberate through generations. The supposed objectivity of science gave racism an intellectual respectability, making it harder to challenge.

This historical example of Carl von Linnaeus serves as a powerful reminder that scientific methodology alone does not guarantee fair, just, or ethical outcomes. When science fails to examine its own biases and assumptions, when it allows itself to become a tool of power rather than of truth, it can provide justification for humanity's brutality. The lesson is not that science itself is inherently flawed, but that we must remain vigilant about how scientific authority can be misused to justify oppression and dehumanization (Jackson & Weidman, 2005). Those invested in the industry of enslavement used just such spurious and baseless claims to exact a legacy of harm that spanned centuries (Kendi, 2016).

Politics

Thomas Jefferson, one of America's most influential founding fathers, utilized his considerable intellectual and political authority to construct and promote theories of racial inequality that would echo through centuries. As both an enslaver and a father to enslaved children, Jefferson's intimate involvement with the institution of slavery adds a layer of profound hypocrisy to his racist ideology.

In his famous and widely circulated work, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Jefferson expressed his personal prejudices while moulding racist beliefs into a bogus scientific theory, lending them the weight of his scholarly reputation and political standing. His declaration that Black people were "inferior to whites in reason … and that in imagination they are dull, tasteless, and anomalous" helped establish a framework for systemic racism that would influence thought and policy far beyond America's borders (Jefferson, 1781, p. 266).

Jefferson's racist theorizing descended into even more degrading territory as he promoted and circulated dehumanizing stereotypes about Black people's physical characteristics and emotional capacity. His baseless assertions about physiological and intellectual inferiority are well documented, he states:

> Blacks smelled bad and were physically unattractive, required less sleep, were dumb, cowardly and incapable of feeling grief … advance it therefore as a suspicion only, that blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments of body and mind.
>
> *(Jefferson, 1781, p. 266)*

By suggesting that these supposed differences might represent a "distinct race", Jefferson provided intellectual cover for the institution of slavery and the broader project of white supremacy.

The profound contradiction between Jefferson's role as an architect of American liberty and his position as an enslaver and promoter of racist ideology illuminates the deep-seated hypocrisy at the heart of American democracy. His writings on race have often been defended by apologists who insist they only reflect the prejudices of "his time", when in fact they actively shaped them, providing ammunition for those seeking to justify racial oppression. The international reach of his ideas helped export American-style racism beyond our borders, influencing racial theories and practices around the globe.

Thomas Jefferson's racist ideologies are intertwined in the nation's earliest political discussions, confirming that racism in America was not a product of ignorance or casual prejudice but carefully constructed and promoted by some of the nation's most educated and influential leaders. Understanding this history is crucial for addressing the persistent effects of these deeply rooted racist ideologies in contemporary society.

Two statements issued in 2020 are evidence of how white supremacy continues to be an indelible part of contemporary American life. FBI Director Christopher Wray told the House Judiciary Committee in February 2020 that "racially motivated violent extremism" had been elevated to "a national threat priority" for the fiscal year 2020. He added that this "puts it on the same footing as ISIS and homegrown violent extremists" inspired by foreign terrorist groups (Boboltz, 2020).

In October of the same year, in its inaugural threat assessment, the Department of Homeland Security concluded that "White supremacists remain the most persistent and lethal threat in the homeland", following widespread concern that the President "didn't do enough to condemn such groups" (Shinkman, 2020).

The formal recognition of white supremacy as a premier national security threat by both the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security in 2020 marked a significant shift in how the federal government officially acknowledges and categorizes domestic terrorism. These statements, coming from the highest levels of American law enforcement and security agencies, provide stark documentation of how white supremacy remains deeply entrenched in contemporary American society. FBI Director Christopher Wray's testimony to the House Judiciary Committee was particularly notable for elevating "racially motivated violent extremism" to "national threat priority" status. By placing this threat on equal footing with ISIS and other foreign terrorist organizations, the FBI formally acknowledged the severe danger posed by domestic white supremacist movements. This equivalence in threat assessment reveals the scale and severity of white supremacist activities within the United States.

The Department of Homeland Security's inaugural threat assessment in October 2020 went even further, explicitly identifying white supremacists as "the most persistent and lethal threat in the homeland". This statement, coming directly from the federal agency responsible for domestic security, represents an unprecedented official recognition of white supremacy's danger to American society.

Together, these assessments carry particular weight because they come from agencies that traditionally have been conservative in their evaluation of domestic threats. The fact that both organizations reached similar conclusions, despite potential political pressure to downplay or entirely ignore such threats, underscores the undeniable reality of white supremacy's persistent presence and growing danger in American life and particularly in the lives of people of colour.

The timing and context of these statements are also very significant. They emerged during a period of increased racial tension and political polarization, when some political leaders had evaded questioning regarding white supremacist activities. The agencies' willingness to name this threat directly, despite potential political consequences, suggests the dire urgency of the situation and the professional assessment that white supremacy poses an immediate danger to the nation's security.

What more powerful evidence can there be that white supremacy is not merely a historical artefact or fringe ideology, but rather an active, organized threat to society? Such statements document how racist ideologies continue to motivate violence and terrorism, requiring the full attention and resources of federal law enforcement and security agencies. Yet, the focus of politicians and law enforcement continues to shift to the growing crime and violence happening in urban America, often explicitly targeting immigrants and communities of colour (Mesok et al., 2024). These statements from federal agencies provide institutional validation for what many communities of colour have long experienced and reported. The official recognition of white supremacy as a premier national security threat acknowledges the lived reality of those who have faced its impact.

Systems of Law

The Virginia Code of 1705, referred to as the "Casual Killing Act", removed criminal consequences for killing a slave in the act of "correcting them" (Wright, 1947). This law was enacted because of the frequency of white women and others beating Black children to death while "correcting them":

> And if any slave resisted his master, or owner, or other person, by his or her order, correcting such slave, and shall happen to be killed in such

> correction, it shall not be accounted a felony; but the master, owner and every such other person so giving correction, shall be free and acquit of all punishment and accusation for the same, as if such accident had never happened.
>
> *(Wright, 1947)*

A similar bill was enacted in Jackson, Mississippi, that remained on the books until 1985 when, much to the embarrassment of the Mississippi legislature, it was discovered and voted out.

Today, while African Americans make up 13.4% of the US population, they comprise nearly 40% of the American prison population (Carson, 2021). This stark disproportion reveals a profound systemic inequality in current American criminal justice. This disparity cannot be understood in isolation but must be examined as part of a broader historical and societal context. This overrepresentation stems from multiple interconnected factors. The legacy of discriminatory policies, from Jim Crow to redlining, has created conditions of concentrated poverty and limited opportunity in many African American communities (Alexander, 2010). The "war on drugs" initiated in the 1970s disproportionately targeted these communities, leading to heightened surveillance and more aggressive enforcement. Studies have consistently shown that while drug use rates are similar across racial groups, African Americans are significantly more likely to be arrested and incarcerated for drug-related offences (Rosenberg et al., 2017). The criminal justice system itself exhibits multiple points of disparity (Rosenberg et al., 2017). African Americans face higher rates of police stops, searches, and arrests (Forman, 2017). Once in the system, they often encounter harsher charges, have less access to quality legal representation, and receive longer sentences for similar offences compared to white defendants (Hinton et al., 2018). The practice of plea bargaining, while theoretically neutral, often disadvantages defendants with fewer resources to mount a legal defence (Hinton et al., 2018).

The school-to-prison pipeline represents another crucial factor (Mauer, 2017). Zero-tolerance policies in schools disproportionately impact African American students, who face higher rates of suspension and expulsion for similar behaviours as their white peers. These disciplinary actions often mark the beginning of involvement with the criminal justice system. The repercussions of this mass incarceration extend beyond prison walls. Upon release, individuals face barriers to employment, housing, and voting rights. These obstacles make reintegration extremely challenging and contribute to high recidivism rates. Moreover, the impact ripples through families and communities: children with incarcerated parents face increased risks of poverty, trauma, and their own involvement

with the criminal justice system. The economic implications are equally severe (Baptist, 2014). Lost wages, reduced economic mobility, and the high costs of maintaining the prison system create a significant drain on both affected communities and society at large. The private prison industry has created additional problematic incentives within the criminal justice system.

Childhood and Education

Children inherit both the strengths and unresolved traumas of previous generations, and without healing, patterns of harm continue to repeat. Those often in positions of educating and aiding children, particularly children of colour and specifically African American children, have continued to commit harmful acts. Historically, this abuse has had tragic consequences (Brave Heart, 2003).

Some may think that such barbaric statutes such as those identified in the "Casual Killing Act" remain in the past; however, patterns of abuse and harm continue to this day. The justification for such actions were couched in rhetoric that suggested a benevolent responsibility to "civilize" people of colour whom they considered to be inherently inferior. This was often referred to as "the white man's burden":

> The problem of the Negro and of the Indian, and of all the uncivilized races, is essentially the same. The problem is, how a relatively large mass of people, inferior in culture and perhaps also inferior in nature, can be adjusted relatively to the civilization of a people much their superior in culture, how the industrially inefficient nature man can be made over into the industrially efficient civilized Man.

In 2016, the Yale Child Study Center conducted research into preschool teacher bias to determine if children of colour were being treated equally to their white counterparts (Gilliam et al., 2016). Here is what their study revealed:

> New Research from the Yale Child Study Center suggests that many preschool teachers look for disruptive behavior … in just one place, waiting for it to appear. The problem with this strategy (besides it being inefficient), is that, because of implicit bias, teachers are spending too much time watching black boys and expecting the worst …

135 Pre-K teachers were asked to watch a few short videos and were told: "Press the enter key on the external keypad every time you see a behavior

that could become a potential challenge". Here is the deception: "There was no challenging behavior".

While the teachers watched, eye-scan technology measured the trajectory of their gaze. Gilliam wanted to know: when teachers expected bad behaviour, whom did they watch? What we found was exactly what we expected based on the rates at which children are expelled from preschool programmes, teachers looked more at the black children than the white children, and they looked specifically more at the African American boy (Gilliam et al., 2016).

The foundational years of early childhood education should be marked by nurturing, safety, and support. Yet, disturbing patterns reveal a systemic bias against Black children in these crucial developmental spaces. Research has uncovered that even at the preschool level, teachers demonstrate troubling patterns of discriminatory behaviour, particularly towards Black boys as young as four years old (Gilliam et al., 2016). In controlled observations, when both Black and white children engaged in identical off-task behaviours, teachers consistently singled out the Black children for correction while overlooking their white peers.

Even more troubling was an incident reported on 7 March 2017, by ABC World News showing Sarah Gable, a white female worker at a daycare, pushing a four-year-old Black girl down a flight of stairs. The daycare worker was unaware that a camera had just been installed in the stairwell thirty minutes earlier, and she was being monitored by the daycare manager. It was only when the daycare worker noticed the camera above her that she immediately took the little girl by the hand and began to walk her down the remaining flight of stairs. Sarah Gable was confronted by the manager, fired, and arrested (ABC7 News, 2017).

Another harrowing 2021 incident involving a non-verbal four-year-old Black child is difficult to even recount. The sequence of events reveals not just individual abuse but institutional failure. After the child left her classroom, likely seeking escape, she was returned by another white teacher who then witnessed her colleague, a white male teacher, violently push the child to the ground. Instead of intervening or reporting the abuse, this second teacher simply closed the door and walked away, becoming complicit in the assault through her inaction.

The vulnerability of this child adds another layer of tragedy to the incident. Unable to speak, she could neither call out for help nor report the abuse she endured. Her attempt to leave the classroom, likely an instinctive response to a threatening environment, was thwarted by the very adults entrusted with her care and protection. The betrayal is twofold: first from the teacher who physically assaulted her, and then from the colleague who witnessed the abuse and chose to walk away (Local 12, 2021).

These incidents represent more than isolated cases of misconduct. They reveal a deeply troubling pattern within early childhood education where racial bias intersects with power dynamics, creating environments where our most vulnerable children face both subtle discrimination and overt abuse. The fact that these events occurred in spaces meant to nurture and protect young children raises serious questions about systemic racism in early education and the mechanisms in place to protect children from those who would abuse their authority.

What makes these cases particularly significant is that they were documented, either through surveillance or witnesses. One must consider how many similar incidents go unrecorded and unreported, especially when involving children too young or unable to advocate for themselves. The responsibility of acknowledging and addressing these patterns of bias and abuse falls not just on individual teachers and caregivers, but also on the entire educational system. All must ensure that every child, regardless of race, receives the care and protection they deserve in their earliest educational experiences (White & Cordova-Cobo, 2022).

Medicine and Health

Such cases of misconduct can also be found in the area of health. In 2024, at Henrico Doctors' Hospital in Richmond, Virginia. The case involved a former Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) nurse, Erin Strotman, a white female nurse who deliberately broke the leg of a Black newborn twin baby boy. On 3 January 2025, the nurse was arrested and charged with criminal abuse. The father of the injured infant, Dominique Hackey, agonized over the fact that his newborn baby boy was made to feel pain before he was able to feel joy, and that he, as a father, wasn't there to protect him (Karimi, 2025).

In an official statement, Henrico County Police announced that Strotman's arrest was in connection with an incident that occurred on 10 November 2024. Other cases of unexplained injuries, including Hackey's, have since been reported. Currently, authorities are investigating the cases of seven other infants by combing through hundreds of hours of surveillance footage. They also said it is possible that more families may come forward (Karimi, 2025).

The 2025 Henrico case is reminiscent of the cruel behaviour of the mid-1800s physician, James Marion Sims. Sims built a makeshift hospital in his backyard where he conducted surgical experiments on unanaesthetized African enslaved women; however, the most innocent of his victims were the enslaved infants (Khabele et al., 2021).

Black infants suffered from a condition that Dr J. Marion Sims termed *trimus nascentium* – what we now know as neonatal tetanus. Neonatal

tetanus, a bacterial infection that enters the body through open wounds, was prevalent among enslaved infants due to their deplorable living conditions, particularly their proximity to horse stables where tetanus bacteria thrived in animal manure. However, rather than recognizing these environmental factors, Sims constructed a racist theory that attributed the disease to supposed inherent flaws in Black people, claiming it stemmed from the "indecency and intellectual flaws" of enslaved people and alleged skull malformations in Black infants.

Sims' response to this condition was as unscientific as it was brutal. Instead of investigating the actual environmental causes of the disease, he performed cruel experiments on these vulnerable infants. His "treatment" involved attempting to forcibly realign the bones in the infants' skulls using a shoemaker's awl – a sharp tool designed for puncturing leather. This barbaric practice, performed without anaesthesia or any scientific basis, led to the deaths of most of his infant subjects.

This episode represents more than just medical malpractice – it exemplifies how scientific racism was used to justify the inhumane treatment of enslaved people. Rather than acknowledging the obvious connection between poor living conditions and disease, Sims and others of his era constructed elaborate theories of Black biological inferiority to explain health conditions that were direct results of slavery itself.

The high mortality rate in Sims' "laboratory" was not an unfortunate accident but the predictable outcome of combining racist ideology with unethical medical experimentation. These infants, denied both proper medical care and basic human dignity, became victims not just of disease but of a medical establishment that viewed them as expendable test subjects rather than human beings deserving of care and protection.

This history continues to resonate in discussions of medical ethics and racial bias in healthcare (Byrd & Clayton, 2000). It stands as a stark reminder of how scientific authority can be misused to perpetuate racism and how racial prejudice can corrupt the practice of medicine, leading to devastating consequences for vulnerable populations (Hoberman, 2012). Understanding this history is crucial for addressing ongoing disparities in medical treatment and ensuring that such abuses are never repeated (Williams & Mohammed, 2013).

Historical trauma and its ongoing effects include the physical, emotional, and psychological injury resulting from the oppression and racism that have persisted in American society. This ongoing trauma has impacted generations, affecting the overall health, identity, and well-being of African Americans today (Yehuda & Lehrner, 2018). Moreover, the horrific medical assaults on Black bodies have resulted in what Harriet

Washington, in her seminal book *Medical Apartheid*, calls "iatrophobia", "a fear of the healer" (Washington, 2006).

The healthcare divide between racial groups in America extends far beyond simple statistical differences. The magnitude of this disparity manifests in dramatically different life expectancies, treatment outcomes, maternal mortality rates, and access to quality care (Smedley et al., 2003). When comparing health metrics between racial groups, the contrast is so stark that Washington states that it mirrors the differences typically seen between developed and developing nations, rather than within a single country (Washington, 2006).

This medical segregation is evident across multiple dimensions, including treatment disparities, where African Americans often receive differential treatment resulting in lower quality medical care, even after controlling for insurance status and income; and barriers to access because medical facilities are not geographically accessible and there is a scarcity of providers in Black neighbourhoods (Betancourt et al., 2005). The most distressing disparity, however, both historically and currently, is the consistent failure in pain management, which echoes back to the barbaric surgeries without anaesthetic on Black enslaved women and children by Marion Sim.

The traditional explanations for these disparities often focus on surface-level factors or problematic biological determinism that suggests genetic differences between races as the primary cause. However, this oversimplified view ignores the deep historical context that has shaped the current healthcare landscape. A critical, yet frequently overlooked, factor is the devastating legacy of unethical medical experimentation on African Americans, which has created a foundation of distrust. From the antebellum period through the 20th century, documented cases of medical abuse include the exploitation of the enslaved, the infamous Tuskegee Syphilis Study (1932–1972), non-consensual medical testing, and unauthorized surgical experiments (Jones, 1993).

This mistrust isn't simply historical; it's actively reinforced by continuing disparities in medical treatment and outcomes. The result is a self-perpetuating cycle: historical abuse leads to mistrust, which leads to delayed medical care and poorer outcomes, which in turn reinforces the mistrust. The consequences of this "medical apartheid" are measurable in excess morbidity and mortality rates, reduced life expectancy, and poorer health outcomes across nearly every medical condition. This isn't simply a matter of socioeconomic disparity; studies show that even when controlling income, education, and insurance status, significant racial disparities persist in healthcare delivery and outcomes.

Understanding Racial Trauma

When we talk about the impact of racism and historical trauma, we're not just talking about something that happened in the past. We're talking about a living, breathing phenomenon that continues to affect people right now, today, at this moment. What I've observed through my years of research and working directly with communities is that this trauma lives in the body. When a person experiences racism in the forms of chronic, persistent exposure to discrimination and dehumanization, their entire system is affected. Their stress hormones are constantly elevated, their nervous system is always on high alert, and over time, this creates a sustained traumatic response. Trauma doesn't just stay with the individual; it gets passed down. I've sat with countless families, and I've watched how a grandmother's pain becomes a mother's hypervigilance, which then becomes a child's anxiety. This is what is meant by intergenerational transmission of trauma. It's not just about telling stories of past hurt; it's about the actual physiological and psychological adaptations that get passed down through generations through epigenetic transfer and social learning.

When a parent teaches their child to be "twice as good" to get half as much, or when individuals instinctively lower their voices in certain spaces to avoid censure or professional retaliation, that's not just learned behaviour but the manifestation of historical trauma. These are survival strategies that were developed under enormous pressure, and they've been passed down because, in many ways, they're still necessary for survival.

And when entire communities are carrying this unhealed trauma, it affects every single aspect of society. It influences how people interact with educational institutions, how they engage with healthcare systems, how they participate in the economy, and how they relate to one another. This isn't just about individual healing, though that's crucial, it's about understanding how collective trauma shapes the entire social fabric.

Until we acknowledge this historical trauma and its ongoing effects, we can't create genuine change. The systemic inequities we see today are the direct result of unhealed historical wounds that continue to shape our reality. What gives me hope is seeing what happens when people begin to understand this framework. When communities start to recognize these patterns, when they begin to connect their present experiences to historical context, it creates possibilities for real healing (Matthew, 2015). This isn't about blame or shame, it's about understanding. Because once we understand how historical trauma operates, we can begin to interrupt these patterns and create new ways of being together. When people *know* better, they can *do* better!

This work demands a fundamental shift in how our society understands itself. We need to create spaces where these truths can be spoken, where this pain can be acknowledged, and where genuine healing can begin. This work is about making people feel and embrace their intrinsic nobility and about transforming the very foundations of our social relationships. Understanding historical trauma isn't about staying stuck in the past. It's about recognizing how the past continues to shape our present so that we can consciously create a different future. This is the work of our generation to understand these patterns so deeply that we can finally begin to heal them, eliminating the need for healing and reparations for the generations to come.

Legacy of Slavery: Beyond Official Endings and Empty Apologies

While 1808 marked the official end of the transatlantic slave trade in the United States, the reality proved far more complex. The illegal trafficking of enslaved Africans persisted well beyond this legislative milestone, revealing a stark contrast between law and practice in American history (Johnson, 2018).

Katrina Browne's documentary *Traces of the Trade* illuminates this dark continuation through the story of her own ancestors, the DeWolfs of Bristol, Rhode Island (Browne, 2008). As the largest slave-holding family in US history, the DeWolfs exemplify how the northern elite profited from human trafficking long after its prohibition. Their story exposes the complicity of high-ranking officials, including President Thomas Jefferson, who appointed a DeWolf family member as a customs official, effectively enabling their illegal trade to continue unchecked (Coughtry, 1981).

Two centuries later, in 2008, the US House of Representatives attempted to address this historical wrong through a nonbinding resolution apologizing for slavery and Jim Crow laws (Congress.gov, 2008). The resolution acknowledged the "injustice, cruelty, brutality and inhumanity" of these institutions and recognized their ongoing impact on African Americans' lives, from lost opportunities to damaged dignity (Congress.gov, 2008). Yet, this gesture, while acknowledging that "the vestiges of Jim Crow continue to this day", offered no concrete remedies or reparations for centuries of systemic oppression (Lyons, 2015).

The path to meaningful legal protection against racial violence has been long and charged (Davis, 2019). Since 1900, members of Congress have repeatedly attempted to pass legislation making lynching a federal crime. Despite these efforts, the bills were consistently blocked, shelved, or ignored (Equal Justice Initiative, 2017). Every president from Washington to Roosevelt had the opportunity to establish anti-lynching laws, yet only seven attempted it, and Congress rejected each attempt (Dray, 2003). This

legislative failure persisted until 26 February 2020, when the Emmett Till Antilynching Act (Congress.gov, 2020), a revised version of the Justice for Victims of Lynching Act, passed the House of Representatives by an overwhelming vote of 410–4. Finally, on 29 March 2022, President Biden signed H.R. 55, the "Emmett Till Antilynching Act" (Congress.gov, 2022), into law, officially making lynching a federal hate crime (Equal Justice Initiative, 2017).

Life indeed comes down to "effort and endings", with our choices filling the space between. These decisions, both to act and to remain silent, have shaped not only individual journeys but also our collective destiny as a nation. The long delay in passing anti-lynching legislation serves as a stark reminder of how systemic racism has persisted through official inaction, even in the face of clear moral imperatives.

The Road Ahead: Racial Healing

These stories are reflective of an overlooked, ongoing crisis of abuse and harm. This abuse is neither new nor is it abating. We must vigilantly confront and prevent further harm. However, without healing, these patterns of harm will continue to repeat with disastrous results. Young people need positive racial identity development to thrive and matriculate through normal life stages in a healthy way, and this can only be achieved by breaking the cycles of trauma through intentional healing work.

Racial healing must be rigorously pursued to redress the unresolved historical trauma and persistent inequities that continue to affect individuals and communities and impede social progress in various ways, from disparities in health, education, and economic outcomes to psychological impacts that span generations. Moving forward requires acknowledging past harms, fostering genuine understanding between communities, and working to transform systems that perpetuate inequality. For healing to occur, there needs to be both truth-telling about historical injustices and concrete actions to address ongoing impacts. This includes examining how past policies and practices continue to shape present-day outcomes, creating spaces for meaningful dialogue and reconciliation between communities, and implementing structural changes to promote equity.

Progress also requires moving beyond surface-level solutions to address root causes. This means looking at how racial inequality is rooted in various institutions and systems, from housing and education to healthcare and criminal justice.

Racial healing is a process of acknowledging, addressing, and working to overcome the historical and ongoing impacts of racism through the recognition and acknowledgement of historical truths and traumas passed down through generations within communities. This includes

understanding how past injustices continue to affect present-day realities. For true healing to occur, there is an essential need to build authentic relationships across racial and ethnic divides by creating spaces for honest dialogue, deep listening, and understanding of different lived experiences. This involves moving beyond superficial interactions to develop genuine empathy and connection. If this is achieved, a personal transformation that involves examining one's own biases, assumptions, and learned behaviours can happen, and new ways of thinking about and relating to others will emerge. This process can include constructively understanding and coming to terms with feelings of hurt, anger, shame, or guilt.

At its core, racial healing involves systemic change that addresses institutional and structural racism through policy reforms and shifts in organizational practices. This healing requires both interpersonal work and broader societal transformation, i.e., community restoration through initiatives that rebuild trust, promote collaboration, and create shared visions for the future. This often includes projects that bring different groups together to work towards common goals of cultural preservation and celebration. This work should honour diverse histories, traditions, and ways of being, while creating space for new, inclusive cultural expressions to emerge.

Perhaps most importantly, racial healing requires sustained commitment and engagement from individuals, communities, and institutions working together over time. It is not a single event or programme, but rather an ongoing journey of growth, understanding, and change.

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3

UNDERSTANDING LEGACIES OF HISTORICAL TRAUMA

Scherto R. Gill[1]

On 25 March 2024, marking the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, UN Secretary-General António Guterres powerfully reminded us:

> Many of those who organized and ran the transatlantic slave trade amassed huge fortunes. Meanwhile, the enslaved were deprived of education, healthcare, opportunity, and prosperity. This laid the foundations for a violent discrimination system based on white supremacy that still echoes today. Descendants of enslaved Africans and people of African descent are still fighting for equal rights and freedoms around the world. Today and every day, we reject the legacy of this horrific crime against humanity.
>
> *(United Nations, n.d.)*

Guterres's message underscores the urgent need to confront the enduring legacies of slavery, emphasizing that recognizing past atrocities is crucial for understanding their ongoing impact. While structural justice remains elusive and a well-being-centred global system is yet to be realized, grassroots movements, civil society initiatives, and international programs dedicated to emancipation and decolonizing narratives are emerging. These efforts span civil rights activism, civil disobedience, ideological resistance, and explorations of race, culture, and nationhood. They also encompass collective healing and forward-looking visions of hybridity and cosmopolitan humanism (Gilroy, 1993).

However, despite these promising responses, the multifaceted harms resulting from historical dehumanization remain inadequately understood

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and analyzed. Movements such as Black Lives Matter assert that rigorous analysis and acknowledgement of these harms are prerequisites for addressing historical responsibilities and recognizing the systemic implications of past brutalities on our global ecosystem.

A deeper understanding of the legacies of slavery is particularly critical for nations whose prosperity has historically depended on exploiting enslaved populations and their descendants. Such acknowledgement compels political and civic leaders to accept responsibility and actively address the persistent economic, political, psychosocial, and spiritual damages caused.

Recognizing these histories and their continuing effects necessitates confronting the unprecedented scale of past inhumanities, including genocide, forced displacement, incarceration, murder, and rape. This confrontation should prompt deep reflection among governments, corporations, institutions, and communities that continue to benefit from historical injustices. Such reckoning opens possibilities for collective healing and systemic transformation rooted in genuine reparations and restorative justice.

This chapter explores the legacies of slavery from historical, cultural, epistemic, psychological, socioeconomic, and political perspectives. Crucially, it distinguishes between the inherited legacies of inhumanity and their ongoing harms. This distinction clarifies how structural inequalities embedded within societal norms, institutional policies, and cultural narratives persist over generations. Understanding these legacies illuminates the continuous manifestation of damage – racial discrimination, economic disparities, psychological trauma, and political marginalization experienced by historically oppressed groups.

Furthermore, distinguishing legacies from their harms provides clarity on temporal continuity: legacies refer to historically embedded structures, while damage indicates their tangible contemporary impacts. Legacies often remain invisible within systemic norms, whereas damage is evident through inequalities and lived experiences of marginalization. This differentiation ensures that efforts to address inequality are grounded in a comprehensive understanding of both historical roots and present realities, thus preventing superficial or fragmented solutions.

Ultimately, this investigation situates transgenerational suffering within the broader context of structural oppression and institutional discrimination, underscoring the necessity of holistic approaches to systemic transformation.

The chapter comprises five sections: first, it outlines existing understandings of dehumanization from philosophical, traditional African, and Indigenous perspectives. Next, it discusses legacies inherited

from historical brutalities like slavery and colonialism, examining their persistence through structural violence. The third section analyzes transgenerational and cultural traumas experienced by affected communities. The fourth section explores the intersection of legacies and contemporary harms through a case study on racism. Finally, the chapter concludes by reflecting on the challenges of addressing historical violence.

Understandings of Dehumanization

There has been growing interest across a range of academic disciplines to develop novel understandings of dehumanization, not least in philosophy, psychology, peace, religion, gender, health, well-being, and education (Ruiter, 2022; Gill & Thomson, 2018a; Haslam, 2006; Bain et al., 2014; Lang, 2020; Smith, 2012). Among innovative perspectives are those rooted in conceptions of what constitutes human, claims about human nature and human subjectivity, and characterizations of being human vs. non-human, all of which can determine our attitudes towards other persons, our relational commitment to them, and our ethical responsibility for their well-being. As this chapter concerns the legacies of dehumanization, I will focus on those conceptions of dehumanization that give rise to social policies, structural processes, and institutional practices of dehumanization that allow such legacies to be perpetuated from historical dehumanization to contemporary systemic injustice.

Negation of Humanness

Typically, dehumanization involves stripping away the humanness of persons. Hence the prefix "de" being used to describe the negation, separation, or removal. To negate our humanness is a refusal to recognize what matters most to being a person (Ruiter, 2022). What matters most to being a person lies in the question of what constitutes being human, which has been central to our collective exploration since the dawn of humanity. There are different arguments in existing literature.

Some approach this question by referring to our genetic makeup and biological uniqueness that differentiates us from other species (Goldenring, 1985). Through these biological and related cognitive features, we have been equipped to evolve capacities to perceive, have abstract thought, develop language, use symbolism, self-reflect, solve problems, create art, make meaning, preserve and construct knowledge, and innovate. We are also afforded with emotional complexity, such as to engage with memories and imagination, and to feel empathy, love, joy, grief, guilt, shame, and so forth. Some groups can use these characteristics of our humanness to demean other groups, pointing out the ways that they

are less than human. Negation of humanness has happened throughout human histories, using excuses such as skin colour, physical features and abilities, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

Some engage with this question of what constitutes being human from a moral and ethical perspective. They argue that our humanness is characterized by the capacity to distinguish right from wrong, make moral decisions, and take ethical responsibilities. The sense of moral obligation and the desire to act in ways that uphold justice and fairness are key aspects that differentiate humans from other species. This moral and ethical conception of our humanness is particularly applicable to humans as social beings. We live in larger groups and societies, experiencing social bonds in communities. Here, our moral and ethical humanness is deeply tied to our relationships with others, from interpersonal connections such as friendship and love to family ties to broader cultural and societal affiliations and belongings. It is these relational bonds that define our identity and our moral commitments. Social bonds further separate us as in-groups from out-groups. At the time of threat and fear, this separation can determine the deservedness of other groups in terms of their humanness. Friends and foes are decided in accordance with who are deemed to be human and less than human. This entails the moral denial of the other group's humanity.

Others maintain that our humanness lies fundamentally in our conscious awareness of ourselves as spiritual beings. Within an existential dimension, humans uniquely seek meaning and purpose in their lives. We reflect on our existence, ponder questions about the universe, and create narratives that help us understand our place in the world. This search for meaning often leads to religious and spiritual inquiry in search of self-transcendence by pursuing ideals such as goodness, truth, justice, beauty, and other virtues.

Many African and Indigenous traditions affirm the spiritual vibrancy of human life. For instance, Souleymane Bachir Diagne highlights that in African philosophy, the "fullness of life and this fervour to exist … constitutes African being-in-the-world" (Diagne, 2016, p. 19). This fullness of life, also termed the *vital life force* in African Bantu philosophy, is "more than a necessary attribute of being", because "force is the nature of being, force is being, being is force" (Tempels, 1959, p. 431). Accordingly, the vital force of life is the basis for articulating the spiritual nature of being human, and what it means to live well with all beings on the planet, including ancestors and the spirits.

Some African philosophies (such as those of the Akan, Bantu, and Yorùbá traditions) perceive persons through a tripartite conceptualization of the physical body, the soul, and the spirit, which animates the soul

(Appiah, 1992; Gyekye, 1978, 1987; Meyerowitz, 1951). Whereas the body exists only in the physical domain, the soul and the spirit are both immaterial, but they are importantly different. The soul is the innermost self or the human essence and provides the principles of life for a person and directs their destiny. In many cultures, the soul is the immaterial aspect or the essence of a human being, beyond our materialistic existence.[2] The soul is our being, or our "I"-ness, as a person. In contrast, the spirit is the source of life's dynamism.

Aboriginal and Indigenous peoples tend to practise animism, a belief or cosmology that suggests nature is imbued with spirits, manifested through the physical presence in, say, mountains, waterfalls, rocks, and other sentient beings in nature. Nature as a whole is regarded by many Indigenous traditions as spiritual, intelligent, and sentient. Although beings such as humans and other-than-humans are different in their physical and material form, all beings in nature share a similar energizing force that connects all. In this understanding, the spiritual connects past, present, and future, and is located in people's relationships with each other and in the shared life forces rooted in their place of origination. In some Indigenous traditions, "soul" and "spirit" are used interchangeably, and in others, they are used separately (Trnka & Lorencova, 2022). Similar to some African ideas, some Indigenous cultures believe that the soul animates the body. The spirit, or the soul, of the psyche, is reflected in the essence of all beings, such as rocks, flora, fauna, rivers, and mountains, and is lodged in kinship with all through the cycle of living. Hence, each person has spiritual responsibility for the wellness of all beings in nature. The soul determines the gifts that each person offers to the flourishing life of all.

Despite the differences, soul and spirit are understood to be interconnected in African and Indigenous practices. For some, the spirit is the active part of the soul, and for others, the spirit is the life force that animates and connects us with the universal soul (Duran, 2006; Igbafen & Ikhianosime, 2018). Accordingly, the soul and the spirit are both constitutive of the spiritual unity of the person. Life forces are organized in a continuum in accordance with a hierarchy of beings, with the supreme being, or the sacred, at the apex. In this sense, the physical and the metaphysical worlds are not strictly separate. For instance, many African people regard their ancestors as existing in the world of spirits. This assumption underlies the place of the spirits in people's lives. For Indigenous people, unembodied spirits can reside in rocks, trees, waters, and mountains, and ancestral spirits continue in their relationships with the living. The supreme being is at the top of the hierarchy, defining the direction of life towards the transcendent as a journey of continued

spiritual ascension. In many cultures, this quest is achieved by partaking in life's mystery, in the ceaseless pursuit of beauty, wonder, and awe, and through our passion for love, joy, creativity, and ecstasy.

African and Indigenous beliefs in the soul and the spiritual have given rise to their recognition of humans' (common) spiritual core, which also determines their perspectives of well-being as holistic, involving all aspects of life (i.e., material, societal, ecological, ancestral, and cosmological), including our consciousness of spiritual beingness. Thus, in the context of transatlantic atrocities, the harrowing damage has been characterized by both African and Indigenous people as the bruising of the soul, or the soul wound. African and Indigenous peoples do not see the damage as injuries at an individual level, in which case therapy and treatment might suffice, but rather they regard the soul wound, or intergenerational trauma, or spiritual injury, as the hurt of the collective psyche, where the harmonious whole is shattered and the manifested world becomes hostile. For them, the many problems confronting humanity today, such as the climate crisis, discrimination, the exploitation of communities and peoples of African and Indigenous descent, and socioeconomic injustice, are mere symptoms of a deeper wound – spiritual harm (Danieli, 1998).

Negation of humanness in this respect involves prioritizing one kind of narrative over the other, perceiving certain narratives as inferior and the groups whose existential horizons are defined by such narratives as less human.

Acts of Brutality

This chapter avoids describing peoples and their communities as being dehumanized. The very idea that people are dehumanized is misleading, if not harmful, as it implies that they need to prove their humanity. This is an important distinction for any discussion about legacies of dehumanization: the oppressed are already human beings, and as human beings, their humanity cannot be taken away, despite the subjugation and brutality. A person's humanity requires no proof, despite the conditions under which their lives are lived.

By contrast, an act can be dehumanizing. What makes an act dehumanizing is that it intends to treat people inhumanely, deprive them of living fully as human beings, and alienate them from a sense of dignity. Dehumanizing acts include diverse processes and practices such as animalization, objectification, and brutalization (Ruiter, 2022).

Animalization denies uniquely human attributes and treats others as more animal-like and less human-like. Such dehumanizing acts often occur in intergroup conflicts, such as ethnic antagonism. Indigenous people and Africans were historically depicted as savages, animal-like,

and uncivilized by colonizers and enslavers. Throughout the Holocaust, captured Jews were stripped of their clothing and personal belongings so that it became easier to see them as less than human but rather as "worms" that can be "crushed" (Levi, 1989). Similarly, during the 1994 Rwandan genocide, the Tutsis were regarded as cockroaches. Animalization can induce in the dominant group moral disgust and contempt, allowing the actor to conduct dehumanizing acts with moral justification. Post-apartheid South Africa continues to witness black people being alienated from institutional decisions and political participation (Deist, 2024).

Objectification is instrumentalization that treats human beings literally as objects, e.g., tools or machines, that can be used and discarded. The trade of enslaved people and the practice of enslavement and slavery are all acts of dehumanization by objectification (UNESCO/GHFP, 2020). In India, the caste system treats the Dalit people as objects. Modern human trafficking and mass-rape as a war strategy are likewise objectification. When treating humans as tools, be it the commodification of human bodies and human children, or the instrumentalization of human labour and creativity, dehumanizing acts consist in utilizing persons for gains and profits (Goff et al., 2008). Beyond these examples, globally, the capitalist economic system is precisely designed to instrumentalize human beings.

Brutalization is the result of dehumanization. When people's humanity is normatively negated, they can either be portrayed as parasites or vermin that ought to be exterminated or eliminated, or they can be regarded as tools and instruments to be used and manipulated. Either way, dehumanization involves brutality, sometimes extreme brutality, as genocide, wars, violent displacement, and enslavement. Mass atrocity becomes a societal norm, applying the moral denial of some groups' humanness and enabling the actor to withdraw from any ethical responsibility towards those who are being dehumanized, leading to indifference to the suffering of certain people and groups of people. This further smooths the path to the large-scale brutalities observed in historical and contemporary societies, from transatlantic slavery to the genocide of Indigenous people, and from the colonization of lands in the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Asia Pacific to apartheid in South Africa, the occupation of the Palestinians, the genocide and displacement of the Rohingyas, and other ethnic minorities.

As we shall see next, in this understanding, an act can be dehumanizing for both the actor and those being acted upon.

Actors and Systems of Inhumanity

Dehumanizing acts require an actor – an individual, a group, an institution, a system – to carry out the brutality. Actors tend to operate at multiple levels, ranging from individuals engaging in abusive brutality to

institutions and states systematically denying rights and dignity to entire groups, and many in between.

The capitalist economic system has been a major actor of dehumanization, both historically and contemporarily. Institutions and corporations have played roles in dehumanization by exploiting labour forces. This began with the early development of capitalism and the industrial revolution and continues now through modern slavery, child labour, and sweatshops. Labourers have been treated as commodities rather than human beings, and their value reduced to the economic benefits they can provide. The transatlantic slave trade is one of the most extreme examples of economic dehumanization, with Africans captured, traded, enslaved, and abused purely for economic gain.

Such systems have been perpetuated in the past by colonial governments that played a major role in dehumanizing the enslaved and colonized peoples. They employed policies that depicted Indigenous peoples as inferior, incapable of self-governance, and in need of civilization, which justified the appropriation of their lands, forced assimilation, and exploitative labour practices. Portuguese, British, French, Spanish, Belgian, and American colonial authorities are well-known examples of state actors in this regard.

Totalitarian governments have historically been significant actors in the process of dehumanization, as seen in regimes like Nazi Germany, Stalinist Russia, and Pol Pot's Cambodia. These regimes dehumanized particular groups, whether racial, religious, political, or socioeconomic, through propaganda, laws, and systematic violence, often leading to mass atrocities or genocide.

If dehumanization is conceived of as the negation of humanness, failure to recognize others as equally human involves a cognitive dissonance on the actor's part (DeGruy, 2005). This means that although an actor can conceive of people such as themselves as human, they cannot apply the same normative understanding to other groups. In this case, the actor deliberately refuses to accept other persons as equally human. This reflects their intentional use of a double moral standard to profit from dehumanization.

Although seemingly benefiting from a dehumanizing act, what the actor is not consciously aware of is that dehumanization not only demeanes others through the act of brutality itself, but the actor is likewise removed from their own humanity. No persons who inhabit in their full humanity will participate and perpetuate dehumanizing acts upon other humans or sentient beings because it is against one's humanity to treat others in such ways. In other words, a dehumanizing act denies the humanness of all persons involved. As such, the actor who imposes dehumanizing acts

and the victims at the receiving end are entangled in the same process of self-alienation and are therefore estranged from human dignity. There is, however, a fundamental difference in their experience of self-alienation: the actor might feel this alienation a sign of power as it appears to affirm their *humane* existence, and the victim might be demeaned by this alienation as it seems to confirm their *inhumane* existence. Therefore, rather than being mutually dehumanized, acts of brutality estrange both the actor and the victim from living out their human dignity.

Dehumanization often requires complicity across various levels, with political leaders, institutions, bureaucracies, economic systems, and everyday individuals each playing roles that support and sustain dehumanizing processes and participating in dehumanizing practices. Social policies, laws, institutional cultures and processes, and education have all been part of the structural injustice that perpetuates systemic dehumanization.

Legacies of Inhumanity

> History [...] does not refer merely, or even principally, to the past. On the contrary, the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do. It could scarcely be otherwise, since it is to history that we owe our frames of reference, our identities, and our aspirations.
>
> – *James Baldwin,* White Man's Guilt *(1965, p. 47)*

There has been violence throughout human history. However, mass atrocities, such as the transatlantic trade of enslaved peoples and slavery during the 16th–19th centuries, the genocide of Indigenous peoples, and the occupation and colonization of native lands, were unprecedented. Slavery itself involved tens of millions of Africans being objectified and brutalized in Europe and the Americas (Berlin, 2003; Williams, 1944/1994). Although there have been varying forms of slave trade and slavery before then, the scale, transgenerational nature, involvement of violent incarceration, and commodification of human beings involved unparalleled brutality (Zulu, 2016). The underlying purpose of these dehumanizing acts was economic gain, i.e., wealth generation and accumulation (Du Bois, 1999). Violence was a major instrument of colonization (body, mind, spirit, culture), with a climate of ever-lasting fear used to coerce submission (DeGruy, 2005).

A typical assumption is that historical dehumanization, such as transatlantic trade and slavery, took place centuries ago, and we should *let*

bygones be bygones. However, as analyzed here, this history is alive today, manifested in psychological slavery rooted in structural dehumanization. This unhealed trauma has now been ingrained in our contemporary societies, permeating many aspects of our personal and communal lives, and affecting not only the black, the Indigenous, and other non-European communities, but also the communities of European descent. The legacies have continued to wreak havoc on our global economic and political systems, structural features, and institutional practices within which the lived realities of all peoples and communities unfold along the colour line (Martin & Yaquinto, 2004).

To understand the impacts of such dehumanizing legacies, we investigate three historically significant processes that paved the "economic", "political", and "ideological" ground for enabling mass atrocities, including the trade of enslaved peoples, slavery, genocide, and colonization. Seldom examined together, this chapter argues that these processes were operated systematically in mutually reinforcing ways to make mass dehumanization possible. First, economic theories were applied to prioritize wealth accumulation over the intrinsic value of being human. Thus, atrocities against enslaved Africans and Indigenous peoples were normalized by slave owners, plantation owners, colonizers, other citizens or consumers, and public institutions such as churches and governments in the name of economic growth for the benefit of material well-being (Martin & Yaquinto, 2004). Second, rationalized political exclusion was introduced to support the normalcy of brutality against black bodies. Third, the economic and political agenda was further strengthened by Europeans fabricating and instituting a racialized discourse and ideology to enable the full exploitation of African and Indigenous people (Fanon, 1986). Together, these economic, political, and ideological processes instiled a binary of white superiority and black inferiority, fuelling the colonization and oppression of peoples of African and Indigenous descent (Salenius, 2016). Although our discussion visits each of these processes separately below, the purpose is to develop an understanding of how they functioned interdependently.

Economic Legacies

The economic factor was the most influential in enabling dehumanizing acts (Stelzner, 2020; Beckert & Rockman, 2016; Stiglitz, 2012). Such an economic system has since been identified as "racial capitalism" (Robinson, 1983; Douglas, 2015; Kelley, 2017), owing to the historic interconnections between the transatlantic trade and slavery, and capitalism (Baptist, 2016; Beckert, 2015). It was the raison d'être of the capitalist economy,

i.e., the ceaseless acquisition of profit and accumulation of wealth, that made systematically subjugating human beings to violent exploitation and enslavement desirable (Beckert, 2015; Faustino, 2021). In this way, slavery and capitalism were interconnected "due to the expression of power, greed, and self-interest in … the wide range of potential outcomes in a capitalistic society" (Stelzner, 2020, p. 335). Hence, the conclusion that "the history of capitalism makes no sense separate from the history of the slave trade and its aftermath. There was no such thing as capitalism without slavery" (Johnson, 2018).

Eric Williams, in his seminal work *Capitalism & Slavery* (Williams, 1944/1994), contends that dehumanizing acts such as enslavement and the trade of enslaved people were not only essential to accumulating wealth and fuelling the industrial revolution, but also central to establishing the economic dominance of Western nations in the world. In terms of economic legacies, Williams highlights that dehumanization defined the global financial institutions and infrastructure necessary for the growth of capitalism. Dehumanization manifested in the instrumentalization of human labour and the exploitation of peoples and communities sabotaged by racialized ideologies, as well as other groups made vulnerable by the economic systems.

Significantly, Williams suggests that the abolition of slavery occurred when it became economically advantageous to transition away from the slave-based economy. He claimed that the decline of the plantation system's profitability, alongside the rise of industrial capitalism and wage labour, motivated political support for ending slavery. This perspective challenges earlier humanitarian narratives of abolition by arguing that economic interests, rather than moral progress, were the primary drivers behind the decisions of colonial powers.

This analysis of the economic legacies of dehumanization underscores how slavery's exploitation has had enduring impacts on the current global economic system's obsession with the growth of GDP at the cost of humanness and the entrenched racial inequalities that persist to this day, including racialized poverty (Cottias & Diptée, 2020), economic marginalization, and the racialization of global labour (Bonacich et al., 2008).

Without an awareness of slavery's historical role in capitalist expansion and the interconnection between slavery and capitalism, societies can be blinded to continued violence and colonization. By connecting race and capitalism, or by calling it *racial* capitalism, we can highlight the pernicious nature of a capitalist economy that relies on the production, reproduction, and instrumentalization of human differences.

Political Legacies

Many political institutions have contributed to wealth pursuit and capitalist expansion (Acemoglu et al., 2005), and in the case we are exploring in this chapter, this has come at the expense of the non-European "other". Structurally, European political power helped determine the direction and processes of economic growth, such as through laws, and played a significant part in the development of economic institutions, supporting trades and industrial productions such as cotton. Seeing it from this joint perspective, slavery was both an economic and political need, with violent racist capitalism and the elite control of political processes compatible (Acemoglu et al., 2005). Following the abolition of slavery on both sides of the Atlantic, structural dehumanization has sustained legacies of slavery through political mechanisms, e.g., colonialism and imperialism, which contrive to serve wealth-oriented economic aims.

Throughout the histories of Europe and the Americas, constitutions (e.g., counting a black person as three-fifths of a person to enhance the voting power of white males in US southern states), national laws (e.g., the UK Slave Compensation Act 1837), the militarization of police, exclusive educational investment, and uneven finance policies are illustrations of structural violence. Take the police brutality against black and Indigenous people as an example. In the United States, the deep-seated racialized practices and racial discrimination of police forces and agencies and African Americans' increased involvement in criminal activities are mutually reinforcing phenomena owing to the living legacies of slavery (Owusu-Bempah, 2017; Van Cleve & Mayes, 2015).

Similarly, in Latin America, race regulation customary laws have tended to naturalize a racial hierarchy, establishing white supremacy in European settler colonies and in contemporary postcolonial societies (Rahier, 2019). Among African communities, both in the diasporas and across the African continent itself, the widespread experiences of economic underdevelopment, social deprivation, and political turmoil can be linked to global structural dehumanization that informs national and international policies and how they are enacted by governments and institutions (Owusu-Bempah, 2017; Van Cleve & Mayes, 2015).

Ideological Legacies

To legitimize the trade of enslaved African peoples, and to prepare an ideology to underpin economic exploitation and political oppression, from the start, a racist discourse was fabricated by European scholars and researchers, depicting black people as brutish, animalistic, aggressive, violent, and dangerous (Fishman, 2006).

Historically, *race*, through its emphasis on visible physical differences between groups in terms of the colour of skin, texture of hair, and other physical features, has been used as a dehumanizing ideology for capitalist and colonial exploitation. Forcefully objectifying, enslaving, and trading Africans, displacing native people, conquering their lands, robbing them of natural resources, and applying unjust market methods to exclude the colonized are illustrative of racialized ideology in service of dehumanization (Stelzner, 2020).

Racialized discrimination was also visible in European Enlightenment thought, whereby black people were depicted as primitives (e.g., with primitive minds), in contrast with white people who were regarded as civilized and intellectually superior.[3] Racist European epistemological paradigm was imposed to formulate the "truth", "knowledge", and "reality" of Africans (Ramose, 1999). It served to enable mass enslavement, colonization, and the now systematic oppression of people of African and Indigenous descent. This historically contingent relationship between slavery and blackness has thus prevailed.

The deployment of racialized discourse and epistemology hence inculcated a racist ideology. Physiological differences were translated into binary distinctions between human "races", and race thereby became a classifying category for exclusion, inequality, and injustice (Du Bois, 1903; Woodson, 1933). Skin colour, hair, ethnicity, belief, cultural practice, and other group-based distinctions were part of the anthropological *knowledge* used to define the inferiority of the *other*. Once established, this racist ideology, although introduced and developed to justify the enslavement of Africans, has perpetuated a hierarchy of human beings. Racist ideology then evolved into white supremacist ideology (Phillips & Bowling, 2003; Gordon-Reed, 2018). It was precisely this focus on "race", and the evolving white supremacist mentality and practices, that distinguish transatlantic slavery from other forms of slavery in human history. Thus, slavery "created a defined, recognizable group of people and placed them outside society … slavery was an inherited condition" (Gordon-Reed, 2018, p. 5).

Also established were the assumptions of Eurocentrism or European singularity, resulting in a discriminatory global system of injustice (Thiaw & Mack, 2020). The Eurocentric approach normalized the lens through which to examine, analyze, dissect, and ultimately instrumentalize and oppress the non-European *other*. It also subjected non-Europeans to Eurocentric standards, demands, and requirements (Curran, 2011). Edward Said, in his book *Orientalism*, states that our world is separated into "two unequal halves" (Said, 1979, p. 5), the West or European, and the Orient, or the non-European, which "has helped to define Europe (or

the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" (Said, 1979, p. 2).

This active othering of peoples of African, Indigenous, and other non-European descent has become a key component of the continued legacies of slavery. In particular, a Eurocentric epistemic basis has allowed the non-European *other* to be degraded, controlled, and brutalized. Such an epistemic framework served as a rationalized moral ground for European colonization, domination, and exploitation of Africa, Latin America, Asia, and other parts of the world. These legacies are now manifested in, for example, "global economic disparities", especially in the phenomena of Africans leaving the continent and becoming vulnerable in Europe and North America, and the mistreatment of illegal African migrants across the globe, such as their being subjugated to police brutality in "a racialized carceral system" (Thiaw & Mack, 2020). In Brazil, a myth of a multiracial and multicultural society masks racial whitening, a subtle mechanism of racial exclusion, whereby the dominant elites prevent peoples of non-white communities from becoming aware of their being victimized in society (Santos Reis, 2020).

Through legacies of transatlantic slavery, perpetuated by structural violence and systemic injustice prevailing in Europe, the Americas, and former European colonized regions, including Africa and Asia, *race* becomes so deeply entangled in Western historical, economic, political, ideological, and epistemological processes that any attempts to redefine it will necessarily create conflicts and tensions (Thiaw & Mack, 2020). The effort to *undo* racialized injustice as a way to address the legacy of slavery will only be "a long, protracted struggle, carried out over generations" (McKee, 1997).

Transgenerational and Cultural Traumas

> Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome is a condition that exists when a population has experienced multigenerational trauma resulting from centuries of slavery and continues to experience oppression and institutionalized racism today. Added to this condition is a belief (real or imagined) that the benefits of the society in which they live are not accessible to them.
>
> – *Joy DeGruy,* Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome *(2005)*

Today, the socioeconomic and political institutions that once enabled slavery remain in place and exert a significant impact on people's experiences of human dignity and well-being in the contemporary world

(Bertocchi, 2016). Despite the abolition of slavery in Europe and the Americas at the end of the 19th century, the regime of terror has continued to inflict harrowing stress on many generations of people of African and Indigenous descent (Goff et al., 2008). To most people, this would be surprising; however, today, more than 400 years after the first enslaved Africans were brutally and violently brought to the Atlantic shores, the catastrophic wounds of slavery and their harmful effects remain far-reaching. The suffering is not limited to the physical, psychological, and spiritual harms endured by the descendants of the formerly enslaved, but is experienced as collective trauma within an overall culture of institutionalized oppression, the toxin of which has contaminated global societies.

Legacies of dehumanization have left enduring harm, which is manifold, from the massive and tragic loss of human lives to the irreversible material loss for Africa and for the world; from the deprivation of human dignity to the damage to our personal and collective psyche that has internalized the effects of the harm; from self-alienation to dehumanizing interpersonal and intergroup and intercommunal relationships. Without recognition, acknowledgement, or addressing these legacies, harms have been passed on, continuing to fester in successive generations and extending the wounds and hurts to generations yet to come. It is therefore critical to examine how the traumatic effects of slavery's legacies are lived and transmitted by peoples and communities, and how they inflict widespread harms. Only with such an understanding can global societies and communities begin to address these legacies and heal their lingering wounds.

Transgenerational Trauma

The harm of the dehumanizing legacies is first and foremost manifested as transgenerational trauma, commonly referred to as the transmission of specific painful and stressful elements of historical events within large groups of individuals from one generation to another (Volkan, 2020). As a profound collective trauma, dehumanization had a tormenting impact on enslaved and colonized people and their descendants physically, mentally, emotionally, relationally, and spiritually (DeGruy, 2005). Such unhealed trauma can be passed on through parenting processes and behavioural patterns of communities and societies (Hübl & Avritt, 2020). Equally, the wounds can be transmitted through the continued injuries from the economic–political systems, psychosocial processes, and institutional practices (Volkan, 2020; Yehuda & Bierer, 2009). It can further prevail across generations through epigenetic mechanisms (Champagne, 2016). Descendants from both sides of mass atrocity, including victims/survivors, perpetrators, and even bystanders, may share common responses to pain

and stress through, for instance, avoidance, numbness, denial, and silence, as ways to cope with the profound, indescribable experiences (Bar-On, 1999). The trauma, although not directly undergone by the descendants of those traumatized, may have effects on successive generations through inherited trauma reactivity being triggered in similar stressful situations.

Symptoms of transgenerational trauma commonly found in people of African descent tend to be both self- and other-directed. Low primary self-esteem, distorted self-concept, learned helplessness, hopelessness, depression, destructive and risk-taking behaviours, and self-violence are among the symptoms of self-directed trauma (DeGruy, 2005). Distrust, suspicion, anger, aggression, antipathy, and violence against others, including one's own family, friends, members of one's own and other communities, are illustrative of other-directed symptoms (DeGruy, 2005). These behaviours and emotional states adopted by people of African descent in contemporary Western societies are inherited from their enslaved ancestors and triggered by systemic oppression and structural violence. There are also indications that oppression has been internalized and accepted by the communities of African descent, who may exhibit a lack of self-agency and a feeling of disempowerment (DeGruy, 2005). For instance, research has found that among peoples in the Caribbean, transgenerational trauma has sustained slavery in the form of "mental slavery" (Fletchman Smith, 2000).

Cultural Trauma

Furthermore, shared traumatic experiences can be embedded within a culture, thus becoming cultural trauma. Like transgenerational trauma, cultural trauma occurs when members of a large group have been subjected to horrifying experiences that profoundly impact upon group members' shared consciousness, scar their memories, and shape their present and future identity in irrevocable ways (Alexandre et al., 2004). Hostile encounters, such as enslavement, colonization, and segregation, underlie the psychosocial ramifications of cultural pains, which are transmitted down the generations, affecting descendants of the enslaved collectively.[4]

Symptoms of cultural trauma can involve both normalized practices and processes of identity formation. In the case of normalized practices, it has been noted, for instance, that contemporary African American parents tend to apply strict discipline with their children, including the use of beating, and they seldom praise their children but denigrate them instead, especially in front of strangers (DeGruy, 2005). The origin of such practices was chattel slavery, whereby the enslaved had to shield children from the masters' attention, as this could result in harsher punishments for them, such as being removed from parents, sold, or killed (DeGruy,

2005). These protective measures applied by the enslaved were normalized within the African American community, passed on, and became a symptom of cultural trauma. In terms of identity formation, cultural trauma can be experienced as a dramatic loss of self-identity, coherence, and meaningfulness (Eyerman, 2001). Often, the formation of group identity requires the centrality of collective memory, interpretation, and representation of the past in the process of developing self-concept, group bonding, and a sense of belonging. An example is the process whereby the collective memory of enslavement, colonization, and displacement from lands has served to construct (and deconstruct) Afro-descendants' identity in Brazil, as in the discourse of "*quilombo*". Originally referring to a runaway slave community, *quilombo* now embodies the myriad struggles Afro-descendants must confront. In this way, cultural trauma occurs and accrues, distorting and regenerating societal perceptions and resulting in misapprehensions and misperceptions of colour and race, and harmful stereotypes and beliefs (Hübl & Avritt, 2020). Unconscious codes, values, and language built into society's memory and remembrance can become cultural norms and further extend and prolong the historical trauma (Hübl & Avritt, 2020).

Enduring Harm

The hurtful effects of both transgenerational and cultural trauma are not limited to the harms to the descendants of the enslaved people; they also impact the direct and indirect beneficiaries of the slave trade and slavery, and the contemporary groups who have continued to profit from the dehumanizing history (Banton, 1966). Thus, legacies of slavery, manifested in colonization, structural violence, and institutional oppression, are trauma beyond individualistic experiences, felt as collective *catharsis* to channel aggression and antagonism to oneself and to others (Fanon, 1986).

For people of African and Indigenous descent, experiences of social deprivation, exclusion, political disempowerment, and economic injustice are part and parcel of systemic oppression. However, on a practical level, each of these harms can serve as a reminder of internalized social norms and self-identification to reinforce the idea that their black skin is the cause of their sufferings. In other words, when the lowest status is imposed on black people, it creates the *Negro myth*, a value system that judges people of African descent to be lacking in social and political worthiness (Hook, 2007). Collective memories and grievances of slavery and related atrocities have evidently led to hostile relationships between social groups and communities, feeding an antagonistic attitude of us-versus-them and perpetuating cycles of violence.

Contemporary Racism as a Case Study

Using racism as a case study, this section illustrates how legacies of dehumanization and their persisting harms are deeply interwoven, highlighting the continuity between historical injustices and their current manifestations.

A most harmful aspect of dehumanizing legacies is racism, which involves both conscious and unconscious racism within overt and covert racialized systems in contemporary Western societies. The harm manifests as internalized racism or self-violence, interpersonal racism or antagonistic intercommunal relations, and structural racism and institutionalized discrimination (Omi & Winant, 2015; Paradies, 2006). Typically, these different forms of racism are treated separately, and few attempts are made to explore their interconnections. Therefore, a closer examination of these mutually constituted dimensions of racism is necessary to discern the relevant contemporary harms.

Internalized Racism

Internalized racism refers to the application of racist attitudes, beliefs, or ideologies within a person's worldview, often manifested in two forms – internalized dominance and internalized oppression. Internalized dominance describes and explains the experiences, attitudes, and privileges of people belonging to powerful identity groups. It is a socially superior status accepted, experienced, and profited from, consciously and unconsciously, by dominant groups, which in the case of contemporary Western societies is white people in Europe and peoples of European descent in the Americas. It is perceived as normalized and deserved. By contrast, internalized oppression describes and explains "the experience of those who are members of subordinated, marginalized, or minority groups; those who are powerless and often victimized, both intentionally and unintentionally, by members of dominant groups" (Tappan, 2006); and those who have adopted the dominant groups' beliefs, attitudes, and ideology and have thereby accepted their subordinate status as deserved, normal, and inevitable (Tappan, 2006).

The experiences of internalized oppression and the long-term negative physical and psychological consequences for black people have been well-documented, with harms including the shame associated with "African-ness, as a result of slavery and racism, and the shame of being shamed" (Watts-Jones, 2002), alienation, both self-alienation and alienation from one's own group/community (Freire, 1970; Padilla, 2001), as well as powerlessness and marginalization (Speight, 2007). Indeed, Afro-descendants worldwide who experience higher levels of

racial discrimination tend to have greater internalized racism (David et al., 2019). As such, they must battle against two forces simultaneously: the oppressive force within and the oppressive structure without. In the case of oppressive force within, internalized racism can be expressed as a desire for more European features (e.g., body size, hair texture) and a denigration of African features (physical and character traits) (Brown & Segrist, 2016). Internalized racism is not limited to the African diaspora, and can be experienced by peoples living in Africa, such as the phenomenon of African women skin bleaching. Internalized oppression can be experienced as self-hatred, feelings of inferiority, resignation, isolation, alienation, and powerlessness. It can inadvertently sustain a cultural normalcy intended to oppress. For example, within a racist system, people of African descent can readily accept and participate in the hierarchical social structure (Golash-Boza, 2016), and even actively reproduce subordination and perpetuate domination by white people (Song, 2014; Tappan, 2005). This is because it is within structural violence and institutional discrimination that racialized subjects experience their lived realities (Itzigsohn & Brown, 2015).

Whenever the internally oppressed are treated as "victims" of their own psychological state, and their experience is diagnosed as a *psychological issue*, internalized racism is reduced to a personal attitudinal *problem*. Hence, personal bias, self-prejudice, or pure ignorance, as the result of internalized racism, is treated with therapy, encounter, and education (Tappan, 2006). Such reduction is pernicious in a contemporary racist society because it willfully ignores the systemic nature of racism and lays the blame on the very people who are oppressed. A person's desires and self-concept cannot be separated from the relevant converging socioeconomic, political, and historical forces that shape them (Fanon, 1986). Instead, as we shall see, they reflect the workings of power, which are necessarily structural (Hook, 2007).

Interpersonal Racism

Like internalized racism, interpersonal racism can have agonizing impacts on intercommunal, intergroup, international, and even global relationships (UNESCO Slave Route Project & GHFP, 2020). Interpersonal racism equally has structural roots. That is to say that the transatlantic slave trade, colonial expansion, postcolonial domination, and globalization have all been built upon unequal power relations structurally shaped and imposed predominantly by Western and neoliberal views of the world (Thiaw & Mack, 2020). This worldview gives rise to our contemporary global economic system that legitimizes Western/white dominance over

the different *others*, especially peoples of African and Indigenous descent. Thus, within an economic system that institutionalizes discrimination,

> we have *all* been programmed to respond to the human difference between us with fear and loathing and to handle that difference in one of three ways: ignore it, and if that is not possible, copy it if we think it is dominant, or destroy it if we think it is subordinate.
>
> *(Lorde, 1984)*

There have been a few patterns of relating that enable people to experience each other as equals across differences.

The prevalent racist patterns of relating are characterized by inhumanity, discrimination, and domination, reflecting the white–black duality of self and other recognition (Harris, 1993). This is the result of *pernicious ignorance* of ourselves as spiritual and ethical beings (Gill & Thomson, 2018b). It is pernicious because ignorance can cause harm, not only to other people but also to oneself. Socially constructed self-identification is built upon a mutual dependency of different identity groups in recognizing each other's positionality in the societal "game" (Mead, 1964), which effectively determines how people in each identity group are perceived, valued, received, and engaged with relationally. Racialization has damaging effects on intergroup and intercommunal relationships (Nunn & Wantchekon, 2011). When people adopt an inhumane attitude about others, and worse, when they internalize the inhuman attitude about themselves, they tend to take an indifferent, distancing, and objectifying orientation towards each other (Haslam, 2006).

Structural Racism

Interpersonal relationships thus shaped by racist structural and institutional conditions can have traumatic effects on people physically, psychologically, socially, and spiritually. Such harms are perpetuated through "normal" processes of the daily lives of people (Young, 1990, p. 14), including self-identification, the experiences of living in one's own skin, the encounters with racialized attitudes, and, above all, the relationships within which people are born, grow, and become themselves.

Therefore, race-based self-identification and its harmful effects on intergroup and intercommunal relationships must be equally understood as historically, socio-economically, and politically defined processes (Hughey & Jackson, 2017). That is to say that race is not only defined in relational terms within socioeconomic and political spaces, but it also reflects systemic, cultural, and symbolic negotiations of power (Nazroo et al., 2020). As systemic racism configures the workings and mechanisms of

institutions, at a micro-sociological level, racialized harms are built into people's lived realities through everyday routines and practices (Nazroo et al., 2020). For example, an obvious reason underlying the endemic poverty in black communities in contemporary Western societies is owing to, among other factors, an unjust educational system (Cammarota, 2008). This includes uneven educational finance, the lack of sensitivity to racial prejudices and colour blindness among teachers, and the systematic exclusion of black and Indigenous children and young people from quality public education (Gillborn, 2008).

Therefore, the harms of racism cannot be understood outside the racist socioeconomic and political structures and institutions, and the problem of the 21st century will continue to be the problem of the colour line as a major legacy inherited from previous centuries (Franklin, 1993). In other words, although racism exists and operates at these three levels – internalized, interpersonal, and institutional – it can be felt as if it is constituted in and integral to one's lived reality, and, as such, "it can be difficult to discern, like the water we swim in or the air we breathe" (Speight, 2007, p. 127). Both internalized dominance and internalized oppression prevent the possibility of congenial relationships among peoples and groups seemingly separated by the colours of their skin. Similarly, relational processes, social interactions, and collective emotional state are always already framed and actualized through the systemic, such as economic systems, social policies, laws, tax regime, etc. They are then enabled by and enacted through the institutional, such as cultures and practices within families, neighbourhoods, schools, shops, hospitals, workplaces, police force, prisons, and so forth. While the systemic creates the macro environment and conditions, it is through the micro processes and mechanisms that the structural characteristics are realized and the enduring harms of the transatlantic slave trade are felt most keenly.

Above all, it is the moral and spiritual harms that are most damaging, including the discriminative conceptions of whiteness as "good" and "superior" and blackness as "evil" and "inferior", the active *othering* of non-Europeans, and the resulting negative and antagonistic self- and other-identification, failing to recognize our own and each other's inherent dignity (Kendall, 2013). There is also a growing ethical blindness in the face of self-alienation, both of which are keeping humanity hostage. In this sense, slavery's legacy "is more cruel than the shackles on the wrists and ankles" (Akbar, 1984, p. 132; Speight, 2007). Trauma and racism rooted in the power structure of contemporary Western societies continue to determine the social domination of an "inferior race" by a "superior race", extending systemic oppression to the Caribbean, Latin America, Africa, and beyond (Pierre, 2020).

Conclusion

This chapter explores the legacies of dehumanization and examines the continuing harmful effects on peoples, groups, and communities in relevant contemporary societies. Through interdisciplinary analysis of these legacies, and by making a distinction between legacies of dehumanization and their multifaceted harms, it has developed an understanding that dehumanizing legacies remain living legacies, and that their damages are not merely historical, but simultaneously personal, relational, socio-cultural, structural, and institutional. By highlighting the interconnection of the legacies, the traumas, the resultant harms, and the systemic root of dehumanization, this chapter invites constructive reflections on how global societies and communities must act now to address this legacy and heal its embittering wounds.

Several moral insights emerge from this exploration. Firstly, at the core of our collective tragedy lies the failure of mutual recognition. This tragedy unfolds when we deny others their full humanity, simultaneously eroding our own human dignity. Secondly, contemporary manifestations of economic oppression, political exclusion, social discrimination, and self-alienation have deep historical roots in the racialization, commodification, and instrumentalization of African, Indigenous, and other non-European peoples. Thirdly, global economic systems, national political frameworks, and institutional cultures have perpetuated the atrocities of slavery, sustaining ongoing damage from its legacy (De Souza & Murdoch, 2005). These insights pose critical ethical questions, which will be further explored in the final chapter of this book, concerning our collective imagination in liberating global communities from continued inhumanity and antagonism.

To truly allow humanity to flourish and to "stand in the sun", to use Du Bois's metaphor (Du Bois, 1935), is to instil a humane culture and to cultivate a person "to be actional, preserving in all his relations respect for the basic values that constitute a human world" (Fanon, 1986, p. 173). Indeed, in his remarks on the 2025 International Day of Remembrance, UN Secretary-General Mr Guterres affirms that our collective futures must be rooted in dignity and justice for all.

Building on the understandings of this chapter, the final chapter of this book offers more in-depth analyses of the overall structural injustice plaguing global society and examines approaches to resist and respond to systemic inequality. It proposes that just society necessitates a politics of dignity and related ethical pillars to underpin institutional processes and practices to safeguard the well-being of all.

Notes

1 This chapter builds upon an earlier paper on a similar theme. See Gill (2021).
2 This conception is present in the early Western philosophies, e.g., Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and many others.
3 See the analysis of Locke, Hume, Kant, and Voltaire's claims in Mills (1997).
4 The formation of black people's identity in the United States is such an illustration (Eyerman, 2001).

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4

HEALING THE WOUNDS OF THE PAST

The Long History of Demands of Reparations for Slavery

Ana Lucia Araujo

From 1517 to 1867, slave ships transported nearly 12.5 million enslaved Africans to the Americas. In West Africa and West Central Africa, African men, women, and children were killed in the wars that produced captives for the Atlantic slave trade. Nearly 2 million Africans also succumbed during the journeys, walking from the hinterland to the coast and through the long waiting period of confinement in slave depots. Approximately 1.8 million were killed in the holds of slave ships during the Middle Passage. Current estimates indicate that 10.7 million enslaved men, women, and children disembarked alive in the Americas (Slave Voyages, n.d.).

A growing number of scholars studying the history of slavery and the Atlantic slave trade have attempted to understand how these human atrocities shaped slave societies (those where slavery was the central engine of the economy), including societies where chattel slavery was present but not as a central mechanism, as well as societies that provided captives for the Atlantic slave trade. In the United States, Brazil, France, England, and African countries such as the Republic of Benin or Ghana, starting in the 1990s, the period inaugurated with the end of the Cold War, initiatives memorializing the Atlantic slave trade have gradually emerged. Commemoration activities developed around heritage sites like the African Burial Ground in New York City and the Valongo Wharf in Rio de Janeiro, now listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, are responses to the calls of Black social actors who demanded to make the past of slavery visible in the public space.[1]

These initiatives, although only carrying a symbolic dimension, have encouraged debates about the slave-trading past of the two countries.

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The rise of these two sites exposed the annihilation of Black populations whose history has remained largely untold in the public space of the two cities. The process of unearthing these sites brought to light again the persistence of racism that operates in a variety of forms, but especially through disparities that maintain the populations of African descent socially and economically excluded. In this chapter, reparation and healing are conceived as continuous processes that can never be fully achieved. Inspired by the work of Paul Ricoeur, I establish a connection between history, memory, and healing. I suggest that through the recovery of these sites and through public demands for financial and material reparations for slavery, very often materialized through the passing of legislation, Black communities across the Atlantic world are promoting healing not as a religious process but rather as a process of growing racial consciousness (Ricoeur, 2006, p. 79).

Based on my previous works and using examples from the United States and Brazil, this chapter discusses how a growing knowledge about the history of slavery and the implementation of reparation initiatives can contribute to healing the wounds of past human atrocities, not through passive acceptance of this past, but by instigating awareness and promoting the fight against racial injustice (Araujo, 2010, 2014, 2023). Yet, despite the healing potential offered by demands of reparations through the denunciation of present-day racism and the construction of markers recognizing how enslaved men, women, and children contributed to the construction of the Americas, I also argue that in a variety of contexts, public debates about past atrocities can be instrumentalized by groups carrying specific political agendas. This dynamic, which also creates division, challenges the premise of the healing potential of reparations debates.

Symbolic and Financial Reparations

Over the 20th century and during the first two decades of the 21st century, Black men, women, and children who have been historically identified as descendants of enslaved people have continued to struggle to occupy the public spaces of cities built with slave labour. Maintaining this presence has always been a challenge. In countries like Brazil, the state and its institutions, such as the courts of justice and the police, have historically criminalized the participation of Afro-Brazilians in carnival, samba parties, capoeira circles, and African-based religious ceremonies. Many decades after its end, the violence of slavery still marks many cities in the Americas. There is a connection between the demands to memorialize slavery in the public space and the persistence of racism as one of the expressions of white supremacy, which, according to philosopher Charles Mills, is as an ideology, a "power structure of formal or informal rule,

socioeconomic privilege, and norms for the differential distribution, of material wealth and opportunities, benefits, and burdens, rights and duties" (Mills, 1997, p. 3).

The notion of reparation addresses the idea of making amendments for past wrongdoings (Brophy, 2006, p. 11). In the first half of the 20th century, the idea of reparation emerged in international law and in the human rights field to conceptualize the redress of physical, material, or moral damage inflicted on an individual, a group of people, or even an entire country. In customary international law, reparation has been associated with actions designed to indemnify nations for wartime damages (Falk, 2006, p. 481; Araujo, 2023, pp. 128–129). Reparations carry a moral or symbolic dimension, usually consisting of apologies and measures to help those who were harmed. Reparations can also encompass a financial and material scope (Araujo, 2023, p. 2), where the victims of past wrongs also obtain money or other possessions, such as land, as compensation for the misconduct inflicted. But ultimately, reparation can carry only a symbolic component, notably through recognition of the harm inflicted, apologies, and symbolic measures that can include the construction of a monument or a memorial, the creation of plaques, and the renaming of buildings in recognition of the victims of wrongdoing (Araujo, 2023, p. 2).

In the past three decades, symbolic reparations for past atrocities have been dominant in the international context through a wave of apologies and the creation of commemorative dates, monuments, memorials, and museum exhibitions, starting with the Holocaust, apartheid, and the Rwandan genocide. These initiatives can be conceived as symbolic reparations. The social actors making these demands either individually or organized in associations and other groups often employed the term reparations and occasionally referred to financial and material reparations. Still, scholarly works discussing memory, slavery, and reparations would refer to the history of reparations as having emerged either in the 1990s, when a group of African intellectuals, politicians, and artists created a group demanding reparations for the Atlantic slave trade and colonization, or in 2001 at the UN World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance held in Durban, which recognized slavery and the Atlantic slave trade as crimes against humanity and advanced the debates on the issues of reparations (Howard-Hassmann, 2008).

The idea that the demands of reparations are so recent is intriguing because a closer examination of the history of slavery and the period that followed emancipation in the Americas shows that demands of reparations for slavery and the Atlantic slave trade have a very long history. Since the 18th century at least, enslaved and freed individuals have been

conceptualizing the idea of reparations in correspondence, pamphlets, public speeches, slave narratives, and judicial claims written in English, French, Spanish, Dutch, and Portuguese (Araujo, 2023, pp. 89–127). In the 18th and 19th centuries, despite the legality of slavery, enslaved and formerly enslaved men and women showed how conscious they were of having been victims of wrongdoing; in other words, they were aware they provided unpaid labour to their owners, contributing to their wealth. Moreover, as the internal slave trade continued to be active in countries like the United States, Brazil, and Cuba over the 19th century, many freeborn and freed individuals were also unlawfully enslaved, sometimes beyond national borders. Drawing from this consciousness, the pioneers who addressed the first demands of reparations to governments and former slave owners clearly asserted that they not only had to be freed, but that they were owed financial and material restitutions (Araujo, 2023, pp. 49–51).

Demands of Reparations for Slavery in the Early Independent United States

During the era of gradual abolition, a small number of former slaves demanded that either the government or their old masters provide them with pensions or some kind of financial reparations. The American War of Independence fuelled anti-slavery discourses, and by the late 18th century, in the colonies of the North, an early abolitionist movement had emerged. In this context, enslaved men and women actively petitioned their owners to obtain freedom and, in some cases, rewards for past services. These requests can be conceived as the first demands of reparations for slavery in the present-day United States (Sinha, 2016). Inspired by the Enlightenment ideals of liberty and equality, the revolutionary movement contributed to challenge the existence and morality of slavery, which, at least in theory, was opposed to republican values, even if slavery continued to exist in the US North and expanded in the US South after independence (Pope-Melish, 1998, p. 56).

In this context, one of the first demands of reparations for slavery was formulated by an elderly freedwoman who petitioned the legislature of Massachusetts. Belinda Sutton, owned by the wealthy Isaac Royall Jr. of Massachusetts, is the first known case of an African-born woman who demanded pensions as reparations for slavery (Finkenbine, 2007, pp. 49–51). According to the narrative in her petition, she was born in a West African village where she was captured before the age of 12 and sold into slavery. Her actual place of birth is uncertain. The petition's account refers to the River Volta, which could suggest a location in the interior of the Gold Coast, but she also mentions the Orisha. This reference suggests

that her ethnicity may have been Yoruba, and that she was born either in the Bight of Benin or perhaps in the Bight of Biafra (Royall House & Slave Quarters, n.d.). When she arrived in the Caribbean, Belinda became the slave of the wealthy Isaac Royall, who was born in Maine and by the age of 28 had settled in Antigua, where he established a sugarcane plantation.

In 1737, Royall moved to North America with his family. He brought with him 27 slaves. Settled in Massachusetts, he acquired a farm in Medford.[2] After his death two years later, his son Isaac Royall Junior inherited his assets, including a large estate with a mansion and 20 slaves, becoming one of the richest men in the colony. Among these slaves was Belinda. Baptism records of 14 August 1768 reveal that she had two children: a son named Joseph and a daughter named Prine (New England Historic Genealogical Society, 1907). In 1775, during the American Revolutionary War, because of his strong connections with the Loyalists, Royall Junior was forced to escape to Nova Scotia and then to England, leaving behind his business, real estate, and enslaved property, including Belinda. In his will of 26 May 1778, Royall Junior instructed his grandson and executor, William Pepperel, to pay Belinda "for three years, £30" (Royall House & Slave Quarters, n.d.). He also bequeathed Harvard University with land to endow a professorship of law, physics, or anatomy. Eventually, the Ivy League university utilized the funds to create a professorship of law that marked the foundation of Harvard Law School.[3]

In 1778, the state of Massachusetts confiscated Royall Junior's properties, and several of his bondspeople were manumitted, including Belinda. Soon after she was emancipated, at approximately 65 years of age, she moved to Boston, where she lived in poverty. After Royall Junior's death in 1781, it is likely that Belinda received the amount determined in his will. But three years later, as expected, the payments stopped. Thus, on 14 February 1783, Belinda petitioned the Massachusetts legislature for the first time. She requested a pension as reparations for the unpaid work she provided to the Royalls. Although certainly written by her attorney, the petition emphasized how Belinda had contributed to the wealth of her deceased former owner (Royall House & Slave Quarters, n.d.).

The legislature accepted her request, and Belinda obtained an annual pension of £15 12s., extracted from the revenues generated by Royall's estate (Royall House & Slave Quarters, n.d.; Finkenbine, 2007, p. 102). Obviously, the petition's successful outcome can be explained because her late owner had already determined in his will to pay her a pension for three years. In addition, Belinda's successful case must have been favoured by the fact that Royall Junior was a Loyalist (Finkenbine, 2007, p. 95). Already in the 18th century, the political context deeply oriented not only the demands of reparations for slavery but also the responses obtained

by the petitioners. Belinda's petition had an impact in the public sphere. The Quakers widely disseminated Belinda's story. In 1783, the US anti-slavery newspaper, the *New Jersey Gazette*, as well as British newspapers and magazines, published transcriptions of her first petition (Finkenbine, 2007, pp. 102–103). Although not advocating reparations to former slaves as a policy worth pursuing, upon freeing their slaves, many Quakers provided them with financial restitutions (Sinha, 2016, p. 66).

However, after the first year, the estate suspended the payments (Digital Archive of Massachusetts Anti-Slavery and Anti-Segregation Petitions, 2015a). In 1785, Belinda submitted a second petition to continue the payments authorized two years earlier. In 1787, she again petitioned the legislature and obtained the pension for only one year (Digital Archive of Massachusetts Anti-Slavery and Anti-Segregation Petitions, 2015b). In 1788, she submitted another petition. Using for the first time her married last name (Sutton), she requested an annual pension of $52 (Digital Archive of Massachusetts Anti-Slavery and Anti-Segregation Petitions, 2015c). When Royall's estate refused to pay the pension, on 25 February 1793, she once again petitioned the government, which determined that the payments should continue (Digital Archive of Massachusetts Anti-Slavery and Anti-Segregation Petitions, 2015d). This is the last known petition submitted by Belinda Sutton, who may have died in the 1790s. Although only partially successful, Sutton was the first known successful case of individual reparations awarded to a former enslaved person.

Reparations in the Era of the Abolition

Between 1804 and 1888, all societies in the Americas abolished slavery, but its demise was a lengthy and gradual process. From Cuba to Brazil, public debates among abolitionists and pro-slavery groups revealed many common features. In these societies, slaveholding elites emphasized that slavery and the slave trade were legal activities and that property rights should prevail above all rights. Following the emergence of the abolitionist movement, although some anti-slavery activists occasionally made calls for reparations to former slaves and their descendants (through land redistribution, wages, and education), what prevailed in these public debates was how governments would indemnify slave owners for property loss.

Abolitionists also utilized legal arguments to denounce that thousands of enslaved persons were imported to the Americas illegally, and that keeping these Africans and their descendants in bondage was unlawful. This was particularly true in Brazil. Moreover, as the internal slave trade continued to be active until the abolition of slavery in countries like the

United States, Brazil, and Cuba, many free individuals were also unlawfully enslaved, even beyond national borders.

In the United States, three cases can be highlighted. In 1841, Solomon Northup, a free African American, was kidnapped and enslaved. His case became famous because of the narrative *12 Years a Slave*, adapted to the screen by Steve McQueen in 2013. After Northup was eventually freed, with the support of a number of abolitionists, several petitions were submitted requesting the US Congress to pay him reparations for his illegal enslavement. Despite these calls, the US Congress did not hear the petitions requesting financial reparations to Northup. Although timidly, Northup's case encouraged US abolitionists to defend financial reparations to former slaves on several occasions before the beginning of the Civil War. Looking at another case, in 1848, John Lytle also gained public attention. Lytle was born free in Philadelphia in approximately 1817.[4] He worked on board the ship *Jupiter* that sailed the Atlantic Ocean. After a shipwreck, he ended up in Sierra Leone. By 1837, slave merchants had sold him and transported him to Cuba, where for 11 years he was maintained under slavery in a plantation. In 1848, Lytle denounced his unlawful enslavement to journalist John L. O'Sullivan, who was visiting the island. Consequently, the Consul of the United States in Havana, Robert B. Campbell, supported Lytle's demand for freedom. In addition to being freed, the Cuban government paid Lytle as reparations for the 11 years he was held in slavery. Liberated, he returned to the United States and joined the abolitionist cause in New York City (Graden, 2014, pp. 174–176). The final case is of Henrietta Wood, a freedwoman unlawfully enslaved in Ohio who sued her kidnapper and obtained restitution in 1870.[5] These incidents generated the few cases of reparations to individuals illegally enslaved. Unfortunately, many other men and women enslaved unlawfully did not have the same fate.

Ultimately, the gradual end of slavery in the Americas during the long 19th century was planned to protect the interests of slaveholders and planters. One of the most tragic examples of this trend is Haiti, which in 1804 ended French colonial rule by becoming independent and abolishing slavery. In 1825, the new Black nation agreed to pay France 150 million francs in five instalments for the disbursement of indemnities to former colonists. The calculation of this amount was based on the annual revenues obtained by Saint-Domingue's planters from sugar, coffee, cotton, indigo, and other commodities during the colonial period, and also included the value of the urban properties they lost in 1789.[6] Although not included in the initial calculations, historians agree that slave property was considered in the evaluation and the distribution of the indemnity to the French planters and slaveholders (Beauvois, 2010; Ulentin, 2016).

In Brazil, where the abolitionist movement emerged late in the 1870s, there existed another layer of difficulty. The slave trade from Africa was banned in 1831, but this ban was not fully enforced. As a result, between 1831 and 1850, nearly one million enslaved Africans entered Brazilian ports; this number alone is almost three times the number of enslaved Africans who were brought from Africa to the United States during the entire era of the Atlantic slave trade. Given the ban, most of these men, women, and children and their descendants were kept illegally enslaved until 1888, when slavery was abolished in Brazil. Brazilian Black abolitionists were conscious of these crimes. During the 1870s and 1880s, they were among the few activists defending reparations to former slaves. In 1883, for example, Black abolitionist Luiz Gama calculated the amount due in salaries to 1.5 million slaves in Brazil as 135 *contos de réis*, which in today's currency would correspond to 50 billion dollars Confederação Abolicionista, 1883, p. 10).

To different degrees, slave owners received at least some kind of monetary compensation in the British Caribbean, Washington DC, the Dutch Caribbean, the French Caribbean, and even in Brazil during the process of gradual abolition. Even after slavery ended, in the British Caribbean and Cuba, the creation of apprenticeship systems indirectly rewarded many former slave owners who kept freedpeople under their control by paying them symbolic wages. The debates on reparations during the period of emancipation shed light on how a variety of social actors conceived property rights and how they envisaged the future of the freed populations in the public sphere.[7]

In the United States, the period that followed emancipation, known as Reconstruction, brought hopes of land redistribution to freedpeople and access to full citizenship; however, these projects ended up failing as well. With the premature end of Reconstruction, the prospects of obtaining land and full citizenship were replaced with disenfranchisement and increasing racial hatred. This context led former enslaved individuals to gather and collectively request pensions as financial reparations. During the 1890s, freedmen and freedwomen created associations to petition the government of the United States to pass bills providing them with pensions for the time they were enslaved. These bills generated great mobilization and debates, but never passed. Moreover, federal authorities persecuted the leaders of one association that requested its members to pay a small fee to join the organization by accusing them of using the postal service to defraud freedpeople. One of its greatest leaders, the freedwoman Callie House, spent one year in prison. Ultimately, the members of the movement never achieved their goal.[8]

In the second half of the 20th century, freedpeople were no longer alive to fight for reparations, but the children and grandchildren of enslaved persons continued calling for reparations. In the period that followed the end of the Second World War, Jewish survivors of the Holocaust obtained restitution.[9] This context brought new hopes to groups and individuals fighting for reparations for slavery. Although constantly associated with Communist activity, several groups advocating reparations surfaced during the period of the Cold War.[10] In the 1960s, during the Black Power Era, the calls for reparations gained new blood with the rise of several organizations such as the Reparations Committee for the Descendants of American Slaves, led by Audley Eloise Moore (Queen Audley Moore), the Republic of New Africa, and the Black Manifesto, which was authored and disseminated by James Forman and demanded financial reparations from churches and synagogues in the United States. These leaders and organizations conceived symbolic and material reparations as a path to redress past wrongdoings and remedy racial inequalities. Yet, despite their different approaches, these groups conceived reparations as just a first step towards a long process of healing the harms caused by slavery and racism. Their demands, similar to those of the end of the 19th century, were met with great hostility by public authorities (Araujo, 2023, pp. 135–168).

During the early period of her activism, Audley Eloise Moore, who became a prominent Black nationalist, Pan-Africanist, and civil rights activist, was greatly inspired by Marcus Garvey, who, under the Jim Crow era, advocated that the only path for remedying the harms inflicted during slavery and the continued exclusion of populations of African descent was return to Africa (Araujo, 2023, pp. 153–154). Moore, however, also considered the potential of symbolic reparations. In 1962, she saw the approach of the 100th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 as an occasion to discuss the legacies of slavery.[11] She believed that Black people in the United States should learn about the history of slavery and African history. To this end, she created the Reparations Committee for the Descendants of American Slaves (RCDAS), which filed a claim demanding reparations for slavery in a court of the state of California (Moore, 1963, p. 7; Williams, 2015; Farmer, 2016, p. 88). She also authored a booklet underscoring that slaves had provided dozens of years of unpaid work to slave owners. She emphasized the horrors of lynching, segregation, disfranchisement, raping, and police brutality. Even though the litigation was not successful, Moore continued building other avenues to fight for reparations. She contended that the unpaid work provided by enslaved Africans and their descendants led to the wealth accumulation that made the United States "the richest country in the world" (Moore, 1963, p. 5). Moore defended that all Black people in the United States and

their descendants should receive financial reparations, with each individual and group deciding what to do with the funds. During the 1960s, Moore continued participating in organizations defending reparations for slavery. In 1968, she joined the Republic of New Africa and later supported the efforts of the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N'COBRA), created in 1987 (Araujo, 2023, pp. 159–161).

As the end of the Cold War approached, the government of the United States paid financial restitutions to the Japanese Americans who were unlawfully interned in camps during the Second World War (Congress.gov, 1988). With this precedent, the end of the 1980s and the 1990s provided ground for a renewed wave of demands of reparations for slavery. In the last two decades of the 20th century, Brazil, Colombia, and Ecuador enacted new constitutions recognizing the right of land ownership for their Black communities (Araujo, 2023, pp. 178–183). In the 1990s, a group of Black students in Brazil organized petitions demanding reparations, and in the United States, new organizations combining activism and litigation requesting reparations emerged. The echoes of this movement were also heard in Africa, where the Group of Eminent Persons, which gathers intellectuals, artists, politicians, and activists, issued a document calling for reparations for the Atlantic slave trade and colonialism (Howard-Hassmann, 2004).

Recent Calls for Reparations

In the last 20 years, demands for redress have acquired a new strength. The UN World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance held in Durban in 2001 recognized slavery and the Atlantic slave trade as crimes against humanity. As recently as March 2014, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) accepted a plan focusing on reparations for slavery and native genocide. The programme consists of ten points comprising material, financial, and symbolic demands addressed to various European governments, including the United Kingdom, Spain, France, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, and Portugal.[12] CARICOM's call for reparations received great attention from the media in European and Caribbean countries, as well as from newspapers in the United States and Brazil. After its announcement, the debate on reparations for African Americans reemerged in the *New York Times*. Weeks later, reparations were discussed in an *Atlantic* article by the acclaimed journalist and writer Ta-Nehisi Coates (Coates, 2014), as well as in a series of essays published in the *New York Times* (New York Times, 2014).

In 2015, a wave of demonstrations, in great part associated with the activities of Black Lives Matter, emerged in universities all over

the United States. In addition to protesting against racism and racial exclusion, students of colour demanded the removal of markers associated with slavery that were still displayed on several buildings on university campuses. These demands were associated with previous and ongoing debates concerning the connections between white elite universities and slavery. As a result, several universities created study groups and produced reports examining the ties of these institutions with slavery. In 2015, the Universities Studying Slavery (USS) was created. This organization gathers Brown University, Emory University, Georgetown University, University of North Carolina, University of Mississippi, Hollins University, Clemson University, University of South Carolina, the College of William and Mary, University of Virginia, and other universities in the state of Virginia, several of which created special commissions to study their ties with slavery and produced reports resulting from these investigations. Other universities such as Harvard University, Princeton University, Yale University, Columbia University, and the University of Maryland also recognized their ties with slavery.

Georgetown University, a Jesuit institution of higher education in Washington, DC, was among those universities that started to come to terms with its own past of slave ownership. Unlike other institutions, Georgetown's relation to slavery carries particular features. The Jesuits are members of the Society of Jesus, an order of the Roman Catholic Church that was the largest slave-owning institution in the Americas. As in other parts of the American continent, the Jesuits also owned plantations and slaves in the United States (Murphy, 1998). In 1838, for several reasons, but especially with the aim of paying a major debt contracted by Georgetown University, the Jesuits sold 272 enslaved men, women, and children to cotton and sugar plantations in Louisiana. The sale generated approximately $3.3 million in today's currency. In 2015, the President of Georgetown University, John J. DeGioia, called for the formation of a Working Group on Slavery, Memory, and Reconciliation. The group's mission was to examine in detail the ties of the university with slavery (Working Group on Slavery, Memory, and Reconciliation, 2016, p. xi). Among the recommendations made by the working group was the suggestion "that the University offer a formal, public apology for its historical relationship with slavery". Although stating that an "apology is a precondition for reconciliation", the document omits any reference to reparations to the descendants of the slaves sold in 1838 (Working Group on Slavery, Memory, and Reconciliation, 2016, p. 28).

Major newspapers around the world reported the main results from the working group's 2016 report, with a formal apology among the measures identified to be taken by Georgetown's administration to come to terms

with its slave past. Additional measures listed in the report include the creation of an institute to study slavery and the construction of a memorial to honour the slaves sold in 1838. The report also recommended the renaming of two university buildings after an African American educator and an African American enslaved man. Moreover, the university's president decided to offer preferential admission to all descendants of slaves who worked for Georgetown. Despite the media's positive reaction to the announced measures, it became clear that none of these initiatives included financial and material reparations to the descendants of slaves.

One week after DeGioia's announcement, the GU272 Foundation, a group consisting of various descendants of the slaves sold in 1838, emphasized that the announced measures did not meaningfully contribute to the elaboration of the working group's recommendations. According to Karran Harper-Royal, one member of the group, the descendants of slaves sold in Louisiana were disadvantaged in comparison to white children (Jones, 2016). Consequently, they proposed that Georgetown University help raise $1 billion to create a foundation to support the education of the descendants of those sold in 1838 (Svrluga, 2016). However, the university did not respond to these demands. In April 2017, during a religious ceremony held at Georgetown University, Timothy Kesicki, the president of the Jesuit Conference of Canada, offered an apology to the descendants of the men, women, and children sold in 1838. The university also renamed two of its buildings, which had been christened after presidents who led the sale of 1838, to honour Isaac Hawkins, an enslaved man sold in 1838, and Anne Marie Becraft, a 19th-century Black educator. In 2019, as the university administration had not taken action on financial and material reparations, in a nonbinding referendum, Georgetown University undergraduate students voted to create a fee to contribute to a fund to be made available to the descendant community (Svrluga, 2019). This early outcome suggests that, beyond symbolic measures as those adopted by Georgetown University, Black social actors and organizations are fighting for concrete measures that will provide them with financial and material resources.

Meanwhile, reparations continued to be debated in the international arena. On 26 September 2016, the UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, which reports to the High Commissioner on Human Rights, presented the report of its mission to the United States during the meeting of the UN Human Rights Council. The conclusions advanced by the committee, which was composed of Ricardo A. Sunga III (Chairperson, Philippines), Mireille Fanon-Mendes-France (France), Sabelo Gumedze (South Africa), Michal Balcerzak (Poland), and Ahmed Reid (Jamaica), underscored the living legacies of slavery and racial

segregation in the United States. Similar to the policies proposed by the Movement for Black Lives, in its conclusions, the working group report expressed several concerns. In particular, it stated that

> the legacy of colonial history, enslavement, racial subordination and segregation, racial terrorism and racial inequality in the United States remains a serious challenge, as there has been no real commitment to reparations and to truth and reconciliation for people of African descent.
>
> *(United Nations General Assembly, 2016, Art. 68, p. 16)*

In its recommendations, the report advised the erection of "monuments, memorials, and markers" to "facilitate the public dialogue". It also stressed the need to acknowledge the "transatlantic trade in Africans, enslavement, colonization and colonialism" as crimes against humanity, and address past and present atrocities with reparatory justice (United Nations General Assembly, 2016, Art. 91, p. 19). Moreover, the working group encouraged the US Congress to pass the bill H.R. 40 "Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act" and to "consider applying analogous elements contained in CARICOM's Ten-Point Action Plan on Reparations" (United Nations General Assembly, 2016, Art. 94, p. 20). As expected, the US government has not responded to these recommendations.

How demands of reparations for slavery and the slave trade have been historically addressed are connected to the particularities of the slave systems that prevailed in the societies where they emerged. These requests are linked to the processes that culminated in the abolition of slavery in several countries in the Americas and are associated with the trails of development taken by these societies during the post-abolition period. Calls for reparations are also related to how former slaves and their descendants achieved or at least attempted to achieve citizenship in former slave societies. They are also associated with the ways Black activists responded to the legal systems that imposed racial segregation and to the ruling ideologies that promoted racism and reinforced white supremacy.

In various periods of history, at least in the United States, reparations activism involved radical movements that gathered thousands of supporters. These movements were recognized as radical by the federal authorities, and their leaders were persecuted and their activities criminalized. Every year, demands for redress continue to be the object of lawsuits and bills and remain present in the public sphere through popular demonstrations,

especially when approaching commemorative dates associated with the abolition of slavery. The analysis of primary sources can reveal how some states, companies, and universities, as well as other individuals and their descendants, largely benefited from the slave trade and slave labour. Historical research can also bring to light how the descendants of slaves remained socially, economically, and politically excluded. Still, many questions remain unsolved. To organizations and activists, which kinds of reparations are due (symbolic, financial, material, or all of them) remain unclear. Most proposals do not work well for the various former slave societies at stake. Even in the recent CARICOM ten-point programme, symbolic reparations predominate. Also, there is no consensus on who should give reparations and who should obtain them. While there are several answers to these questions, the historical particularities of societies demanding reparations must be considered, and this is why it is important to historicize the demands of reparations, because they have been around for more than two centuries.

In this process, social actors demanding reparations have changed over time. Initially, they were enslaved people. Then, free individuals who had been illegally enslaved, as well as freedmen and freedwomen, called for reparations. Also, abolitionists in various European and American societies formulated rhetorical demands of reparations to governments. Later on, former slaves and slaves, individually or in small groups, demanded reparations from their former owners. Finally, when freedpeople were dead, men and women claiming the identity of descendants of slaves continued demanding reparations from governments and churches, as well as from companies that insured or profited from slavery.

Today, demands for reparations go far beyond requests for amounts of cash to particular individuals and groups. There are instead a variety of groups and even nations that collectively or individually demand financial and material reparations from other groups, companies, and governments. These groups put pressure on public authorities and governments, and their actions have been heard in the public sphere. Up to this day, no concrete and broad measure has been implemented to provide reparations to populations of African descent who have been historically associated with the stigma of slavery. However, the continuous demands from Black social actors to amend these past wrongs are a reminder of the ongoing legacies of slavery and the post-emancipation period in the Americas. Although not successful, these demands have contributed to raise awareness about the past atrocities of slavery and the Atlantic slave trade. Here, healing is not an abstract notion; it is rather a concrete process, in which, by voicing their claims, historically excluded groups take their destinies into their own hands.

Ongoing Calls, Persisting Divisions

Like never before, with the emergence of the Internet, groups in the three continents involved in the Atlantic slave trade have been creating ties to establish possible common ground to fight for reparations. In the United States, propelled by the CARICOM ten-point plan, recent debates on reparations have gained new force. Moreover, the commemoration of 1619 (the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the first documented enslaved Africans in Virginia) encouraged conversations about reparations in the public sphere. In 2019, with the approach of the 2020 presidential elections in the United States, and the growing space occupied by social media, pro-nationalist individuals identifying as "America's descendants of slavery" started establishing clear distinctions regarding who should and should not receive reparations on the basis of national origin, very often promoting anti-African and anti-immigrant discourses (Cokley, 2020). As debates continued, the US Congress held a hearing panel to discuss H.R. 40 legislation in June 2019.

The COVID-19 global pandemic disturbed the trend of commemoration and demagogic symbolic measures aimed at allegedly redressing the atrocities of slavery and the Atlantic slave trade. In late March 2020, many cities in the United States and other countries in Europe and the Americas went into lockdown. Once again, Black communities across the globe were disproportionately affected by the deaths caused by the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2. Likewise, the restrictions imposed by the lockdowns led millions to lose their jobs. Despite these developments, police brutality and anti-Black racism did not stop during the pandemic. On 25 May 2020, white police officer George Chauvin assassinated George Floyd, an African American man in his late 40s, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Thousands of Black citizens, along with their white and brown allies, took to the streets of various cities in the United States to protest police brutality and anti-Black racism.

The global demonstrations in the wake of George Floyd's murder propelled the internationalization of the struggle against anti-Black racism across countries founded on the exploitation of Black and Native American populations. On 14 April 2021, the Judiciary Committee of the US Congress House of Representatives voted to move H.R. 40 to the House floor for full consideration. Almost one year later, organizations such as the National African American Reparations Commission (NAARC), an organization of professionals created in 2015 to fight for reparations for African Americans, along with historical organizations such as N'COBRA, NAACP, and Humans Rights Watch (HRW) that formed the Why We Can't Wait Coalition, sent a petition with 365

signatures of organizations, leaders, activists, and celebrities demanding the US Congress to bring the bill H.R. 40 to the House floor for a full vote. However, as late as October 2022, one month before the midterm elections to elect representatives to occupy 435 seats in the House of Representatives, the bill had not yet been voted.

Meanwhile, on 30 September 2020, the state of California enacted Assembly Bill 3121, establishing the Task Force to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans. Charging the California Department of Justice with providing administrative, technical, and legal support to assist the task force, Bill 3121 aimed to develop reparations proposals for African Americans as a result of slavery and the continuous discrimination against freedpeople and their descendants in the United States. In June 2022, the task force released a 500-page interim report. Although the state of California only became part of the United States in 1850, the decade preceding the Civil War, and despite stating that only around 1,500 enslaved "African Americans lived in California in 1852", the report provides a very long patchwork of studies about slavery in the United States between 1619 and 1865 (California Task Force to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans, 2022, pp. 7, 39).

The California interim and final reports also present an overview of the atrocities committed against Black people in the aftermath of emancipation by emphasizing the persisting discrimination against "African Americans" at several levels, including education, housing, and the judicial system. However, by using the generic term "African American" (even when referring to a period when Black Americans were denied civil rights), along with the term "Black", the reports fail to determine who is "African American" and who is "Black", and if the two terms are different or interchangeable. Despite this vagueness and confusion, the interim and final reports formulate a series of recommendations, although the recommendations regarding financial reparations are short and equally vague. The interim report recommended the implementation of a "detailed program of reparations for African Americans", and the development and implementation of "other policies, programs, and measures to close the racial wealth gap in California" (California Task Force to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans, 2022, p. 24). Other recommendations included providing "funding and technical assistance to Black-led and Black community-based land trusts to support wealth building and affordable housing". Therefore, despite emphasizing the exceptional nature of slavery in the United States, the interim report suggested that any Black person (including the huge Black Latino population and Black people whose ancestors were African immigrants) living in

California between 1850 and today has been victimized by discriminatory practices and could be considered for the recommended reparatory measures. The final report, however, refers to reparations to the descendants of persons enslaved in the United States, even if the state only became part of the United States 15 years before the end of slavery in the country (California Task Force to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans, 2023, p. 633).

Ultimately, regardless of the outcome of these recent fights for reparations, from a historical viewpoint, as long as racism and racial inequalities persist in former slave societies and societies where slavery existed, demands of reparations for slavery and the Atlantic slave trade will continue to occupy the public sphere, not only in the United States but also in other countries of the Americas, Europe, and Africa. As they did in the past, these long-lasting demands offer Black social actors an opportunity to make their history recognized in the public arena. In other words, claims for reparations contribute to the understanding that healing the wounds of past human atrocities mainly consists in the ability to continue the fight to transform societies historically grounded in slavery and racism.

Notes

1 See Valongo Wharf Archaeological Site, https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1548/
2 Royall House & Slave Quarters, located in Medford, MA, is a National Historic Landmark and is open to public visitation: www.royallhouse.org
3 For the section of the will bequeathing land to Harvard University, see Warren (1908).
4 According to other sources consulted by Gerald Horne, Lytle was born in Charleston, South Carolina, and sold into slavery when he was still a child. See Horne (2014).
5 On Wood's story, see McDaniel (2019).
6 See: *L'ordonnance de Charles X du 17 avril 1825* [The Ordinance of Charles X of 17 April 1825] (2003).
7 On the debates among abolitionists associated with property rights, see Sinha (2016, pp. 45–85).
8 To know more about the ex-slave pension movement, see Berry (2006) and Araujo (2023, pp. 99–108).
9 On the Jewish case, see Zweig (2013).
10 Numerous activists and organizations associated with the fight for reparations were persecuted for alleged involvement with Communist activity. See Araujo (2023).
11 Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Harvard University, Boston, MA, United States, Black Women Oral History Project, Interview with Audley (Queen Mother) Moore, 6–8 June 1978, OH-31, 39.
12 On the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Ten-Point Plan, see: Caribbean Community (CARICOM) (n.d.) and Pilkington (2014).

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PART II

Collective Healing

Case Studies from around the World

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5

DECONTAMINATING NARRATIVES

A Path to Collective Healing

Ali Moussa Iye

Stories are like entities with their own history and trajectories. Like rumours, they sometimes escape the control of those who create them and trace their own itinerary in the heads and hearts of men and women. Like enzymes, they imprint and guide their hopes, dreams, and frustrations. The ability to produce mythologies and narratives about the past, present, or future is perhaps what most distinguishes human beings from other living beings. It may even be the driving force behind the extraordinary human adventure that has brought us to the "Information and Communication Age" (Harari, 2015).

Stories have a history too …

Founding myths and legends first served to define our response to the mystery of creation, death, and transcendence. They have helped us to explain our position in the universe, our ontological relationship with other living beings, and our teleological quests. All peoples produce these mental substances through which we feel and observe the world around us and, above all, interact with other humans (D'Huy, 2023). Despite their extraordinary diversity and inventiveness, these cosmogonies can be divided into two categories according to their intended purpose. First, there are the mythologies, which are generally concerned with making sense of what happens in the heavens, in the invisible world teeming with spirits and creatures with which humans must learn to live. Second, there are stories that focus more on what happens on Earth and that try to explain socio-political and economic relations and structures. They seek to justify the hierarchies and relationships of domination and exploitation between individuals and groups within and between human societies (Fredrickson,

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2002). Narratives are, in a sense, an ideologization or instrumentalization of the great founding myths. They are the propaganda arm of socio-political and economic ambitions of power and domination. Religion, by virtue of its impact on the mind, has been the preferred vehicle for these narratives (Garaudy, 1996). Indeed, who can safely dispute the words received from God? All the beliefs about the "promised land", the "chosen people", "divine right", or "cursed castes" stem from this instrumentalization of human spiritual aspirations to justify socio-political realities (Lévêque, 1997). Other fields of knowledge, such as philosophy, science, and cultural expressions, have also been used to inculcate narratives that have changed the course of human history.

The effectiveness of these narratives lies in the fact that they offer a simple, even simplistic, way of explaining the complexity of reality, responding to people's quest for certainty. But where their use is most strategic is in situations of conquest, domination, and exploitation (Hindi, 2015). For many observers of European history, the 16th century marked a turning point in the way grand narratives were developed. The European conquest of the world that began at this time was called the "Century of Great Discoveries" (Fernández-Armesto, 2006). A century that for the Indigenous inhabitants of the "New World" ended in genocide (Ricard, 2015) and for the African peoples in slavery (Thomas, 1997). These great myths still structure cosmovisions and socio-political and economic projections, as well as the psychology of the European peoples.

Singularity of Dominant Narratives

The Europeans introduced three major innovations in the creation of grand narratives:

1. A concept of humanity, *humanism,* developed during the "Age of Enlightenment", which places man at the centre of creation and Europeans at the centre of this centre and at the pinnacle of human evolution (Césaire, 1955).
2. An understanding of the universal, *universalism*, born of the same "Age of Enlightenment", which transforms European particularism into a universal model and makes the historical trajectory of Europeans the only path to human destiny (Trouillot, 2006).
3. A theory of the economy, *capitalism*, which has made the race for profit the main driving force behind human development, reducing human success to materialistic possessions (Amin, 2000).

However, the ultimate singularity of the great European narratives is the use of science to demonstrate the relevance and legitimacy of these theories and to present them as indisputable facts (Ricoeur, 1991). Scientific

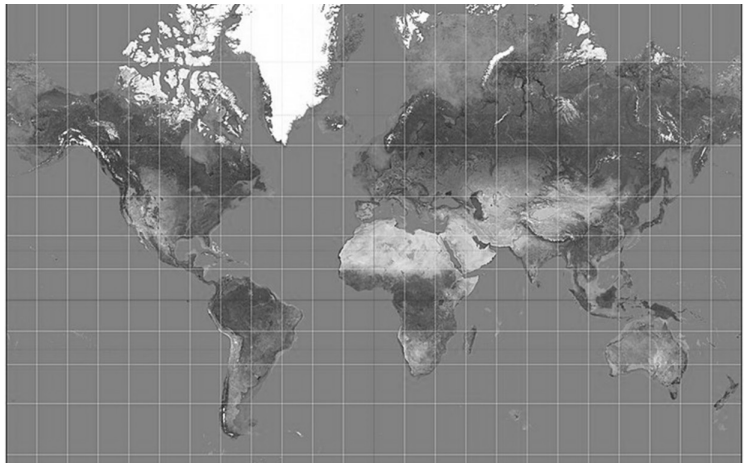
discourse, based on the belief in objectivity, experimentation, and the search for truth – i.e., the immutable laws of the universe, nature, and society – has become a powerful means of imposing these narratives. This discourse, which has the particularity of disqualifying all other forms of knowledge as mythologies, beliefs, and superstitions, has succeeded in dethroning other intelligibilities and explanations of the world (Foucault, 1969). Who could resist this epistemology of truth and knowledge liberated from myth and superstition? How can we not succumb to narratives that have been driven by the power of images: painting, photography, and, above all, cinema and television? Look at how Western films, stories of cowboys and Indians, have turned guilt on its head by transforming exterminated peoples into barbaric villains who massacred the poor European settlers who came to develop these wild regions of the West. Hollywood managed the double feat of making a lot of money while turning Indian victims into white executioners.

Generally speaking, narratives have a limited lifespan and are modified after major socio-political, economic, or ecological upheavals. This is the case with the narratives of the ancient Egyptian, Mongol, Roman, or Islamic empires, to name but a few. The current geopolitical, socio-economic, and cultural upheavals have begun to call into question the European narratives, whose continuity and legitimacy had hitherto been ensured by the globalization of the economic system resulting from colonial conquests.

Maps and Worldviews

To understand why it is so difficult to free ourselves from narratives that literally shape our vision of the world, let's take the example of certain cartographies (Monmonier, 1991). The most common map we still use today is known as the Mercator projection (Map 5.1).

The Mercator projection was devised in 1569 by the Flemish cartographer Gerardus Mercator. This map, which illustrates the Eurocentric vision, embodies the great narratives of the "century of discoveries". Europe, placed at the centre, appears much larger than its actual geographical size. The further away you are from the equator, the greater the distortion in the size of the regions. The areas close to the poles are disproportionate to their actual size. One of the most frequent criticisms of the Mercator projection is its distortion of the representation of Africa, which is systematically reduced in relation to the real size of the continent, with implications for how geopolitical and historical visions are constructed. For example, the Mercator projection suggests that Greenland is more or less the same size as Africa, whereas the African continent is in fact 15

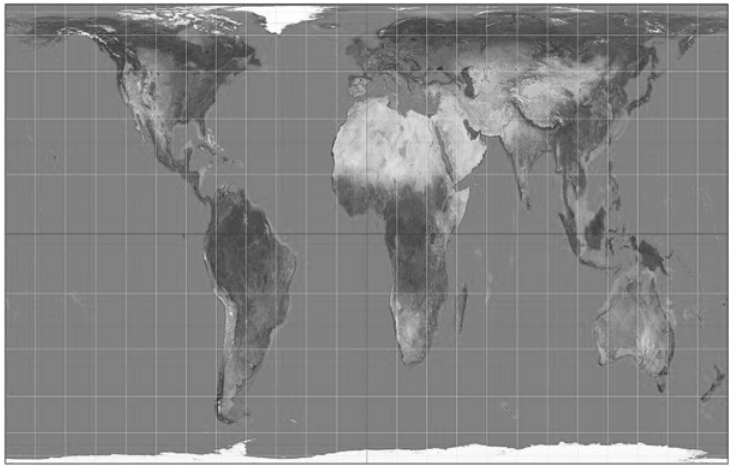


MAP 5.1 Mercator Projection.
(Wikimedia Commons)

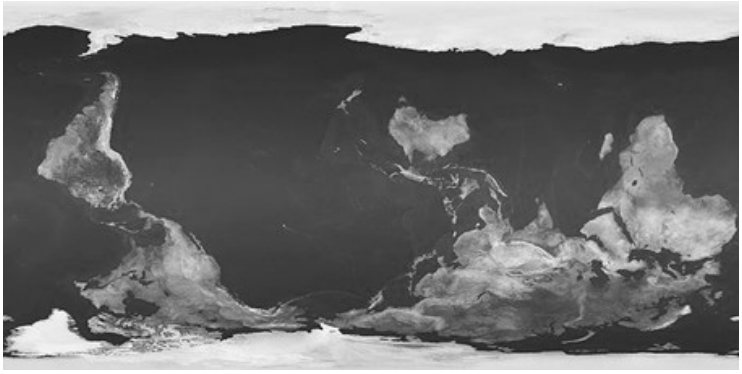
times larger. This distortion also illustrates European designs on the rest of the world.

The Peters projection, also known as the Gall-Peters equivalent projection, is a cartographic projection popularized by the historian and geographer James Gall at the end of the 19th century, but above all promoted by the geographer Arno Peters in the 1970s (see Map 5.2). The Gall-Peters projection is often put forward as a fairer alternative to the Mercator projection, particularly in terms of the representation of the continents and their relative size. It offers a different dimension of the continents and attempts to keep the areas of the countries and continents proportional by making each area of the map equivalent in terms of surface area. Unlike Mercator, it avoids giving disproportionate importance to areas near the poles and to northern regions. The main advantage of the Gall-Peters projection is its ability to provide a more accurate representation of continental surfaces. It shows the true size of Africa in relation to Europe and North America. This projection has had a significant impact on debates about the representation of the world and geopolitical cartography. It is often used in post-colonial conversations and in discussions on geopolitics and global justice.

The McArthur projection, also known as the McArthur equivalent projection or the McArthur cylindrical projection, is another alternative to traditional cartographic constructions (see Map 5.3). It was developed by the Australian geographer and cartographer John McArthur with the



MAP 5.2 Gall-Peters Projection.
(Wikimedia Commons)



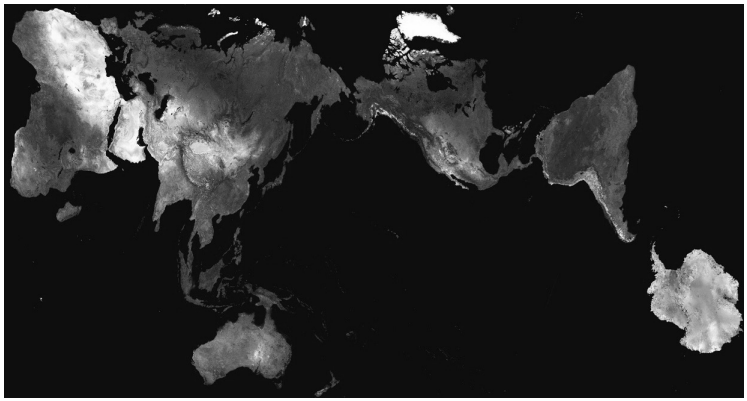
MAP 5.3 McArthur Projection.
(Wikimedia Commons)

aim of providing a more balanced representation of the world in terms of surface areas, while minimizing the distortions visible in more traditional projections. He made two changes to the Gall-Peters projection that literally overturned the Eurocentric representations of the Mercator projection. He changed the orientation of the map, putting north at the bottom and south at the top, shifting the focus of the map from Europe to Australia.

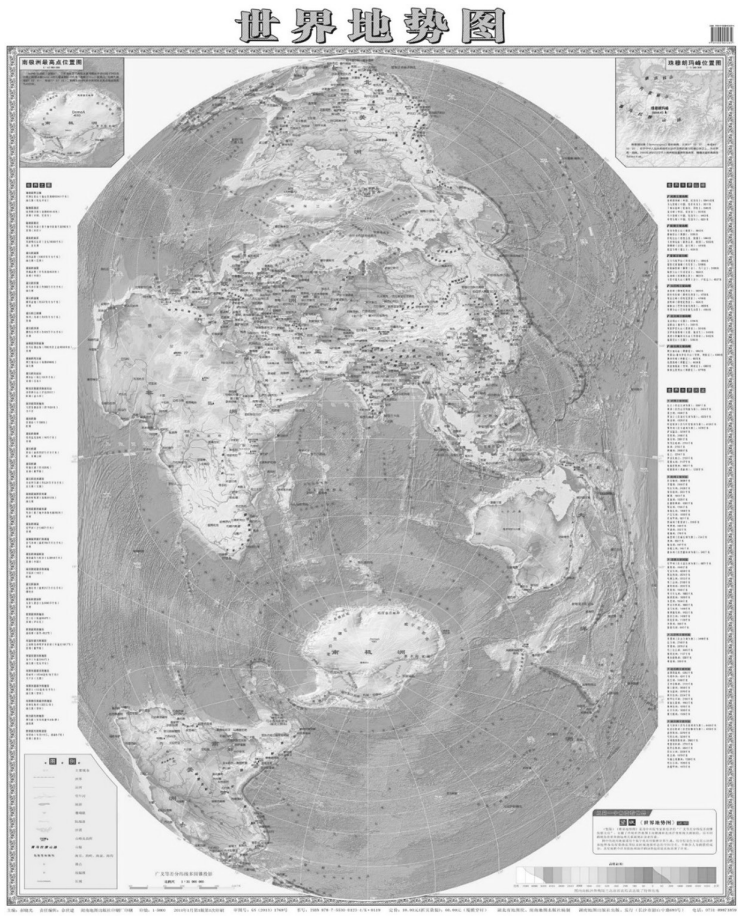
The McArthur projection is an interesting option for those wishing to see a map of the world where the surfaces of continents and countries are better proportioned to their actual size. Although it involves visible distortions in the geographical shapes, it offers a different way of looking at the world and helps to raise awareness of geopolitical injustices and deconstruct certain preconceived ideas about the size and importance of the world's regions.

The AuthaGraph, created in 1999 by the Japanese designer and cartographer Hajime Narukawa (seeMap 5.4), is a revolutionary cartographic projection that has attracted a great deal of attention because of its ability to represent the globe more faithfully while avoiding certain distortions visible in traditional projections. Narukawa's aim was to develop a projection that could represent the spherical surface of the Earth on a flat surface with the least possible distortion and that was simple to understand and easy to reproduce. This map represents a significant advance in the field of cartographic projections and offers an innovative solution that reduces distortions of the continents, oceans, and regions close to the poles, providing a more accurate representation of the planet. Its ability to give the countries and continents of the Global South more realistic proportions and to offer a new way of seeing the world has aroused growing interest in cartographic circles and beyond.

Let's end this world tour with the Hao Xiaoguang projection, which was adopted in 2013 as the official map of the People's Republic of China (see Map 5.5). With his new vertical projection, Chinese geographer Hao Xiaoguang offers a fairer and more accurate alternative to the Mercator



MAP 5.4 AuthaGraph Projection.
(Wikimedia Commons)



MAP 5.5 Hao Xiaoguang Projection.
(Wikimedia Commons)

projection. It is distinguished by its geometric characteristics and its representation of the world. The main aim of Hao Xiaoguang's projection was to correct certain distortions in the Mercator projection, in particular the distortion of the relative sizes of the continents in the regions close to the poles (Europe and North America), which appear larger than in reality. It therefore proposes a more balanced division of the globe, particularly for the countries of the Global South (Africa, Asia, Latin America), which are often under-represented or distorted in other conventional projections. In designing this geographical projection, Hao Xiaoguang wanted to

deconstruct the colonial legacy of the Mercator projection and illustrate a world view centred on China. However, like all cartographic projections, Hao Xiaoguang's projection involves compromises and does not totally eliminate certain distortions. It does, however, allow us to rethink how maps influence geopolitical perceptions and offers an interesting alternative to the Mercator projection.

There are many other maps that depict unusual representations. None of these maps is cartographically neutral, and each embodies specific geopolitical narratives and visions. These maps blur our representations of the world's geography and disrupt our personal projections in space. What's more, although many people know that the Mercator projection is unreliable and biased, it continues to be the most widely used. The question is: Why are maps considered to be more accurate not adopted and used, at least by people who have suffered from the biases of Mercator representations? The answer is that, in reality, it is not easy to change our point of view when we are confronted with perspectives and paradigms that overturn those to which we have become accustomed. What we discover when we change our epistemological and paradigmatic glasses destabilizes us because we don't like to abandon our points of reference and certainties. This is one of the reasons why Eurocentric narratives continue to prevail in the world, despite the end of slavery and colonization and the emergence of new narratives (Lacoste, 1976).

The perspectives on which Eurocentric narratives are based include the following:

- The exceptionality of Europe: Born of the Greek miracle, it is said that the civilization emerged spontaneously on the shores of the Aegean Sea, without reference to the influence of Egypt, even though this is clearly attested to by the Greek authors themselves in their writings (Goody, 2008).
- The "Age of Enlightenment": The contribution of this age to humanity conferred on Europeans the right to be the most qualified to speak in the name of universalism, humanism, and human rights (Sala Molins, 2004).
- Europe's "civilising mission": This mission, despite its excesses, opened up new horizons for the other peoples of the world by linking them to the march of progress (Drescher, 1994).
- Capitalism and liberal democracy: Seen as the engines of modernity, itself a symbol of human progress, and as the least bad options for humanity, which, in any case, now has no choice but to come to terms with them and learn to assimilate and adopt them (Fukuyama, 1992).

Decontaminate to Repair

Without a systematic process of questioning and deconstruction, these narratives will continue to discourage any honest and serene dialogue between peoples to transcend the traumas and wounds of the past. The reaction of labelling any critical approach to the narratives and language inherited from the dominations and injustices of the past as "wokism" is nothing but a headlong rush that does not help engagement in a debate that is so necessary for peace, reconciliation, and healing in our multicultural, post-slavery, and post-colonial societies.

To engage in this dialogue, it is important to understand and be aware of the cognitive implications of the dominant narratives. Narratives are not just stories we tell ourselves to glorify ourselves and justify our rights over others and over nature, they also involve a whole process of reasoning that structures our thinking and our cosmovision, notably through the perspectives, categories, paradigms, and the language we use.

Challenging the monopoly of worldviews, representations, and conceptions of the human being, time, space, values, and aesthetics is a logical consequence of the recognition of cultural diversity and the need for cultural pluralism (UNESCO, 2001). Looking back over the political and symbolic struggles of decolonization, we can now reconsider the entire contemporary intellectual production of societies that emerged from colonial empires. Over the last few decades, thinkers in Africa, Asia, and South America have engaged in critical reflection to conceptualise the problem of coloniality, which is still perpetuated in many spheres of knowledge production, imagination, politics, and attitudes (Santos, 2010). These efforts have shown that the dismantling of the colonies has not made it possible to break away from the geopolitics of domination and dependence in the production, circulation, and evaluation of narratives and knowledge, as well as in economic exchanges.

Concepts such as "epistemic otherness" (Grosfoguel, 2007), "epistemology proper" (Cusicanqui, 2010), the "philosophy of liberation" (Dussel, 1992), and the "African renaissance" (Diop, 1960) have been introduced by these thinkers to deconstruct dominant narratives. They emphasized the need to rediscover and explore endogenous ways of thinking that emerge from lived experience, collective memory, and resistance, and to revalorize multifunctional local know-how. The dynamic and evolving nature of this knowledge has highlighted the futility of the opposition between tradition and modernity, which has given rise to sterile debates since independence in Africa.

What we call tradition is nothing more than the body of knowledge, skills, know-how, imagination, representations, historical experience, and practices that enable a given society to respond, at a given point in

its existence, to the challenges of survival, living together, nature, and transcendence. These responses are neither static nor monolithic, as we often tend to believe. This is why decolonial thinkers reject the use of the term tradition to talk about the knowledge and practices of their societies. They prefer to use the concept of endogenous knowledge and practices, which highlights the fact that they have been produced within societies for particular functions and that they possess their own internal dynamics of evolution. The concept of endogeneity makes it possible to introduce the historicity of endogenous knowledge and to understand, for example, that not everything that is old is necessarily outdated, and not everything that is new is necessarily synonymous with progress or improvement (Moussa Iye and Holl, 2024). In this context, it has proved necessary to decolonise the concepts, paradigms, and categories used in the social sciences, both in the production of knowledge and discourse and in the development of educational, audiovisual, and multimedia content. Among the various attempts to decontaminate dominant narratives is the UNESCO project, General History of Africa, which is explored below.

The General History of Africa: Another Account of the Continent

The need to write a different history of Africa, based on facts analysed from an African perspective, was asserted very early on by African and Afro-descendant intellectuals at the end of the 19th century (Firmin, 1885; Du Bois, 1947). Indeed, it was necessary to confront all the writings, speeches, and certainties that made Africa a continent outside history, "ahistorical", to use the famous expression of the German philosopher Hegel (Hegel, 1857). In this conception of the world, Africa only entered history with European penetration, and could only be told using European sources, writings, and methods. Africa had become the symbol of otherness par excellence and the preferred object of the depreciatory visions that Europe had developed of the peoples it had "discovered" in its conquests. These writings and images form the basis of what has been called the "colonial library" (Valentin, 2018), which is full of assessments by the greatest scholars that Europe had produced, marked by their pretentious ignorance. They left to posterity names that still persist in common parlance: savage tribes, pre-logical peoples, stateless and unwritten societies, retrograde traditions, the reign of the mystic-religious and of paganism, and so on. European thinkers were so convinced of the existence of a hierarchy between "human races" that it was difficult for them to think differently about a different world. They could not, for example, conceive of an African history with civilizations and cultural achievements, because that would have called into question the whole edifice they

had built to demonstrate the superiority of European man and the civilizing mission he had set himself.

As soon as they gained independence in the 1960s, the African states turned to UNESCO, the intellectual organization of the United Nations system, which had already invested in the "disarmament" of history by launching its major initiative on writing the history of humanity. African states wanted to rewrite the history of their continent and rectify the erroneous and distorted image and knowledge of the African past and the cultures of non-European peoples. In response to this call, UNESCO launched the monumental General History of Africa project in 1964 (UNESCO, 1980–1999).[1] More than 350 historians and researchers from Africa, the African diaspora, and the rest of the world mobilized to undertake a remarkable project over more than 35 years to dismantle racial prejudice against African peoples. Through a rigorous approach, they have succeeded in restoring an African historicity based on the African actors in history by innovating in the use of hitherto little-exploited sources: oral traditions, artistic expressions, and writings in African languages transcribed into Arabic. These sources have been used to revisit dominant epistemic categories such as the periodization of history and the use of toponyms and ethnonyms (UNESCO, 1984). Words and concepts in African languages have also been introduced to better reflect certain conceptions of the world. This collective work led to the publication of the eight volumes of the General History of Africa, in main and abridged editions, now translated into twelve languages, including three African languages (Kiswahili, Fulfude, and Haoussa). It also led to the publication of a series of 13 guides to sources of African history and a collection of 12 works entitled *Histoire générale de l'Afrique: Etudes et Documents* (General History of Africa: Studies and Documents).

This intellectual and scientific undertaking gave rise to important and often heated debates between African historians and Africanists on the search for categories and methodologies appropriate to African reality. This work has continued with the development of teaching content for primary and secondary schools based on the General History of Africa, launched in 2009, and the preparation of three new volumes with a view to updating the collection, revisiting knowledge of Africa's presence in the world, and analysing the new challenges facing Africa and its diasporas. The efforts engaged to produce educational content and new volumes have made it possible to deepen the deconstruction of colonial relics and essentialist content on Africa.

This long-term work, carried out within the framework of the General History of Africa, is still regarded today as one of the major scientific endeavours to decolonize the discourse on history. It has made it possible

to dismantle with great rigour some of the paradigms that have been at the heart of the falsification of African history, such as:

- The paradigm of a continent with no significant history: Africa has not only a history, but the longest history in the world, spanning more than three million years, with a leading role for the first 15,000 centuries of human history.
- The paradigm of a continent as a receptacle for the influences of other civilizations; in fact, the most ancient civilizations, including ancient Egypt, found their origin and inspiration in the African peoples themselves.
- The paradigm of the separation between Black Africa and North Africa, delimited by the great Sahara Desert, which has never been a barrier but rather a living space of contact and exchange between the peoples of the north and south of the continent.
- The paradigm of a continent frozen in its traditions until the arrival of the Europeans; in fact, Africa has its own chronology that demonstrates the continuous changes it has undergone since the creation of its first civilizations.
- The paradigm of an isolated continent, constrained by tropical forests, the Sahara, and the oceans; in fact, Africa was in contact with Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and even the Americas very early on, before the arrival of Europeans.

Changing Words That Cause Harm

The new writing of African history has necessitated an epistemological break to bring about a radical change in our understanding of the African past and to reveal what had been ignored or denied: knowledge and know-how in all fields, spiritualities, monumental and artistic achievements, African scripts that are their own or that have been re-appropriated, sophisticated systems of governance and justice, and the great, original socio-political groupings adapted to the extraordinary diversity of African peoples and cultures. More specifically, the authors of the eight volumes (soon to be eleven, with the three new volumes currently being published) of the General History of Africa have made an admirable contribution to decontaminating narratives by carrying out an axiological analysis of the terminologies used.

All dominant discourse, whether scientific, literary, media, educational, or technological, is embedded in language. Cinema, literature, the media, museums, and school curricula all help to forge this vocabulary, which supports and reproduces the dominant narratives. Language is the marker of the colonialities of power, knowledge, and being (Colin

& Quiroz, 2023). To accompany this process of rewriting and reappraising African history, it was necessary, as part of the second phase of the General History of Africa project that I had the honour of coordinating, to develop a glossary to reveal the main cognitive and semantic biases. Rather than drawing up a long list of terms to be decolonized, which would be endless, we opted to define a methodology for critical analysis that would make it possible to identify problematic perspectives, patterns of thought, paradigms, concepts, and terms and find more appropriate equivalents for them (UNESCO, 2019).

What do we mean by these terms? A *perspective* is the spirit of a narrative that indicates its ultimate goal and horizon. It is built up from general ideas, principles of reasoning, and categories of thought that underpin our thinking. *Patterns of thought* are mainly categories, reasoning logics, and dimensions that make it possible to understand and express reality. By *paradigm*, we mean a proposition generally accepted by a scientific community, containing, more or less explicitly, a perspective, schemes, specific concepts, and a few major facts that tend to prove its empirical truth.

Let's take two examples that illustrate cognitive reasoning and the sequence of ideas underlying the evocation of a semantic categorization. When we think of Africa, *the perspective* that generally comes to mind is that of an oral continent inhabited by peoples with no history and no significant contribution to humanity. *The thought pattern* attached to this perspective is the distinction between prehistory and history, the anchoring of Africans in prehistory, the perception of a continent isolated and remote from the great areas of civilization, the division of the continent into black Africa and white Africa, and the idea of the discovery of the continent by Europeans who brought it into the history books. In terms of the *paradigms* induced by this reasoning, we might mention the presuppositions of societies without writing, traditional societies frozen in essentialism, societies that receive contributions from outside, and whose history is reduced to colonial chronology (pre-colonial/colonial/post-colonial). The resulting *concepts and terms* are the notions that political discourse, literature, cinema, and the media continue to propagate, such as primitive peoples, tribes, tribal wars, wildlife and animal paradise, animism, anti-progress cultures, under-development, humanitarian assistance, etc.

If we apply this methodology to the notion of "development", we would obtain the following chain of reasoning:

- Perspective: Development, linear human progress.
- Pattern of thought: Enlightenment, great discoveries, humanism and universalism, science, emergence of modernity, conquest of nature.

- Paradigm: Capitalism, liberal democracy, standard of living index, developed countries in the north and underdeveloped countries in the south, development aid.
- Concepts and terminology: Market economy, globalization, individual freedoms, individualism, sexual liberation, leisure society, knowledge societies.

The prejudices and terminologies conveyed by these cognitive biases are so pervasive and widespread in all the disciplines of the human and social sciences, in academic and everyday language, and in habits of thought, that it has become difficult in the short term to purge them exhaustively. They continue to condition contemporary views and perceptions, which, despite significant changes and the contribution of Western thinkers, still influence scientific, intellectual, literary, and media production. It is therefore in terms of method, process, and even curriculum that the decolonizing approach should be approached (Wiredu, 1980). Given that most of the problematic concepts stem from the predominant use of European languages in research, the dissemination of knowledge, and teaching, there is a need to identify and explore concepts, paradigms, and terms from African languages that can better translate and express the particularity of African experiences (wa Thiong'o, 1986).

Imagining Alternative Narratives Together

These efforts to transform the dominant narratives are a prerequisite for any process of dialogue, healing, and reconciliation. We cannot heal if we continue to use the same language that has caused harm. We cannot heal if we continue to remain within the same paradigm and perspective that generated the language that dehumanized human beings. We cannot fight racism and discrimination without changing the vocabulary through which racial prejudice is expressed. This is not a question of changing semantics, but of ethics, justice, and reparation. Healing the traumas of the past means freeing ourselves from the narratives that perpetuate them and the terminologies that recall them.

The need for this "decolonial turn" (Mignolo, 2018) is even more pressing today, when we are witnessing a step backwards, marked by a resurgence of essentialist and depreciatory discourse, with groups and high-profile personalities no longer hesitating to revive ideas and prejudices that we thought were outdated. These uninhibited manifestations of racism, xenophobia, and supremacism are preparing minds for a new division of humanity in which some peoples have more rights than others, including the right to commit crimes against humanity to ensure their survival or domination (Mbembe, 2018). But at the same time, more

and more people in Africa, Asia, the Americas, the Caribbean, and even Europe are speaking out and organizing to put an end to the dominant narratives that transmit the viruses of supremacy, racism, and the dehumanization of others

But the problem facing all those with good intentions is that we cannot change these narratives and terminologies without changing the system that produced them and that continues to generate them structurally. So we are faced with a systemic problem. Deconstructing the dominant narratives, therefore, calls for a multidimensional struggle that is not only epistemological, philosophical, and conceptual but also political, economic, cultural, and educational. All the public spaces in which nations develop and express their narratives feel compelled by this struggle. Any attempt to transform dominant narratives therefore comes down to the need to deconstruct, first and foremost, the myths and founding principles of the system of predation that promotes the dehumanization of humans and the instrumentalization of nature, namely the capitalist system, which was built on a racial order justifying the hierarchy of individuals, races, cultures, and species (Mills, 1997).

This process of transformation must be undertaken not only by the peoples who suffer the consequences of the legacies of injustice, but also by the descendants of those who benefited from slavery and colonization. It is an indispensable struggle in any serious project to facilitate social justice, reconciliation, collective healing, and common well-being. It is a struggle that we must wage together to imagine alternative narratives that are not based on paradigms of domination, exploitation, and hierarchy, but that restore our humanity and link it to the rest of creation and to what is beyond us. It is a collective struggle to imagine new utopias for our human societies sapped by nihilism.

Note

1 https://www.unesco.org/en/general-history-africa

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6

EMOTIONAL JUSTICE

A Framework for Racial Healing

Esther A. Armah

A legacy of untreated trauma. Our global humanity is reeling. We are navigating a world that has normalized harm, trivialized trauma for entire populations of people, is living with this lingering legacy, and whose future demands global racial healing.

That future is the racial healing framework, Emotional Justice (Armah, 2022).

It is a tool and a resource. To get to this future, we need tools. All over America, all across Europe, on the Continent, in our communities, in places of learning, labour, and leadership globally. We need this tool to support us, as our current healing models lead too many to simply seek refuge in good intentions, solid arguments, progressive politics, and feel-good-ology, which leads to momentary, temporary healing.

When it comes to issues of racism and systemic oppression, we have a current frame that is harmful. We frame harm as disagreement, accountability as attack, and claim erasure as belonging. There is no neutrality with systemic oppression nor with its impact and legacy. Nobody's name is Switzerland. No healing lies here, only the evasion of necessary accountability.

Too many deflect and deny that this is our work to do. It is no one else's. The work requires a sustainable practice, not simply a neat philosophy. This new racial healing framework does not have a shelf-life; it is not a blip or a moment. It is the future of global racial healing that will serve our fullest humanity. This tool helps us listen, engage, and stay in community with one another when every part of us wants to run and retreat to our neat philosophies.

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The tools we currently have are insufficient. They are centred in whiteness, elevate privilege, and entrench systemic harm. Too many have been navigating racial healing while lacking crucial understanding, therefore lacking adequate emotional tools. They are deficient in effective language but want to be better, to do right, to harm less, to repair, to heal, to lead with love, to thrive (Armah, 2022).

Emotional Justice is a framework and tool that offers a new love language for racial healing and social justice (Armah, 2022). It grapples with this legacy of untreated trauma from a history of horror and harm that has shaped, impacted, and affected all of us – White, Black, Brown – all of us.

This global work of racial healing is ours to do. However, the work is not the same in Black and White bodies. There is specific work for White people to do with one another; there is the work for Black people to do with one another; there is the work between Brown people to do with one another. There is the work between Black and Brown people, the work between Black and White people. This level of specificity within racial healing is critical. It has too often been overlooked in favour of collapsing healing into mantras of: "We all just need to do better, and we are all the same".

We are all the same in terms of our humanity. Our humanity has been racialized, demonized, targeted, and stripped due to the systems of harm that shape our world. As such, our racial healing models require specificity and particularity if they are to move beyond the performative and into a sustainable practice.

Yes, we are indeed a global human family with a multiplicity of lived experiences and histories that intersect and interconnect. However, we are also branches of a human family with distinct lived experiences that matter, that shape us, and that manifest in how we lead, love, and work. We are indeed interconnected and interdependent. But there is a racial feud, one that is centuries deep, rooted and wretched, and wrapped in histories and policies of power, profit, and pain that privilege some and punish others.

The umbilical cord of our humanity has been cut by white supremacy and its offspring – racism. Emotional Justice offers our human family a new way to bind, to heal, and to thrive.

Emotional Justice focuses on the emotional work that White, Black, and Brown people need to do to heal and to end systemic inequity. That emotional work entails exploring, identifying, and severing the connections in our relationships to power and race that uphold systemic inequity by unlearning the language of *whiteness*. This relationship shapes how

we lead, learn, work, and see ourselves and one another as Black, Brown, Indigenous, and White people.

That's because the connections are about the essence of who we are, involving emotions, intimacy, trauma, heart, and soul beyond mere intellect, ideology, or beliefs. Emotional Justice engages and explores how legacies of untreated trauma from global histories of injustice shape us. It transforms how we lead, learn, work, and see ourselves and others. It is about loving one another more justly in order to make our world more justice-centred. It requires justice movements to change our world for the better, not least social justice, environmental justice, gender justice, and labour justice. Each speaks to a particular part of our striving for our global humanity and engages issues of injustice, inequity, or violence that threaten global humanity. Emotional Justice is the glue that binds this family of justice movements.

Developing the Emotional Justice Framework

I am a Black woman and former international journalist who built and shaped Emotional Justice over 15 years through three components: research, assignment, and community engagement. I worked within a global community of activists, activist leaders, scholars, artists, and journalists in six cities across three countries on three continents – Africa, Europe, and North America – two cities on the Continent, three in the United States, and one in Europe. I don't treat the emotional in the purely individual sense; I consider the emotional as structural.

The research began with the 1966 coup in Ghana and its impact on my family and our nation of Ghana. It specifically explored the emotional impact, separate from the focus on policy and politics.

The assignments were all in 1997, starting with covering 40 years of independence in Ghana and learning a family secret that led me to explore the centring of Black women's stories, and what we lose when their narratives are erased from history. I also looked at the Million Woman March in Philadelphia, where I interviewed the keynote speaker, Winnie Mandela. Finally, I explored the Truth and Reconciliation Commission interviews in Cape Town and Johannesburg. I interviewed Archbishop Desmond Tutu; Ntsiki Biko, a freedom fighter and widow of Steve Biko; and Adelaide Tambo, a freedom fighter and widow of Oliver Tambo.

The community engagement was from 2009 to 2016. On-air, on-stage, and in communities, I led interviews, created stage plays, and held dialogue series to work through, identify, and break down the specific components of Emotional Justice. That engagement included a range of high-profile activists, artists, academics, and writers from and in the United States, including Staceyann Chin, Dr Brittney Cooper, Dr Joan Morgan, Dr

Stacey Patton, Kiese Laymon, Dr Marc Lamont Hill, Dr Mark Anthony Neal, Marlon Peterson, and Byron Hurt.

South Africa, 1997

In 1997, I reported on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the global racial healing model revered by the world. The TRC was the body set up following South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994. Its focus was to tell the full truth about the atrocities you committed during apartheid, and in return, you get amnesty.

It was a journalism assignment, writing articles for publications in London, the city of my birth and where I used to live. It was the assignment that led to the naming, understanding, and need for what would become Emotional Justice.

I met and interviewed Archbishop Desmond Tutu (now deceased), the TRC's architect and an anti-apartheid warrior; and Ntsiki Biko, an anti-apartheid freedom fighter and the widow of Steve Biko, a beloved figure known as South Africa's Black Father of Consciousness.

Covering the TRC, I, like the global media, had watched this wrenching truth-telling process of an outpouring of Black trauma against white legislated violence. It is from my interviews with Desmond Tutu and Ntsiki Biko that I explored, named, and developed "the language of whiteness", and named two of its pillars: "emotional patriarchy" and "racialized emotionality". These first two pillars become integral parts of unlearning this language of whiteness.

Forgive and Forget: Language of Whiteness and Racism

I was ushered into Archbishop Tutu's office in Cape Town. He prayed before our interview. I asked him about this process of forgiveness between White and Black people. "South Africa will be a Mecca for whites, just like Kenya!" declared Tutu. I asked him why there was so much focus on how white people felt. His answer was evasive. I asked again. And again. I asked why there is so much focus on how white people felt in a nation healing from so much horror, harm, and terror perpetrated against Black bodies by a system that enshrined the false superiority of whiteness. He became uncomfortable.

He told me that when it comes to repair, Black South Africans shouldn't ask for "too much". I asked him what "too much" meant, given the extent, weight, and depth of pain caused to Black South Africans and their families by apartheid and its successive white governments. He went on to explain that if someone needed particular assistance – say, a wheelchair – because of apartheid violence, then the person could get that. The TRC

would find someone to help them with that. I was struck by how limited the language of repair was, and how individual it was. Even though the TRC was a body about forgiving an entire people, the repair – the healing – seemed to be about forgetting that an entire people had been subjected to apartheid, its legacy, and the ongoing toll.

I continued to ask about Black people's needs and their healing. Archbishop Tutu then said, "The whites are beginning to take this offer of forgiveness for granted". I was especially struck by this. The interview came to an end. I left with a sharpened understanding of a healing that was centralizing and soothing whiteness while neglecting Blackness – but calling it healing for a nation.

Archbishop Tutu mentioned Kenya. "A mecca for whites just like Kenya", he had said. Kenya was colonized by the British, and during colonial rule, the British committed multiple atrocities. They tortured, raped, and murdered. According to the 2006 Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya*, by Harvard historian Caroline Elkins, 1.6 million Kikuyu – an entire population – were imprisoned by the British (Elkins, 2005). The Kikuyu were detained in a network of camps and heavily patrolled villages as part of a violent attempt to suppress the growing battle for independence – known as the Mau Mau, or the Kenyan Land and Freedom Army (Elkins, 2022). Kenya gained its independence in 1964, with Jomo Kenyatta the first post-independence president. Kenyatta told the British, let's forgive and forget, side-lining the Mau Mau and freedom-fighting population. There are archival images, articles, and interviews of Kenyatta reassuring white Britons that Kenya forgives them, that the past is forgotten, and that this land continues to be their home.

The new independent government's doctrine was essentially to forget the past. The reality was that even if the past is forgotten – and that is simply unlikely – the legacy of what happened during that past is not. It manifests in the present and shapes the future unless it is confronted, engaged, and healed. Colonialism was from 1895 to 1963; that's almost 70 years of colonial rule. Each of those 70 years has a truth and a toll, and requires a healing.

I have familial connections in Kenya. My dad had been an adviser to Jomo Kenyatta. My dad – like Kenyatta – was an advocate of reconciliation. He had worked in the Kwame Nkrumah government, navigated multiple coups, was incarcerated, and throughout it all, reconciliation was his mantra. In our home in Ghana, there are black and white photos of my dad with Kenyatta. Years later, I was living in New York and interviewed the Nobel Prize winner, Kenyan environmentalist, and freedom fighter, Wangari Maathai. I also travelled to Kenya on an assignment that

deepened my understanding of a history of racial healing that firmly centres whiteness.

Nelson Mandela would also echo Jomo Kenyatta's words of forgiveness: "Let bygones be bygones. Let what has happened pass as something unfortunate that we must forget", he said, speaking of South Africa's future in one of several interviews following his release from 27 years in prison.

What was Mandela asking South Africa, and specifically Black South Africans, to forget, to forgive? The laws enshrining false notions of White superiority and Black inferiority. Laws such as the Native (Urban) Areas Act of 1923, which created what would become exclusively African slums; the 1926 Colour Bar Act, which banned Africans from practising skilled trades and forced a poverty that Black South Africans continue to struggle with today; and the 1936 Representation of Natives Act, which removed Black voters from the common voters roll in Cape Town, denouncing their citizenhood.

Mandela was asking to let pass the water cannons, the truncheons, the torture, and the killing and terrorizing of children, which had robbed them of their innocence, their childhood, and made violence their normal. There was the killing and raping of women, the murder of men's souls, the murder of men's bodies. There was the emasculation of Black men, the humiliation and violation of Black women, and the wholesale thievery of land. There was the racializing and dehumanizing of Black bodies and then targeting them with relentless violence.

Forgiveness, then, took on a colour, a context, a direction, and a meaning. Apartheid was terrorism and white supremacy. Forgiveness had become Black emotional labour, and it was absolution for whiteness. It was a one-and-done healing scenario, one that was about fetishizing reconciliation but forsaking justice. It did not account for legacy, and it didn't centre those who had been harmed and what was necessary for their healing. That meant that white people did no emotional work but received amnesty and forgiveness.

It was in my realization of this context of forgiveness that I coined the term "racialized emotionality" – describing a world where we racialize emotions – inserting colour, context, and consequence to emotions – and in doing so, change how we see, engage, and treat those bodies in whom universal human emotions are now racialized. Years later, I am connecting this history of racial healing, of emotional labour by Black folks in service of white supremacist violence, to the United States and the United Kingdom.

Creating the Racial Healing Model

South Africa's racial healing model is globally revered and emulated. Despite it being emulated and lauded by countries all over the world, it was not constructed centring – or even fully acknowledging – Black and Brown people, and the breadth, depth, harm, and toll on them, their communities, their future, and an entire nation. Because of this, it was not a racial healing model or framework. It was a model that privileges one group and exacts emotional labour from another. It was political, it was structural, and it was inequitable. It was emotional apartheid masquerading as racial healing.

No national or global conversation or structure about forgiveness centred Black people forgiving themselves and one another for what they had endured, for what, and who, they became, for how this system shaped how they loved, for the self-hate that survival may have triggered, and for the toll that eternally fighting back took on their sense of self.

One of the most powerful examples is in the treatment of Winnie Mandela, a liberation leader, freedom fighter, and formerly married to Nelson Mandela. South African writer Sisonke Msimang wrote: "This was a nation with a narrative of forgiveness, but it wouldn't forgive Winnie Mandela". There was public humiliation and global castigation of a Black woman freedom fighter, while De Klerk, a white man who never stood on a global platform professing the horrors perpetrated by South African governments – which he represented as a former president – on its Black citizens, received a Nobel Peace Prize.

In saying let bygones be bygones, what Nelson Mandela, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and the TRC had done was to ask Black people – brutalized and beaten – to privilege the fears, insecurities, and feelings of white folks over their own sacrifice, story, struggles, and lived experiences, and those of their families. And the world applauded, awed by this capacity, and turned Mandela into an icon of forgiveness.

This model of racial healing – both in South Africa and Kenya – is an emotional apartheid. It separates White and Black people. It was a model that entrenched inequity by centring whiteness and reinforcing emotional labour as the sole work of Black folks, while white folks were the recipients and beneficiaries of that emotional labour. It timelines and deadlines the trauma for those harmed, treating the emotional as if it were an economy to be moved and manipulated, to appreciate and depreciate.

It was this inequity that strengthened existing labour disparities around race. From physical labour to emotional labour by Black people in the service of whiteness, this was emotional injustice. This cannot be our approach for any future that serves a full, inclusive humanity.

A Journey into Deeper Understanding

A pivotal exchange with Ntsiki Biko, an anti-apartheid warrior and the widow of South Africa's Black Father of Consciousness, led me to create the term "Emotional Justice", and for me to solidify the need, the work, and the framework. Ntsiki stood before the world's predominantly white media and invited them to better understand what happened to her husband, Steve Biko. She told them that for her, there is no question of forgiveness.

Ten former members of the security branch of the South African police sought amnesty for Steve Biko's death. They said that Steve Biko, in the presence of white policemen, had "gone berserk" during a "scuffle", which led to his death (Pityana et al., 2024). Addressing the TRC, one of the ten white policemen said: "Your honor, we have said that during the scuffle, he bumped his head against the wall". "Scuffle" and "bumped"? The so-called "scuffle" was a 22-hour interrogation involving ten officers. Biko was shackled, and his legs were put in leg-irons. He was stripped naked. The "bump" resulted in a battered and bruised body that was naked and then transported to Pretoria rather than given medical treatment. Steve Biko was dumped naked, battered, and bruised in a cell and left to die.

The TRC's process required the full truth to be told. Those who took the stand regarding Steve Biko's death didn't do that. They prettied up brutality, justified terror, minimalized violence, and expected forgiveness. Ntsiki Biko said, "There is a lot of talk about reconciliation. What I want is for the proper course of justice to be done". Mrs Biko and other families sued the government, rejected the TRC process, and demanded justice for their loved ones.

It was listening to Mrs Biko, her call for justice even when connected to a process that was deeply emotional, that I began to think in a more structural way about the emotional and about Blackness as integral parts of a justice project, a liberated future, and real racial healing.

Lessons from South Africa

I began to parse and rearrange the pieces of the narrative about pain, power, race, whiteness, emotional labour, and racial healing. I was again struck by the focus on how white people feel, by the care and thought given to those feelings, and by how those feelings were the centre of a process that addressed forgiveness – by how the pain and loss were racialized and politicized. The process was not individual; it was structural. It was connected to the political, but it was unjust and inhumane.

I began connecting the emotional to the notion of justice when it came to race and racism through listening to and learning from Ntsiki Biko,

Winnie Mandela, and the Black women of South Africa, as well as through my interview with Desmond Tutu and other ANC (African National Congress) leaders. I don't judge their focus; I simply recognize that this is unfinished work. Effective racial healing – through which White and Black people come to a fuller humanity – cannot be achieved by centring the needs, the fears, and the feelings of those who have caused the harm. Because when we do that, we are using the emotional as an instrument to entrench what is unjust. That teaches the perpetrator – the harm-doer – entitlement, and it teaches those harmed to sideline themselves.

I saw how this model manifested all the way up to the world of DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion). It was a model that centred those who held power and had abused it. It centred their feelings and discomfort. It called for minimal labour by those who perpetuated harm and applauded, affirmed, and appreciated them for doing the bare minimum – and then called that transformative change.

I saw how this model manifested during the trial of Dylann Roof, the white American supremacist mass murderer who killed nine African Americans in a church. Roof stood in the dock as the loved ones of those killed offered an outpouring of forgiveness, emotion, tears, and trauma towards this white supremacist murderer.

Let me be clear. I do not condemn individual acts of forgiveness by those who believe in that. This is about a global racial healing model, the lessons passed down by that model, and how those lessons have shaped what is done today – but more importantly, what is not done. This is about understanding that there has been no equal division of emotional labour; there has barely been a requirement for white people to do any emotional labour on behalf of dismantling inequity. And it is for this reason that we need to use Emotional Justice and its framework as a roadmap for racial healing.

This is also not just about interracial healing – a healing between Black and White. It is also about a healing between and among global Black people – in this case those in South Africa – including those who are defined as "Coloured". These "Coloured" designations are a path to segregate identity and hoard power by a privilege that focuses on a closeness to whiteness. It is achieved with devastating success. It segregates Black and Coloured people, creating hierarchies that protect a white-centred power.

Tutu mentioned Kenya. Beyond Kenya and Britain, there is the healing between and among Kenyans, given their land and freedom struggle. The healing among the Kikuyu – the tribe that elevated the Mau Mau Uprising – with the Luhya, the Maasai, and the other tribes within Kenya. I was born in London to Ghanaian parents of the Ashanti and Nzima tribes. Ghana was also colonized by the British. There is a healing required

among and between tribes in Ghana – the Ashanti, the Akan, the Nzima, the Ewe, the Fante. Then there is the healing among and between African nations across the Continent. And with Black people on the Continent and across the diaspora – in Europe, the Caribbean, the United States.

This intraracial healing is equally critical to a racial healing that leads to a full humanity.

The Birth of Emotional Justice

It was because of my journeys with these assignments – in Accra, Philadelphia, and especially Cape Town – and through engaging with leaders, and listening and learning from Black South African women challenging authority, that Emotional Justice was born. It was from watching an adoring global media lap up – and help export – the South African model that led to my understanding that Emotional Justice is an interconnection between the individual and the institutional. It led to my clarity that we need to treat the emotional as structural, to understand that there is an emotional component to systemic harm, and to recognize the emotional perpetuation of that same harm.

It was because of that journey that I explored how systems are upheld and that I more fully understood that systems worked through people, are maintained by people, and therefore must be dismantled by people. When it comes to systemic harm, we are the dismantlers we have been waiting for. The individual connects to the institutional. Context, nuance, and detail matter. The emotional work is the crucial – but neglected – part of the political, intellectual, philosophical, and organizing work to dismantle systemic harm and white supremacy.

The TRC is a historically significant, but no longer relevant, model. It is an outdated racial healing model that needs evolution, lessons learned, deeper context, and expanded clarity. Emotional Justice is about all of us having emotional work to do, but as I stated earlier – yet must repeat – that work is not the same. The toll of the harm has not been the same. South Africa's lesson for me, and Kenya's before it, was that any racial healing model centring whiteness can no longer be accurately called racial healing. Recognizing the emotional components of systemic harm and racial healing has been critical to expanding, naming, and birthing Emotional Justice.

Emotional Justice Framework

The Emotional Justice framework provides us with old language to unlearn and fresh language we can learn to speak and share when it comes to race, racial repair, and racial healing. A roadmap has signs with information

that keep you on your path towards a specific destination. It helps ensure you're going in the right direction; it identifies locations, helps you stay on track, and ensures you arrive where you want to be.

That's what Emotional Justice does: it locates where we are when it comes to the emotional aspects of race, trauma, whiteness, and history. It explains how we got here, identifies the next place to go, and ensures and affirms that you are on the right path and equipped to get to the next sign. It does this with a love language of phrases to learn and unlearn.

The Language of Whiteness

First, we must unlearn the language of whiteness, which is the thread stitched into the fabric of systems of oppression that build connections and sustain our relationship to power, centring whiteness.

The language of whiteness is a narrative about who we are as White, Black, Brown, Indigenous people and about our role in the world, with a central focus on white men. It is a false narrative that says whiteness is the world, built the world, and saves the world. That narrative is a lethal fiction with ongoing consequences that the world lives with daily.

What is a narrative? What's the difference between a narrative and a story? This distinction is crucial for us to get to the reality of collective healing. They can be defined as follows:

- A story is an account of real people and events.
- A narrative is the choice we make about which events to relate and in what order.

The narrative is about how we choose to tell a story. We apply different narratives to the same story all the time. That differentiation is crucial. It means that in the world of narrative, there is the choice to include or omit, to speak or to be silent. That doesn't just communicate information or tell a story – it shapes people. And critically, it shapes how a people might be seen, how they see themselves, and how they might then see each other.

The language of whiteness lays down the foundation and is the heartbeat of sustained injustice. At its core, it centres a notion of supremacy and issues of dominion, subjugation, and exploitation. Supremacy means being better than somebody. In order for that to be real, the language of whiteness created this narrative about itself as a global saviour and civilizer, with Black, Brown, and Indigenous people as savages needing saving and civilizing. No one is immune to the weight and toll of this narrative of whiteness that permeates every sector, industry, and aspect of our lives as people across all parts of the world.

We must unlearn this language. This unlearning is required of all people – White, Black, Brown, Indigenous. If we do not unlearn the language of whiteness, we cannot fully heal, nor dismantle systems of inequity. And if we do not dismantle them, we maintain cycles of progress and regress that exhaust, devastate, and debilitate (Adichie, 2009).

When White people hear the phrase "the language of whiteness", and about the need to unlearn it, they may immediately get defensive, uncomfortable, and, frankly, pissed. It feels like an attack. The defence mechanisms kick in, and the explaining, excusing, and negating go into full effect. That's because White people often conflate "White people" with "the language of whiteness".

They are not the same thing.

The language of whiteness is a narrative we are all taught about how the world came to be and our role and place in it as White, Black, Brown, Indigenous people – women, men, children. It is a narrative about who you are to whiteness and what whiteness is to you. Languages are made up of words and phrases. We learn how to pronounce them, how they go together, in order for us to communicate. Did you learn French at school?

Teacher: Class, repeat after me: BONJOUR! Class: BONJOUR!

Teacher: Good job. That means "GOOD DAY" in French.

The language of whiteness isn't French. It's not made up of words that we translate and that mean the same thing to any French-speaking person. No. It is spoken through how we see ourselves as global Black, Brown, Indigenous, and White people, and its meanings are fractured through the lens of how we see one another and how we are seen.

The language of whiteness is about how we live and engage. It is a narrative of who we have been told we are, who we can and cannot be, and why. It is a narrative that is a lethal, deadly fiction – treated as fact. You can choose not to learn French. You can't choose not to learn the language of whiteness. It is not simply taught; it is enforced. It was birthed in sure, swift, brutal, and deadly historical systems: enslavement, colonialism, and apartheid. Each was violent. These systems were about separation and superiority. They produced narratives of struggle, salvation, survival, and surrender. They were about false, deadly notions of superiority and inferiority.

These systems have contemporary consequences that manifest in our world to this very day. They carry a lingering legacy of untreated trauma that manifests in each of us, in all of us. And we all live with and deal with that legacy and its manifestations.

The language of whiteness is about winning and winners, conquering and conquerors, saving and saviours. It is a narrative that assigns and then depicts in order to control. In the *New York Times* best-selling

book *White Fragility*, Robin DiAngelo writes about "navigating white people's internalized assumption of racial superiority"(DiAngelo 2018). That assumption is born of these historical systems. These assumptions nurtured an addiction to false notions of white superiority and Black inferiority. Black people shape-shifted to navigate this narrative, which is part of the systemic harm, in order to survive. That shape-shifting continues into the present.

The language of whiteness rewrites worlds and recasts people in those worlds. It reduces Black and Brown people's reality to nonexistence – or more specifically, a noncivilized existence. Africa, Asia – according to the language of whiteness – were not there in any civilized way until whiteness came and said they were. What that narrative teaches all of us is that our existence isn't real until whiteness names it. That makes whiteness the centre only and always, with no space for anyone else.

The language of whiteness puts anybody who is not white – men first, then women and children – on the periphery, and the periphery is the world of Blackness. Society teaches us our place. There is the periphery and the centre, and the centre is the goal. Being there means peace, prosperity, power, and profit.

The centre is whiteness, all alone, offering no room for anyone else. What that centring does is create and sustain a rejection of your value as Black, Brown, or Indigenous. Because who wants to be, live, and love on the periphery? That's not where you thrive; it's where you rot (Armah, 2022).

Unlearning the Language of Whiteness

Unlearning the language of whiteness requires internal and external work for us all (Putuma, 2017). In other words, there is the personal reckoning that requires our own behaviour and actions to be challenged and changed, and there is the work to be done structurally, within and by all the sectors and systems we are all part of.

The work to unlearn this language needs to expand and continue in order for those systems of harm to be dismantled and for sustainable healing to occur. Let's be clear, it is the interconnection of the internal and the external that is crucial and a foundational part of an Emotional Justice love language. Personal change alone isn't enough. That change must expand to be applied within the systems and sectors of labour, learning, leisure, leadership, beauty, entertainment, governance – all of them.

We have all been shaped by a history of dangerous and deadly dual delusions: White superiority and Black inferiority. We all pay a price for both. The systems of oppression that built the world were about labour, race, and power. The labour was always unequal. Racial healing with

Emotional Justice means that all of us are doing emotional work. There can be no Emotional Justice without the equal division of emotional labour. Dividing up that emotional labour means naming the connections, contextualizing the relationship to the emotional, power, and whiteness, and then identifying who should do what.

Although we all – White, Black, Brown, Indigenous – have work to do, our work is not all the same. I will continue to repeat this. It is crucial that we understand this and identify who has what work to do and why it is they, and they alone, who must do that work. How do we do that? We begin by breaking down the Emotional Justice framework (Armah, 2022).

Emotional Justice: A Roadmap to Racial Healing

The Emotional Justice framework has two key elements: 1) naming the language to unlearn; and 2) creating the love language that becomes the healing resource.

Naming the Four Pillars of the Language of Whiteness

We start by identifying the four pillars of the language of whiteness:

1. **Emotional patriarchy**: A society that centres, privileges, and prioritizes the feelings of men, particularly white men, no matter the cost or consequence to all women, and to Black, Brown, and Indigenous peoples.
2. **Racialized emotionality**: A world where we add gender, colour, context, and consequence to universal human emotions. The universal becomes racialized. The racialized is then dehumanized. The dehumanized becomes the ongoing target of violence.
3. **Emotional currency**: A society that treats women – particularly Black women – as a commodity and currency that appreciates or depreciates according to its service to whiteness, men, white people, and, centrally, white men.
4. **Emotional economy**: A world that makes decisions and creates policies that revolve around the feelings of white men and that is relentlessly driven by those feelings, regardless of the harm to the health of a nation. The emotional economy functions to sow division, to plant seeds that segregate, and to spin narratives that separate.

These are the four elements of the language of whiteness. This is what we are unlearning. We must then replace this with the Emotional Justice love languages. What does that look like?

Creating the Emotional Justice Love Languages

There are four Emotional Justice love languages:

1. **Intimate reckoning**: For white women and men to do the emotional labour of severing their connection to a notion of power that centres dominion. It is a power that upholds a white masculinity by centring the subjugation and exploitation of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people, as well as white women. That means stop defending, supporting, uplifting, voting for, and cheering this white masculinity that shapes white men's emotional connection to and relationship with power and race.
2. **Intimate revolution**: For Black, Brown, and Indigenous women to sever the connection between labour, value, and worth by centring rest and replenishment. This connection – especially for Black women – stretches back into a history where labour was life and death, where Black women were conditioned to see their sole worth as connected to, and measured by, labour, struggle, and servitude to people outside of themselves. This connection comes with a parallel narrative of laziness, gender, and race, making it complex. It is how the language of whiteness is spoken by Black, Indigenous, and Brown women. That complexity means reimagining the relationship to labour that associates rest with guilt; it means normalizing rest and severing a connection to labour rooted in history's systems of oppression. For Black and Brown men to heal from a masculinity that is traumatized and hypersexualized by the language of whiteness, which too often leads to pouring their untreated trauma over the bodies and beings of Black women. Intimate revolution means unlearning that Black women are Black men's emotional currency – with their value treated as a commodity – and replacing this understanding with a path, process, and practice of making peace within their Black male bodies and the complexity within themselves.

3. **Resistance negotiation**: For white women and men to do the emotional labour of staying to work through the discomfort – your insides that squirm, protest, deny, and defend – as you are challenged, confronted, called out, and called in about issues of race and racism. Resistance negotiation requires you to navigate through feeling personally maligned; it is how you stay, fight, and work through "white fragility", the term coined by Robin DiAngelo (DiAngelo, 2018).
4. **Revolutionary Black grace:** For Black people globally to unlearn the narrative that makes American Blackness criminal and African Blackness wretched. It's unlearning a single-story narrative exported

by the language of whiteness, rooted in systems of oppression that sustain segregated Blackness and feed emotional labour that upholds unhealed, untreated trauma among global Black people. It is learning to love one another more justly as global Black people, and to engage one another with more compassion, tenderness, discernment, and empathy.

Unlearning and Replacing

This is our work: to unlearn the language of whiteness and replace it with an Emotional Justice love language.

That means we must:

1. Unlearn emotional patriarchy and replace it with intimate reckoning.
2. Unlearn racialized emotionality and replace it with resistance negotiation.
3. Unlearn emotional currency and replace it with intimate revolution.
4. Unlearn emotional economy and replace it with revolutionary Black grace.

From Framework to Template

Unlearning each pillar of the language of whiteness and replacing it with an Emotional Justice love language is our process, path, and practice for global racial healing, dismantling systemic inequity, and building a truly brave new world that centres our full humanity, one that works for all peoples – Black, Brown, and Indigenous women and men, and White women and men.

To guide us on this path, I built the Emotional Justice Template. Again, while our work as Black, Brown, Indigenous, and White people is not the same, there are three steps we each must take in order to do this work:

1. Work through our feelings.
2. Reimagine our focus.
3. Build the future.

Work through our feelings: The feelings of flee, denial, disregard, blame, shame, punish, defend, grief, sadness, hurt, and leaning on historical behaviours will all come up. Leaning on historical behaviours means engaging in old racial disparity dynamics of Black emotional labour in the service of whiteness. Become aware of these feelings; feel them – all of them. That's how we begin unlearning the language of whiteness. It is the act of becoming embodied.

For white women, this means no more "white tears" – i.e., no more weaponizing emotions to avoid doing your emotional labour when it comes to issues of racism and harm-doing. White tears are a historical weapon, the emotional perpetuation of systemic harm masquerading as hurt requiring empathy and care.

For Black, Brown, and Indigenous women, it means not taking on the emotional labour of soothing, comforting, and reassuring whiteness. These feelings are part of an emotionally racial DNA – that is how the history of oppressive systems shapes the emotional responses and engagement of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people – and particularly women.

Reimagine our focus: Answer this question: "How do I speak the language of whiteness?" Answer it for yourself first and then within your community, and in your places of work and learning.

Build the future: For White people, this step entails decentring – focusing outside of yourself and instead centring the experience of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people. Building this future means severing your emotional connection to whiteness that puts white people at the centre. This severing is a continuous action, not a one-and-done. It is in this focus that you choose a different path and start actively speaking an Emotional Justice language. This focus is transformative. It is the healing future.

For Black, Brown, and Indigenous people – and particularly women – building the future means actively centring yourself and ending the historical practice of soothing, comforting, and reassuring whiteness. By actively centring yourself, you start speaking an Emotional Justice love language. This is building your future by doing your particular emotional labour.

This decentring for white people and centring for Black, Brown, Indigenous peoples – particularly women – is how we build a future with a racial healing practice. It is how we gain and practice Emotional Justice.

The Emotional Justice Template requires that you stay emotionally. What I mean by that is that you stay and feel all the feelings that emerge – resentment, denial, guilt, frustration, desire to flee, shame, sadness, grief, anger, hurt. It means that you do not run from the feelings or project them onto someone else or punish someone because of how this emotional labour makes you feel. This is what it means to do your own emotional labour. It is what is necessary to then be able to focus on answering the question: "How do I speak the language of whiteness?" And that focus leads you to create a future of developing and sustaining a racial healing practice, and of speaking an Emotional Justice love language.

Emotional Justice Love Languages

Love, that four-letter word that centres on feeling good, affirmed, uplifted, and desired. Our understanding of a love language is based on Dr Gary Chapman's *The Five Love Languages*, a global bestseller that taught people five ways we speak the language of love in our intimate relationships, and how learning those languages nurtures and sustains our intimate relationships (Chapman, 1992). Understanding love languages makes our relationships better. An Emotional Justice love language for racial healing makes our racial healing journey possible and transforms it into an ultimate practice.

When it comes to race and racial healing, we have too often wanted a weird, unrealistic, and unattainable "let's all just love each other" love and "we'll feel healed" type of love – one that is all-encompassing, one that blurs colour, disappears harm-doers, and centres on how much good we all want to do and how at heart we are all the same – just good people. I get that. But an Emotional Justice love language is not that.

To be clear, you will feel absolutely wonderful, empowered, engaged, and affirmed – but perhaps not at first. The Emotional Justice love languages are about a journey into places that are rife with discomfort, where you feel challenged and where you might not want to be. It is in that precise place that love begins. And it is in this place that you are called to stay.

An Emotional Justice love language will – and should – stretch our emotional muscles in directions that are unfamiliar. In other words, there are unrecognized places we all must go to that, as part of this Emotional Justice love language, change our bodies in ways that surprise, delight, threaten, and infuriate.

It is what you then do with those feelings that makes this an Emotional Justice love language. Deep listening is part of an Emotional Justice language of comprehension, of understanding, and being understood. Right now, when it comes to race, too many of us listen defensively to a "you're being racist" accusation. We double down, fling out phrases about no regrets, reliance on good intentions, and accountability-free. We unrelentingly deflect from actually holding, having, and staying in hard conversations on racism, white supremacy, and racial healing.

With an Emotional Justice love language, accountability no longer feels like oppression; consequence is the inevitable cost of racial harm; intention is not a defence that excuses consequences for racial harm; and advocacy is as integral a part of an organization's equity and anti-racist practice as the silence that had been there before our worlds changed unimaginably in 2020 with the global pandemic and the murder of George Floyd, an African American man killed by a white police officer, sparking global protests. In America, there is, of course, a witnessing of the dismantling

of these gains, reminding us of the cycle of progress and regress of justice, race, and change in America.

An Emotional Justice love language means speaking up and speaking out without requiring applause or affirmation, wrestling with your own fear of repercussions and punishment for doing so. Speaking out and speaking up are crucial steps in dismantling work, which leads to developing a racial healing practice. To walk this road less travelled, we need compassion, equity, and empathy. All of those things are hard within a climate torn apart by unrelenting violence and bolstered by a deeply divisive global political landscape.

Here's the thing – someone can't speak an Emotional Justice language for you. Too many folks claim victims' rights at the merest hint of racial impropriety, slinging emotional arrows left and right in a valiant bid to evade doing this work. Some speak the language of avoidance fluently. In other words, let's-talk-about-something-else-anything-else-ology. Or we think this work should be done according to that clock called "only-so-much-discomfort-then-I'm-out". We may speak the language of "cancel culture", that ferocious means of communicating – often online – where we play prosecutor, judge, jury, and executioner, elevating fear and desecrating the possibility of redemption and change. Courageous conversations in troubled racial territory are such a necessity in racial healing work, but they are reduced to sparring, to jabs in a social media ring where gloves are off and the goal is to draw blood.

For too long, too many of us have believed that this work can – and should – be done by one side, by one people, by changing behaviours, by reimagining transformation as tweaking and then standing back with a self-congratulatory ta-dah! At our barely there efforts. Tweaking. That shit doesn't work. It never has. It's a ruse; it is reckoning-avoidance. And for too long, too many have expected to be incentivized to do this emotional work. An Emotional Justice love language is one you learn, rooted in your belief in and your commitment to a fairer and more humane world.

Here's the beauty: a new language is a gift enabling us to communicate beyond our worlds and move into terrain that may be terrifying, but we now have the tools and resources. Here's the challenge: How willing are we to learn a language that helps us do the emotional work to create the world we believe in philosophically or ideologically, one where Black lives matter? How willing are we to make that language real in our worlds of work – of education, of policy, of international human rights, of justice? Here's the breakthrough: we can all learn a new language.

Addressing Legacies of Untreated Trauma

Untreated trauma is also a thread that runs through this emotional connection to and relationship with whiteness, race, and power from a legacy of oppressive systems. Let's define trauma. It is a deeply distressing or disturbing experience. It is damage, a wound, a hurt that has lasting consequences beyond one body but also intergenerationally, handed down, manifesting again and again.

For millions of people, George Floyd's killing was their closest – or perhaps even first – engagement with racial terror and racial trauma – being witness through the power of social media and the courage of a Black teenage girl who captured every heartbreaking second of the 9 minutes and 29 seconds that a white police officer leaned on Floyd's neck, ultimately killing him. For millions, this killing was a single act that led to an awakening about racial terror and law enforcement in America. For millions of Black people globally, it was not a single act but the cumulative effect of a policing system unpunished and unaccountable, whose violence robs families of loved ones with deadly regularity.

For millions of white people, George Floyd's murder was transformative; it was a discovery. For millions of Black people, it was traumatizing and triggering – igniting both ancestral memories of white authority murdering Black people and feelings of helplessness, rage, and grief. It was an untreated trauma.

For Black people globally, Floyd's murder was a deep wound that reached beyond America's shores and into the United Kingdom, South Africa, and across Europe – where families have fought the state and its police systems that have killed unrecorded and without criminal justice consequences, but where the impact has been no less devastating.

On a journey to learn an Emotional Justice love language, you will encounter this untreated trauma that manifests in ways that may confuse, frustrate, or transform you. The way to speak the love language and use it as a tool is to recognize that such encounters are part of what occurs when you are doing Emotional Justice labour. You may feel confused, but it is here that you should feel encouraged. This is part of racial healing with the Emotional Justice framework as a roadmap.

Conclusion

This chapter offers the history, development, framework, and processes of Emotional Justice. It is our global racial healing model. It is a guide and a game-changer for a sustainable healing practice for our fullest humanity and liberation.

Emotional Justice is specifically about the role emotions play when it comes to race, whiteness, power, and sustaining inequity. History and politics help us see the need for social, environmental, gender, or climate justice. Thus, Emotional Justice explores the impact of history's systems of oppression when it comes to the emotional.

Like other justice movements, Emotional Justice connects the histories of oppression to what is happening now, what is going wrong, and how we can put it right. It connects us to the role of the emotional within systems that cause harm. Putting the two words together – "emotional" and "justice" – is about highlighting that this is our collective work, a group focus connected to institutional change. Emotional Justice joins the family of justice movements fighting to bring people together to heal harm that impacts all of us, and to make changes that benefit all of us. It is not a replacement for social or racial justice. It is a crucial untold but pivotal addition.

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7

REMAKING CANADA

Centring Indigenous Voices in Reparations and Reconciliation

Lewis Cardinal

Introduction

I still remember the weight in the air that afternoon in June 2008, when I sat in the House of Commons' public gallery, metres from the Prime Minister of Canada, to hear the federal government's formal apology to Indigenous peoples for the Indian Residential School system. The Prime Minister's words echoed through the chamber – an official acknowledgement of what had long been known in my Woodland Cree community: that generational traumatic harm had been inflicted on our families, languages, and sacred ways of life. In that moment, many wondered if this apology would spark a profound shift in Canada's self-understanding, or if it would remain yet another gesture of emptiness followed by indifference.

In the years since, conversations around "reparations" have roused both hope and hostility. I have seen friendships fracture and communities split over the notion that Indigenous communities might receive financial compensation, and I have also witnessed genuine curiosity among non-Indigenous neighbours seeking to comprehend a history so often concealed. In many instances, this history is denied with varied statements like "I can't believe this happened", or "I think it's exaggerated or we would've heard about it", and angrily, "Why, weren't we taught about this?" Yet, when reparations are reduced to a single line item – money – misunderstandings abound. From my perspective, true reparations penetrate into the cultural, spiritual, and relational realms, aiming to restore not only what was taken but also how we live together going forward.

This chapter emerges from my lived experiences as a Cree advocate and educator, reflecting on questions that reverberate well beyond financial

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settlements: How can we make genuine amends for cultural genocide and dispossession? In what ways can we support families and nations in reclaiming their identities, languages, and rightful place in society? And ultimately, how do we heal relationships – among peoples and with the lands we inhabit – that have been systematically severed?

To explore these questions, I weave together the themes of reparations, restitution, rematriation, and reconciliation, culminating in a fifth theme, a guiding principle: relationship. It is my hope that these reflections illuminate how "Canada" – or kanata, as we say – may yet be reimagined as a living, sacred responsibility, rather than a static collection of borders. If we dare to do the deep, often difficult, work of repairing the past, we edge closer to a future where all Canadians can stand in dignity and mutual respect with the past as our guide.

Facing Canada's "Unsettled" Past

Canada's colonial apparatus did more than seize land; it systematically targeted Indigenous cultures, languages, and governance structures for destruction. Policies like the Indian Act (1876) and subsequent amendments aggressively restricted Indigenous movement, spiritual practices, economic independence, and self-determination. By the late 19th century, federal governments and churches had constructed the Indian Residential School (IRS) system, with over 150,000 Indigenous children forcibly removed from their families, forbidden from speaking their languages, and subjected to abuse and neglect. Many never returned home.

The devastation was profound and still echoes today. Although official records remain incomplete, conservative estimates place mortality rates for Indigenous children in residential schools at three to five times the national average, often due to tuberculosis, malnutrition, or untreated illnesses, as well as physical violence. Survivors who did live into adulthood carried deep emotional scars – loss of language, disconnection from community, and, in many cases, long-term trauma that has revealed itself through subsequent generations and the measurable social disparity ratios we are currently addressing.

These harms are not a distant past; they cast a long shadow over present-day realities. Studies confirm the intergenerational impacts of severe childhood trauma, where disrupted stress responses lead to higher risks of addiction, mental illness, and family breakdown. Even the legal structure around land ownership and control remains politically and legally contentious. Many land claims in courts have lingered there for decades. For generations, treaty promises went unfulfilled, leaving

many First Nations communities in poverty and struggling to reacquire jurisdiction over ancestral territories.

In 2008, when the federal government finally issued a public apology, it brought to light what some had termed "cultural genocide". The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) followed, gathering survivor testimonies and issuing 94 Calls to Action. These revelations forced Canada to confront the reality that forced assimilation policies had shaped everything from the child welfare crisis to the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in the justice system. However, many Calls to Action remain unimplemented, signalling an ongoing reluctance – or inability – to address the underlying colonial frameworks, and demonstrating that Canada is afraid to change.

For me, as a Cree person, these truths aren't academic curiosities; they're part of our lived reality. We see their legacy in high rates of youth suicide, impoverished reserve communities, and estranged urban Indigenous families cut off from cultural anchors and access to land. This backdrop clarifies why reparations must encompass more than any single settlement payout. To truly repair – and to heal – Canada must reckon with the centuries-long dismantling of Indigenous nations, honouring land, cultural and governance sovereignty not as benevolent gestures but as overdue justice. Only by acknowledging these histories and their present-day consequences can we begin to imagine ethical pathways towards real and lasting reparation as a part of the journey to healing and becoming whole.

Broadening the Meaning of Reparations

When people outside Indigenous communities hear the term "reparations", many assume it refers solely to financial compensation. This narrow view has sparked resentment – why should public funds go to certain groups and why now? This creates a schism between Indigenous people and other Canadians, who may feel anger as they also consider themselves "hard working". Yet, from an Indigenous perspective, reparations speak to the restoration of entire ways of life that were systematically dismantled.

I recall conversations with non-Indigenous friends soon after Canada's 2008 apology. They often asked if the government's monetary settlement would "fix everything". For them, compensation was concrete and therefore seemed sufficient. But they did not always grasp the deeper cultural and spiritual losses endured by our families: the theft of language and ceremony, the disconnected kinship systems, the shattering of governance structures once guided by matriarchal and Elder leadership.

Some of the most promising reparative efforts reflect a "land-as-relationship" approach rather than a strict financial model. For example,

in Edmonton, kihcihkaw askî-Sacred Land was the first designated urban Indigenous ceremony ground in Canada. The idea for this came about through a discussion paper that myself and Elder Wil Campbell first presented to the City of Edmonton in 2006, describing the urgent need for our Indigenous people to have a land base in the city to do our basic healing and spiritual ceremonies. This paper began years of stressful and earnest dialogues between Indigenous community leaders, Elders, and city officials. Yes, it took 17 years to build, but as we now agree, "We did it at the speed of relationship". Today, kihcihkaw askî-Sacred Land ensures ongoing access to land for spiritual and healing ceremonies, language revitalization, land-based education, reconciliation work, education opportunities, a place to feast and celebrate, and intergenerational knowledge transfer between our Elders and youth. By placing cultural authority back in Indigenous hands, the city effectively recentres Indigenous protocols and worldviews in an urban environment. It is a bold statement of reconciliation turned relationship, which has inspired cities from across Canada to seek us out for guidance for their own urban ceremony grounds initiatives.

Such initiatives underscore the idea that the healing of people and the health of land are intertwined. Money alone cannot repair the severed bonds created by forced relocations and colonial policies. Instead, reparations must also include policies that enable Indigenous communities to reclaim decision-making power over their resources, cultural teachings, education, and languages. When viewed this way, reparations become not a single payout, but an ongoing commitment to reestablishing relationships – with the land, with each other, and with the past.

Addressing the invisible wounds – intergenerational trauma, identity loss, and cultural dislocation – requires collective effort. Governments, municipal bodies, and local neighbours alike must engage in sustained education and dialogue. Only then can we shift the discourse away from "why do they get money?" towards a more nuanced understanding of how centuries of harm reverberate into the present. By broadening the meaning of reparations to encompass land, culture, and sovereignty, we begin to heal the rifts that a purely financial lens can never touch.

Restitution and Rematriation in Action

For many Indigenous nations, restoring land and cultural authority is the most pressing and visible form of reparations. The long history of dispossession – whether through forcible relocation or legalized theft – left communities not just without territory, but often without the cultural and spiritual landscapes that sustained them. It can never be overstated that "The land is us and we are the land". As I've learned in my own

work, "restitution" means more than handing over parcels of real estate; it involves reintroducing Indigenous legal frameworks, knowledge, and leadership where they had been systematically erased.

Projects like Ontario's Deshkan Ziibi Conservation Impact Bond illustrate how restitution might look in practice. Instead of issuing a one-time payout, the initiative ties investor returns to concrete ecological and cultural outcomes – such as healthier aquatic habitats or stronger youth engagement in Anishinaabe language camps. This model doesn't treat land as a commodity to be bought or sold; it recognizes that restoring the land's well-being and reinforcing cultural traditions go hand in hand.

Similarly, the Sogorea Te' Land Trust in California has pioneered "cultural easements" to ensure Indigenous women-led stewardship and ceremonial access, without requiring a total overhaul of existing property laws. By safeguarding ongoing use for ceremony, ecological restoration, and community gatherings, the trust advances Indigenous priorities and spiritual revitalization – even in heavily urbanized environments.

Closer to home, the concept of rematriation takes restoration a step further by centring Indigenous women as traditional keepers of land, culture, and ceremony. This principle resonates in Edmonton's kihcihkaw askî, where Elders and women knowledge keepers oversee everything from sweat lodges to moon ceremonies. The city acknowledges Indigenous authority by providing long-term access, covering substantial maintenance costs, and respecting protocols decided by community leaders. These efforts counter the colonial narrative that relegated Indigenous women to the margins. By restoring women's leadership roles, rematriation reclaims cultural continuity for future generations.

Time and again, I've seen how the land itself becomes a site of healing. When communities gather for a ceremony on reclaimed or newly protected land, it fosters unity and reestablishes our shared bonds with Mother Earth. In Cree understanding, these relationships are vital not only to physical survival but to our sense of identity and spiritual belonging. By aligning policy, funding, and governance with Indigenous knowledge – particularly women's leadership – restitution and rematriation move beyond symbolism. They reweave torn threads of culture, instil community pride, and anchor the collective pursuit of justice in a living, sustainable framework.

Reconciliation: Beyond Apologies

When the then Prime Minister Stephen Harper stood in the House of Commons in 2008 to apologize for the Indian Residential School system, it was a moment many Indigenous peoples had long awaited. For some survivors, this official admission of guilt felt like validation for their untold

suffering. Yet, the apology also raised questions: Would Canada back its words with transformative action, or would this become yet another chapter in the country's pattern of well-meaning but insufficient gestures?

At first, the TRC offered hope. Survivors shared their stories, and the TRC issued 94 Calls to Action, each addressing a dimension of the structural harm perpetuated by colonization – ranging from child welfare reform to equitable health care and language preservation. However, more than a decade later, many calls remain unimplemented, ignored, or have involved half-measure attempts, revealing the deep institutional inertia that mitigates genuine change. Without tackling issues like the over-policing of Indigenous youth or the chronic underfunding of Indigenous education, the apology risks devolving into a national salve for guilt rather than a catalyst for long-term repair.

True reconciliation demands structural transformation. It requires dismantling the paternalistic frameworks that still pervade policy, from resource extraction deals that sideline Indigenous jurisdiction to the inadequate support for families affected by intergenerational trauma. It appears that Canada does want reconciliation, but only if we do it their way, i.e., for Indigenous people to "be like us". As a Cree person, I am reminded daily that healing is inseparable from justice: if basic human rights – clean water, secure housing, safe communities – are denied, no apology, however heartfelt, can undo the harm. I call it neo-colonialism, and corporations supported by Canadian governments are the new colonizers.

Nevertheless, I have witnessed hopeful sparks in grassroots and Indigenous-led movements. Communities are designing culturally grounded child welfare programmes that keep children connected to their families and language. Youth are revitalizing and connecting to ceremony, using social media to amplify teachings that once lay dormant. In many cases, local successes have emerged in spite of government foot-dragging, illustrating that reconciliation often begins with those most affected by injustice. Non-Indigenous Canadians are making their own efforts to bridge the divides and showing themselves as good allies and friends, without government funding. As my mentor, the late Elijah Harper, shared with me, "True reconciliation will never happen until the grassroots people come together and talk. Regardless of what the governments are doing".

Ultimately, reconciliation involves more than apologizing for history; it requires grappling with how colonial legacies manifest in contemporary policies and attitudes. Only by addressing those ongoing harms can Canada move from symbolic gestures to a vision of shared prosperity and dignity. If the apology of 2008 was a door cracked open, it falls on each of us – Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike – to walk through and commit

to the collaborative, at times uncomfortable, work of building a just and compassionate future. And as the late Senator Murray Sinclair, also Chair of the TRC, stated: "The truth will set you free, but first, it's going to piss you off".

The Fifth "R": Rebuilding Relationships

Throughout my travels and work, one teaching resonates above all: in Cree thought, we are all related – humans, animals, the land, and the spirit world. This principle, often spoken of as wahkohtowin, affirms our interconnectedness and mutual responsibilities. Seen through that lens, reparations, restitution, rematriation, and reconciliation ultimately converge on the need to renew relationships – between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, and between society at large and the earth itself.

Yet barriers persist. Misinformation about treaty obligations, stigmas around ceremony, and a phenomenon sometimes dubbed "competing victimhood" can foster resentment. I've heard individuals claim that addressing Indigenous injustices somehow overlooks other groups' suffering. In reality, acknowledging one community's trauma does not negate another's. We build compassion by recognizing each other's experiences, not by ranking them. Seeing ourselves in another's story is the first thread of relationship, and when we pull on that thread, we begin to build a bridge.

In practice, relationship-building unfolds at multiple levels. Grassroots efforts – like community feasts, storytelling circles, and local "community dialogues" or talking circles – allow neighbours to share experiences and dismantle stereotypes in a supportive setting. Meanwhile, policy reforms can cement equitable partnerships: mandating Indigenous representation in municipal decision-making, supporting Indigenous-led child welfare programmes, or legally recognizing stewardship roles for Indigenous women in land-use planning. By aligning laws and resources with relational values, governments signal a genuine commitment to partnership rather than paternalism.

On a personal level, I've seen the transformative effect of something as simple as hosting an open ceremony at kihcihkaw askî. When non-Indigenous residents take part respectfully – learning protocol from Elders, learning of our history, understanding the importance of ceremony in our lives, participating in language circles – they emerge with a deeper understanding of Indigenous worldviews and a willingness to stand against racism. It's one of the clearest illustrations that relationship-building can bridge historical divides far more effectively than policy alone. This also proves the notion that when the people lead, the leaders will follow.

Ultimately, relationships flourish when rooted in mutual respect and reciprocity. Whether it's returning control over cultural programmes to matriarchal leaders, ensuring Indigenous language instruction in public schools, or fostering open dialogue about past harms, each effort is a step towards collective healing. The fifth "R" reminds us that no single transaction or apology can fully heal centuries of colonial violence. Rather, the rebuilding of relationships is a continuous, generational endeavour – one in which each conversation and collaborative project can reaffirm our shared humanity.

Conclusion: A Renewed Vision of "Kanata"

In Cree teachings, words often carry deeper meanings that cannot be reduced to their English equivalents. Take the word "kanata", which the early colonizers took to call their new lands "Canada". The word "kanata" comes from the word "kanatan", which in the Cree language means "a pure/clean/sacred place". When the "n" is removed from "kanatan", it becomes the word "kanata", then it is transformed into a verb and means "to make pure-clean-sacred". In order for us to achieve "kanatan" – a pure-clean-sacred place – we have to practice "kanata" – to make pure-clean-sacred. It calls us to action to make sure our relationships are in order and maintained. With that understanding, therefore, Canada is not a noun, it's a verb and should be recognized by all people who live here as a way to understand the necessity of reparations, restitution, rematriation, and reconciliation. It truly is an invitation to actively create and uphold a community anywhere in Canada, and for our nation to revise and rebuild ourselves founded on respect, mutual aid, and shared responsibility, and to maintain and renew our relationships.

This vision of kanata resonates with the Five "R's" explored in this chapter: reparations, restitution, rematriation, reconciliation, and, finally, relationship. Each carries a commitment to heal from the past, honour present responsibilities, and forge a future where Indigenous peoples can fully reclaim their cultural and spiritual inheritance. Financial compensation alone will never compensate for the loss of language, ceremony, and identity. Nor can symbolic gestures without structural change truly mend the intergenerational wounds of colonization.

The good news is that renewal is already unfolding – in city-based cultural grounds like kihcihkaw askî, in land trusts that champion Indigenous stewardship, and in grassroots dialogues that bring once-siloed communities together. As we push for institutional reforms to reflect Indigenous voices, each of us can take up our part in making "kanata" a reality: learning the true history of these lands, listening to Elders,

challenging racism whenever it appears, and supporting Indigenous-led solutions that centre women's and families' well-being.

This is not work that ends in a generation – or with a single policy. It is an ongoing practice of reaffirming relationships and respecting our responsibilities to each other and the land. Through sustained efforts, we reshape Canada from a static noun into a living verb, where the call to repair and reconcile remains ever-present, a cycle of renewal, woven into the fabric of everyday life. If we persist, we may yet realize a nation grounded in the sacred principle that all our relations – human and more-than-human – deserve dignity, reciprocity, and care.

8

HEALING AND REPAIR

Building Trust to Transform Conflicted and Traumatized Communities

Rob Corcoran

This is a time of great pain, anger, and increasing polarization in many parts of the world. The legacies of colonialism and the false narrative of human hierarchy impact societies everywhere. In this environment, how can we create spaces for constructive change? How can we cultivate hope and demonstrate positive alternatives to break cycles of repression and revenge and build healthy and equitable communities? Can we move from blame to acceptance of shared responsibility for a new future?

My colleague Mike Wenger and I recently wrote a paper, *Toward Transformative Reparations*, for the National Collaborative for Health Equity (Corcoran & Wenger, 2023). It draws on experiences in a number of communities in the United States as well as Canada and Australia. While specifically addressing urgent needs for relational and policy change in the United States, its central theme may have relevance for other parts of the world.

We state that transformative change calls for authentic, courageous, and imaginative leadership at all levels:

> True and enduring change requires both acknowledgement and compensation for past harms and deep healing from the wounds created by those harms. As Americans, we must heal together as a nation. This will require a clear and accurate telling of history, and a vision for the future to which everyone can contribute and feel a sense of ownership. It will require deep honesty and listening to the stories of others. It will require a commitment to restorative justice and policies that can effectively foster systemic change. And essentially, it must involve all

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> sectors of our society including people of different political views. In the United States, transformative reparations must include Indigenous people in addition to the descendants of enslaved people.
>
> *(Global Humanity for Peace Institute, 2023)*

In this chapter, I share practical examples of transformative change, often in places that are traumatized by histories of racism, ethnic conflict, or interreligious strife. I am British by birth, and I am acutely aware of my ancestors' horrific record of colonialism and transatlantic slavery. For most of my adult life, I have worked with Initiatives of Change (IofC), a worldwide movement of people of diverse cultures and backgrounds that seeks to "build trust across the world's divides".[1] Participants in this movement are committed to the transformation of society through changes in human motives and behaviour, starting with their own. For many decades, IofC has been engaged in collaborative work to bring about healing and to build trust across deep divides. It develops ethical and trustworthy leaders and has a track record of a sustained multisector approach for reconciliation in support of efforts to build social cohesion and equitable communities.

The most urgent challenges facing our world are not technical in nature. Meeting them requires adaptive change: new attitudes, behaviour, and relationships. It demands "levels of political courage and trust-based collaboration that can only be achieved by individuals with the vision, integrity, and persistence to call out the best in others and sustain deep and long-term efforts" (Corcoran, 2010). Trust is the moral foundation for the functioning of democracy. As Kate Monkhouse writes,

> Trust within and between communities takes many years to build up and a short time to break. Trust is like ligaments in the body, holding things together. When crises occur, it is fit to flex and respond – or snap if stretched.
>
> *(Corcoran & Ballew, 2019)*

Dr Barry Hart, who teaches at Eastern Mennonite University and has supported peacebuilding work in many countries, writes about the vital connection between peacebuilding and trustbuilding:

> Peacebuilding, or the unfolding of peace for transformational purposes, is a dynamic process geared toward "right and just relationships" between people who have experienced division due to violence and complex conflicts, corrupt systems and/or power-driven leadership. Building a comprehensive peace requires trustworthy people of

> self-reflection and courage, who comprehensively assess their situation, and provide secure and safe "spaces" for dialogue, joint storytelling, psychosocial support and a range of other elements that restore and begin to harmonize relationships – while contributing to the social, economic and often the political structures that sustain them. Like peacebuilding, the trustbuilding process begins with the "self" and a deep respect for one's own dignity and that of others. And both draw on a "wholistic" set of other values and principles that include cultural and gender sensitivity, human needs/empowerment, nonviolence, honest communication and interdependency.
>
> *(Hart, personal communication, 2024)*

This chapter illustrates how diverse communities in the United States and on four other continents are working to build trust in situations of tension or conflict. I am writing from Austin, Texas, where my wife and I moved five years ago. But for nearly four decades, Richmond, Virginia, was our home and where we had the privilege of working with a diverse network dedicated to racial healing and equity. The full story is told in my book on trustbuilding.

Few US cities carry a heavier burden of racial wounds than Richmond. The first European settlers encountered a flourishing Indigenous culture on the banks of the James River, where the city now stands. The interactions of these colonists with the native population – and later, Africans – were marked by tragedy and cruelty.

Imagine a city that was the country's second-largest domestic slave market. A city that became the epicentre of a Civil War that caused more American deaths than two world wars, Korea and Vietnam, combined. After 100 years of American apartheid, Virginia's state legislators led the nation in a political strategy known as "massive resistance", which aimed to prevent school integration. By the time a Black majority was elected to the city council in 1977, Richmond was a deeply traumatized community. And very few people, white or Black, seemed willing to talk about the need for healing. My colleagues and I once facilitated a TV programme that we called "the polite silence", in which diverse Richmonders shared perspectives on the hesitancy to address this topic.

So, it was a revolutionary and liberating moment in 1993 when residents of all backgrounds from this same city came together with the bold vision that the very place where racism in its worst form began might be the place where healing could begin. That was the start of a movement that impacted not just Richmond but communities across the United States, and in recent years, it has inspired acts of healing and repair in at least a dozen countries.

I came to the United States in 1980 as a young liberal activist, and I found myself reacting to the intensely conservative environment in much of Richmond at that time. One of my early friends and mentors was a Black lay preacher, John Coleman, who said to me, "You have to build a bridge of trust strong enough to bear the weight of the truth you are trying to deliver". I came to understand that it was not my job to judge anyone or convert them to my point of view, but that I might actually learn something from some of the people I found difficult.

In this country, there is a prevailing attitude among liberal activists that "we are the solution, and others are the problem", or that others are at least in need of "education". Self-righteousness is one of the biggest obstacles to racial and social change. All of us have our own truths we want to deliver and passion for things we want to achieve. But no one has a monopoly on truth. And without trust, it will be impossible to achieve transformative change. So, how do we build the bridges that John Coleman talked about?

Starting with Ourselves

The international president of IofC is Gerald Pillay, who was born in South Africa, taught at universities in South Africa and New Zealand, and served as vice chancellor of Liverpool Hope University in the United Kingdom. He says:

> The world urgently needs trustworthy people without self-interest who seek no personal gain or status in seeking the common good… We may have wonderful academic ideas about peacemaking and bridge building … but if these values are not translated into the way we live then they are not worth the paper they are written on.
>
> *(Pillay, 2023)*

This focus on personal authenticity is the first key step in building trust. We must take an honest inventory of our own lives. Marc Gopin at George Mason University writes,

> What goes on between people cannot be separated from what goes on inside people. Who we are deep inside determines how well we get on with others. So, if we want to fix our communities, we had better get started on ourselves.
>
> *(Gopin, 2004)*

Mahatma Gandhi talked about "the inner voice", and I have discovered the importance of trying to listen to that voice of truth. A friend calls this *connection, correction, and direction*. Connection with our true self, the

inner voice, maybe the voice of God, of Allah or conscience. Correction for things we need to do differently, relationships to mend, apologies to make. Directions for the day on how to act, our priorities, and people to reach out to. It's a vital tool for resilience.

The day we arrived in Richmond, we were welcomed by our neighbours, Audrey Burton and her husband Collie, a Black couple who were civil rights activists. We quickly became friends. They were carrying the scars of racial oppression, and they were dissatisfied with the usual approaches to community activism. Collie Burton told us, "We spent so much effort in changing structures, but we had to keep going back and doing it again because we did not change the hearts of people". They were intrigued by the idea of connecting personal and social transformation, and they began to practice daily times of quiet, of inner listening.

In one of these times of reflection, they had the thought to reach out to a senior white city administrator named Howe Todd. He and Collie Burton had clashed publicly over the allocation of community block grants. The Burtons invited Todd and his wife to a cookout at their home, which was the start of an unusual friendship. Some months later, the Black director of a nonprofit organization remarked to me,

> Howe Todd used to be known as someone who never listened. Whenever I went into a meeting with him, I always felt that the cards were stacked, that the decisions were already made. Now he really listens to what I have to say.

The change in the relationship of two well-known personalities, such as Todd and Burton, sent ripples across the city.

I share this story because the demonstration of transformed lives and relationships proved much more powerful than engaging in exhaustive analysis of the problems or simply advocating for others to change. And as more people from all walks of life had the courage to step out of their comfort zones and examine their own attitudes, an interracial network began to grow. It became known as Hope in the Cities and ultimately developed as the major national programme of Initiatives of Change, United States.

Healing Historical Wounds

Another essential step for building trust in traumatized communities is finding ways to acknowledge historical wounds and create new shared narratives to begin a process of healing. We need truth-telling in ways that bring people together. And we need to understand the power of stories in shaping identity. People will not listen to facts or data if they feel their identity is threatened, their dignity is wounded, or their story is not

being heard. The *New York Times* columnist David Brooks writes, "If a country can't tell narratives in which everybody finds an honourable place, then righteous rage will drive people toward tribal narratives that tear us apart" (Brooks, 2021). As we see across the world, pain that is not transformed is transferred, often generationally. It fuels tribal grievance and anger as well as shame and guilt.

Writing off a whole group to a single story is incomplete and dangerous. We must learn to deal with the ambiguity and complexity of history. We are all touched in different ways by stories of conflict, bitterness, and division. And so, we must honour the dignity and humanity of every individual, while overcoming false narratives and taking ownership of our shared history and the legacies of that history.

In June 1993, Richmonders of all backgrounds – grassroots activists and business leaders, elected officials, educators, liberals and conservatives, and people of different faiths joined by people from 50 states and 24 countries – took part in the city's first "walk through history", which was led by Mayor Walter T. Kenney, an African American, and Jack McHale, the white chairman of Chesterfield County Board of Supervisor. They walked together to acknowledge sites in Richmond's history of slavery that had previously been too painful or shameful to remember. According to Joseph V. Montville,[2] such a walk, done with historical accuracy and without accusations, establishes an agenda for healing. "It allows the conscience of large numbers of people to give up avoidance and be activated in the most positive sense" (Corcoran & Greisdorf, 2001).

Since that first walk in 1993, thousands of Richmonders have walked this historic trail of enslaved Africans, as have people from cities across the United States and from other parts of the world that have histories of racism, ethnic or religious conflict, or discrimination, such as Northern Ireland, the Middle East, India, South Africa, Australia, and various countries in Central and Latin America.

As I write in *Trustbuilding*, a walk is a journey of inner exploration. A march has a destination, but in a walk, it is the journey rather than the destination that matters. A walk is an invitation, not an accusation. It is an act of shared memory, grief, mourning, understanding, and even celebration.

Liverpool, United Kingdom, was a major port involved in the transatlantic slave trade. Its traders financed 40 percent of the European ships involved. In December 1999, Liverpool City Council passed a resolution of "unreserved apology" for the city's role in the trade and the residual effects on its communities of African descent. Later that same month, President Matthieu Kerekou of the Republic of Benin convened an international gathering for representatives of the African Diaspora and former

slave-trading countries at which he apologized for his ancestors' prominent role in selling fellow Africans to slave traders. Benin had actively participated in the slave trade for almost 300 years. In April 2000, a delegation from Benin, including four government ministers, came to Richmond to repeat the apology on the banks of the James River.

Symbolizing these new relationships, a Reconciliation Statue by Liverpool artist Stephen Broadbent was donated by Liverpool to Benin, and Richmond's City Council allocated funds for an identical statue placed at the former site of its slave market. In March 2007, 5,000 people and the ambassadors of Benin, Gambia, Niger, and Sierra Leone celebrated its unveiling. That same year, led by Governor Tim Kaine, Virginia became the first US state to apologize for its role in promoting and defending slavery.

In 2020, statues of Confederate generals and political leaders who had led the fight to defend the system of slavery still lined Richmond's famed Monument Avenue. The nationwide protests sparked by the police killing of George Floyd, an unarmed Black Minneapolis man, that summer compelled the Virginia General Assembly to act and the Richmond City Council to vote unanimously for their removal. But as several observers have noted, the fact that this was accomplished with the support of most of the population owes much to the process begun three decades earlier when organizations such as Hope in the Cities and its allies began to collaborate with the museum community, universities, business elite, and city government in using public history to rid Richmond of its racist identity and to tell the city's history honestly and inclusively. Plans are currently underway for a national slavery museum at the site of the former slave market. Rev. Sylvester Turner, one of those leading this effort in Richmond, describes reconciliation as a process of acknowledgement and apology, forgiveness, accountability, and commitment to work together on acts of repair.

Honest Conversation

The willingness to openly face the pain together enabled the Richmond community to engage in deeply honest conversation. This brings me to a third key step in transformative change: creating a welcoming space where difficult and sometimes uncomfortable dialogue can take place; where participants can move beyond blame, the mentality of victimhood, and guilt-ridden shame. Honest conversation must include all stakeholders, even those whose voices are challenging to hear. We must ask: "What conversation needs to take place?" "Who must be part of the dialogue for it to be effective?" "And how might we invite and welcome them?" True dialogue is a journey of discovery. Hope in the Cities has developed

a dialogue guide, and hundreds of people have taken part in small group conversations throughout the city.

Sometimes, opposing groups needed internal conversations in "affinity groups" before they could be honest with the other group. Responding to requests by Muslim leaders in Richmond, we convened a group of seven leading Muslims and seven conservative evangelical Christians. We first asked each group to meet separately to consider two questions: 1) Both Islam and Christianity have great traditions of peacebuilding. What have we in our group done, or are doing, that undermines this tradition? 2) What do we need to hear from the other group in order to begin to build bridges of trust?

When the two groups came back together, the Muslim group said: "We are too isolated and have secluded ourselves from the concerns of the wider community. We have not been vocal enough on violence or human rights abuses". They also challenged the Christian group, saying: "We need to hear from you a commitment to the principle of religious pluralism and to civil rights". For their part, the Christian group admitted that "We have never built relationships with any Muslims. We failed to see Islam as an ally in fighting social and moral ills". They challenged Muslims to be forthright in denouncing acts of terror and anti-Jewish statements.

This led to deep and honest exchanges, and the group remained in regular conversation for seven years. They formed personal friendships and supported each other in community projects. We had similar experiences with many other groups, including a gathering of business leaders and community activists. One of my colleagues says the most important moment in a dialogue occurs when someone takes responsibility for what their group has done to create or perpetuate a problem and can claim this in front of the other group. "It changes the whole dynamic because the other side already knows. It's not news to them" (Corcoran, 2010, p. 88).

The removal of Confederate statues in Richmond was essential, but the removal of such symbols alone does not lead to change in structures. Decades of identity reform have made the city an increasingly attractive place to live, but this has not translated into benefits for those at the lower end of the economic scale. Ebony Walden, an urban planner and facilitator, writes: "While Richmond's resurgence brings great potential to deliver economic opportunities and neighborhood improvements to the city's low-income communities, the pervasive sense is that many will remain cut off from opportunity by poverty and structural racism" (Walden, 2020).

In response to this, Hope in the Cities and its allies designed a form of dialogue that connects historical narrative with data to highlight legacies of history. The inequalities in areas such as education, housing, and public

transportation are direct consequences of decades of racially inspired public policies. In collaboration with John V. Moeser,[3] a respected university professor, we created a presentation using census data and narrative to show how racist policies and jurisdictional boundaries have combined to create and perpetuate concentrated poverty. This programme reached hundreds of people in faith-based organizations, advocacy groups, education, business, and government. The combination of data and historical narrative informed participants and built energy for action; it connected the head and the heart. This provided a platform for the mayor to launch an Anti-Poverty Commission to develop racial equity strategies, and the city subsequently created the nation's first Office of Community Wealth Building.

Teamwork and Multisector Networks

Transformative change requires broad multisector networks of people working together in a sustained way. This is the fourth essential step, but it is often the most neglected part of social change movements. Ego, competition, and hurt feelings undermine the most idealistic projects. Teams and coalitions engaged in efforts to effect radical social change can expect to find among themselves the same tensions, prejudices, and fears as in the communities they hope to impact. We need people with different gifts and perspectives, and we must be willing to work with people who challenge our assumptions. The Richmond experience demonstrates the importance of unselfish partnerships and sustained relationships based on shared vision and commitment.

Sometimes we may find "unlikely allies" in people or institutions who seem to represent obstacles. The *Richmond Times-Dispatch* newspaper was notorious for its racist editorials in support of segregation and attacks on the first majority Black city council. Before Richmond's first history walk, an interracial delegation from Hope in the Cities met with senior editors to share a new vision for Richmond as a national leader in racial healing and to invite their support in communicating the importance of that vision. The editors were surprised as they were accustomed to being criticized, and they assigned Michael Paul Williams, recently hired by the newspaper as its first Black columnist, to cover the event. This resulted in prominent stories about the event. Williams then arranged for editors to meet with community leaders to discuss the role and responsibility of the newspaper. Editors and reporters took part in history walks and dialogue circles. In the following years, news coverage began to portray the diversity of the city in a more balanced way, the tone of editorials changed noticeably, and public forums were even jointly hosted by the newspaper and Hope in the Cities.

In 2015, the day after the Confederate flag was removed from the state capitol of South Carolina, a *Richmond Times-Dispatch* editorial declared that it was finally time for a truth and reconciliation commission, and that Virginia should take the lead. Another editorial that same year stated: "The case for reparations appears stronger than dismissive critics think. Reconciliation depends on truth; truth requires intellectual courage. A dynamic dominion need not fear examining the status of self-evident truths" (Richmond Times-Dispatch Editorial Board, (2015). In 2021, Williams was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for his coverage of the removal of Confederate statues from Monument Avenue.

Reaching Out and Going Deeper

In a national outreach supported by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, other localities were inspired to begin their own work of healing and dialogue. On 22 April 1999, at the instigation of the local Hope in the Cities affiliate, Oregon Uniting, the state of Oregon formally acknowledged its discriminatory history at a Day of Acknowledgment at the State Capitol, an event attended by 800 members of the public. A resolution passed by the legislators and signed by the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House acknowledged a history of "discrimination, exclusion, and great injustice" to Native Americans, African Americans, Latinos, Chinese and Japanese Americans, and Pacific Islanders. In particular, the resolution cited an 1849 bill banning "Negroes and mulattos" from living in the state that was only repealed in 1926, with the spirit of exclusion persisting over the following decades (Henderson, 2003). Following this event, Oregon Uniting facilitated widespread dialogues for community groups and partnered with educational teachers and administrators at Portland public schools to develop a textbook for eighth-grade social studies students. Several other cities have also launched dialogues and explorations of their racial history. In Dayton, Ohio, the city manager assembled a broad-based board and assigned a staff member to manage a multi-year project involving thousands of participants.

However, in many places, such efforts have proved hard to sustain. To address the need to equip community leaders with a deeper and broader set of life skills, Hope in the Cities developed the Community Trustbuilding Fellowship, which convened diverse cohorts of community leaders from different US cities for a series of residential sessions in Richmond, focusing on the four critical areas identified by that city's experience:

1. **Change starts with me:** Participants study how individuals can become authentic trustbuilders and change agents by exploring personal practices and values that build trust and promote sustainable

social change. This includes having the courage to make a personal inventory of attitudes and behaviours, relationships, and personal priorities; becoming aware of privilege and unconscious bias; and developing spiritual practices such as inner listening.

2. **Acknowledge and heal historical wounds**: Using Richmond as an experiential case study, participants learn about the power of history and memory in shaping community narratives. They gain new perspectives on the importance of deconstructing false narratives while honouring different stories as steps in creating new shared narratives and building movements to address the legacies of inequity. This training in transforming unhealed wounds and wounded memory includes an understanding of issues of identity and culture, trauma awareness and resilience, and the role of forgiveness and acts of repair in the healing process.
3. **Include all stakeholders in dialogue**: Groups learn and practice skills for initiating and guiding honest conversations on complex subjects that cause community divisions. Honest conversation "requires a readiness by all stakeholders to hold themselves, their communities and institutions accountable, and to be willing to change where change is needed" (Corcoran, 2010). It requires skills in creating a welcoming space, deep listening, designing non-judgemental questions that elicit storytelling and reveal underlying issues, and the ability to be a non-anxious presence as a facilitator.
4. **Build diverse teams**: The goal is to build and sustain multisector teams, partnerships, and networks held together by common values and working for healing, equity, and social cohesion. The cohorts include community activists, educators, representatives of business and government, students, and people of different faith traditions. This is critical for the strategic long-term development of trustbuilding work.

Graduates from 16 states are now putting these skills and values to work in local and state government, healthcare, education, business, faith communities, and community organizations.

International Outreach

The experience and methodology developed in Richmond inspired the creation of an international award-winning Trustbuilding Programme (TBP) led by Initiatives of Change International (IofCI) (Initiatives of Change, n.d.). Established in 2019 as a collaborative initiative with the Fetzer Institute, the TBP aims to promote just, peaceful, and inclusive societies, directly addressing Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG16).[4]

With local projects spanning five continents, the programme currently involves diverse local teams in fifteen countries. While maintaining consistent core principles, these projects are contextualized locally to address specific divisions. Evaluation shows that it is the combination of the four parts of the methodology noted above that makes teams effective.

The TBP works in countries experiencing conflict such as Ukraine and post-conflict countries such as Burundi, as well as in localities where ethnic, religious, or community tensions have been present for decades. It also partners in several countries with the Collective Healing Circles, a project of UNESCO and the Guerrand-Hermès Foundation for Peace. These healing circles provide valuable experience and training for those developing trustbuilding programmes.

Addressing Trauma

The TBP engages with many communities that have experienced or are currently experiencing trauma. Dr Barry Hart, who leads the programme's steering committee, says:

> Trauma of individuals or groups of people is understood as the response to multiple forms of violence, e.g., physical, psychological, spiritual, social, and structural, where this violence more often than not produces overwhelming, painful and disruptive experiences. People's sense of safety, hope and trust are disrupted, making life choices difficult or impossible to make. Awareness of why these experiences happen and how they impact the body and mind, as well as a sense of the collective self, are critical first steps in understanding trauma's impact and building resilience and trust and the capacity to trust.

Hart coauthored a manual on trauma awareness and psychosocial support with Bena Mark, a lecturer at the Juba University of South Sudan. While customized to aid the peace and reconciliation process in that country, it is a valuable resource for all those engaged in trustbuilding work in communities experiencing trauma. He writes:

> Resilience reflects another form of capacity – to bend and not break. This happens as the individual or group draws on existing assets and resources within self and group, such as spiritual understanding and practice, personal and collective wisdom and other strengths; and development of new ones to strengthen identity and moral purpose. Therefore, when trauma awareness and resilience are factored into the trustbuilding process, they provide an important basis for a constructive

and more meaningful (re)bonding between people who have mistrusted and been alienated from each other.

Interreligious Tensions

Kenya was one of the first TBP pilot projects.[5] As part of its interfaith work, the team organized an "acknowledging history walk" and a reflective healing circle at Garissa University, where terrorists massacred 148 students in 2015. Since 2019, the TBP team has reached more than 2,000 people in Mombasa and Garissa and trained a core group of participants who now deliver their own activities and are "trustbuilding champions in their communities". Reflecting on this work, project manager Dan Mugera reports that there has been increased cohesion among people of different faiths in Mombasa and Garissa:

> We were looking at the 2022 elections data when there were zero interethnic/religious conflicts in both cities. As we worked across society with local government, religious institutions, youth, community leaders and women, we can confidently attribute at least some part of that statistic to the TBP efforts.

The team is now planning to boost their efforts on building trust between Muslims and Christians in a divided informal settlement in Nairobi.

Indonesia has struggled for decades with religious extremism. ISIS sympathizers have carried out terrorist attacks, and an estimated 700 Indonesians have joined ISIS in Syria, some of whom have returned to Indonesia. The Indonesian Trustbuilding team is countering the growing tensions, religious extremism, and radicalization by building relationships between Christian and Muslim youth. Interfaith camps have been held across four regions of the country, with participants given the opportunity to get to know people of different religions and grow in their understanding of each other's cultures and customs. One participant reported, "I have gained many things from attending the camp. I had never made friends or even met people from other religions before, especially Muslims". Another said, "I finally feel free from the fear caused by the negative stigma I held toward people different from me in religion, tribe, and culture". The team works in partnership with universities, and as a step towards sustainability, it now offers fee-for-service training for a variety of businesses and corporations on topics such as inner development, trust and integrity in the workplace, and team building. Recently, the Indonesians delivered training to a Muslim community in Thailand in collaboration with their partners, PeaceGen.

Community and Police

In Nigeria, the Police I Care initiative addresses a deeply polarized issue by reaching out to police and aggrieved community members. Starting in Lagos, it has developed into a national project in four states to build trust and promote people-driven service delivery. Few people thought the project would be feasible, let alone successful, but due to the relationships that the project team has built, they now hold regular dialogues with police representatives and community leaders, including youth. A unique project in Nigeria, it seeks to eradicate misconceptions about the police's position, purpose, and authority. It focuses on changing negative biases by recognizing the officers' good work, enhancing understanding of the narrative of the police, and highlighting the responsibility of community members in bridging the divisions. The addition of individual "caregivers", which involves individual police officers being connected with a team member who meets with them regularly, is a crucial element in building constructive relationships. The police report that they have never been shown this level of care or been part of such discussions, and that their mindset has shifted regarding their service to the community. "We have been waiting for years for an NGO with an initiative like this", states the Director of Community Affairs of the Lagos State Government.

Relationships with police have also been part of the effort in France, where deep distrust and tension between youth and authority figures such as police in migrant and low-income communities in the suburbs of Paris and other cities have led increasingly to radicalization. The trustbuilding work, which is mainly carried out in schools, includes open dialogue and meetings with police officers to create mutual understanding. Each workshop cycle in a school culminates with a civic project as a way for young people to add value to their local community. The team has delivered nearly 1,000 such workshops in educational institutions in the suburbs of Paris, as well as two summer camp forums that brought students from different schools together.

In India, the TBP also focuses on schools. Privileges enjoyed by the urban population add to the challenges of rural populations, creating fertile ground for future conflict. This project aims to close the wide cultural gap. Visits to rural schools and villages and three-day summer camps are valuable learning experiences for urban youth. Outreach activities and workshops for students and teachers include sessions on gender roles, class privileges, sustainability, and planting rice together. The team has worked with 500 students and trained more than 30 teachers to continue the ethos of trustbuilding in schools.

Healing Families

Youth unemployment, substance abuse, and socio-economic problems paralyze communities in South Africa. Apartheid, the migrant labour system, and the absence of several generations of fathers have left a legacy of dysfunctional communities stemming from broken families. Unhealed trauma is passed from one generation to the next. The South Africa TBP supports inner healing and trustbuilding between parent or guardian and child as a foundation for a more just and healthy society. This work began with women and has now shifted its focus to trauma healing with men. One participant in Cape Town said, "As black men, we are not used to allowing ourselves to be vulnerable, but for the first time in my life, I now understand the power of inner healing. I feel like a new person". Another in Johannesburg said,

> The pain I have experienced in my life, I am now passing on to my family. It is a difficult cycle to break. These workshops have given me the tools I need to change this, which I intend to do.

A partnership with another NGO engages unemployed men and their wives or partners in practical work to create food gardens. Known as Therapy Gardens, this programme reconnects people with nature and all living things. This partnership is now developing an authentic family resource centre that integrates the main elements of healing and personal development, connects the men's forums to women's groups, and links participants to training and work opportunities. Through delivering more than 90 trustbuilding events, the team has supported close to 1,800 high-need individuals. Two of the project leaders, Cleo Mohlaodi and Anthony Duigan, say that their goal is to "make lives livable and to ignite hope and love in our communities".

Regional, Linguistic, and Ethnic Tensions

Québec, Canada, was another of the first localities to implement the international programme. For decades, there has been tension between this predominantly French-speaking province and the rest of Canada. There is also a rise of Islamophobia and discrimination against Indigenous, Black, and ethnic communities. In the first workshop retreat, the group included anglophones and francophones, a First Nations elder, and immigrants from around the world. Together, they explored issues of history, identity, and the role of the individual in building trust. The group was convened by Joseph Vumiliya, IofC's regional coordinator for Québec. He came to Canada in 2012 after many years of work with an international NGO

in sub-Saharan Africa. Joseph says, "I have experienced broken trust at a personal level as a survivor of genocide in Rwanda where I lost most of my family". He noted that in Canada – and in Québec in particular – "there is a denial of racism, but all the time we have examples of it. It is well rooted, and people do not want to talk about it". The dialogue was vigorous, and people felt free to express their experiences and emotions honestly in a space where such honest conversation could take place in a constructive way. Several participants noted the challenge of listening to others and remaining open when different or conflicting views were shared. One participant said at the end, "I expected people to shout at each other, but this did not happen". Another wrote, "The collective space allowed us to hear other perspectives and to start building something in common. This makes my soul feel better". A highlight was an exercise led by a First Nations elder exploring the history of Indigenous people and the experience of colonialism. Participants said they gained a new awareness of the complexity of Canadian history.

The Burundian TBP team has taken on the sensitive task of building trust and promoting healing in a post-conflict country with Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa ethnic groups who have suffered greatly and where wounds, trauma, and divisions run deep. Since 1996, the Burundian authorities have forced hundreds of thousands of civilians to leave their homes and live in displacement camps divided by ethnic groups, thereby preserving the divisions. In 2023, the TBP team started to deliver activities in the camps. The team partners with faith leaders, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and local NGOs to run activities that integrate the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups. The project brings together youth to create a shared narrative for a common future for Burundi. In these workshops, participants identify barriers that prevent them from trusting others, including overvaluation of the past, ignorance, and the spirit of revenge. Participants pledge to adopt a culture of non-violent communication, forgiveness, and acceptance of each other's past. This makes it possible to overcome the fear of others and create a space for honest conversation and active listening. Workshops have also been held for socio-political leaders, including government representatives and religious leaders.

The impact on participants has been profound. Chandelle, who took part in a workshop on "honest conversation" for reconciliation in the country, says:

> I was born in a camp for displaced people. The effects of the mass killing have affected me personally. The violence has been cyclical, with each ethnic group seeking revenge on the other. I grew up surrounded by only people from my ethnic group, all survivors of the massacres.

> We share the same narrative of what happened to our community and the country. Those who are not from our ethnic group are demonized, judged inhumane and held responsible for all the misfortune that has befallen us. I have never been exposed to another narrative. After attending this workshop, I understood how important forgiveness is and how important it is to open our hearts and cultivate inner peace to allow us to be no longer afraid of "others" and start good relationships with them. Now I feel transformed and know we are not the only ones who suffered from the past violence.

In Cameroon, which has experienced ethno-political conflict, the focus is on bridging divides between anglophone and francophone communities. As in Burundi, many people have been forced to move. Yaoundé is one of the host cities for the displaced and home to Cameroon's two largest universities. Displaced students have increased the proportion of English speakers in these universities, increasing the risk of conflict with French-speakers. Most students grew up with their identities as "francophones" or "anglophones" constantly being reinforced by their parents. Through co-organizing trustbuilding activities, dialogue skills are developed to prepare students to prevent future conflict or to handle it constructively. Trustbuilding ambassadors are trained and appointed to support the trust-building work on their respective campuses, and students run Trust Cafés. Sport is also used to bring anglophone and francophone youth together. Collaboration with the government is increasing, with the Minister of Higher Education supporting an outreach to funders and the National Anti-Corruption Commission providing material for a dialogue.

In Nepal, the low-lying Madhesh province differs in climate, culture, and resources from the Pahadi province, which is hilly and mountainous. The community speaks a northern Indian dialect, while the Pahadi speak Nepalese. Madhesh is the smallest but most populous province, and it has been underprivileged. The disconnect and mistrust between people of the different multicultural and multilingual communities have occasionally sparked violent conflict. The Trustbuilding work addresses this through building solid partnerships and engaging a broad representation of civil society. This includes Peace Circles for women in the rural communities who don't speak out in wider community dialogues, work with local government authorities to deliver workshops for government officials and for youth through outreach to colleges and schools, dialogues for media representatives to encourage them to portray the Madesh ethnic groups fairly and equally, and training and connecting youth networks to be active trustbuilders. One young volunteer said, "I felt the warmth and care, realizing that, though we come from different regions, we are all

Nepalese, and each individual is important for building a just and caring society". The Nepalese team also holds retreats for representatives from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka.

Healing Historical Wounds

Australia's history of colonization continues to impact the health of its communities, resulting in inequity, racism, and the disruption of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. The divide between non-Indigenous Australians and First Nations peoples remains deep and painful. The Trustbuilding team has reached thousands of people directly through activities such as the TURRUK immersive workshop series and historical site visits. A typical activity involves a visit to Myall Creek. Once an abandoned site where Aboriginal people were massacred in 1838, it has become a place for truth-telling, healing, and reconciliation. Tanya Fox recounts:

> It was one of the first times I connected on a deeper level with an Aboriginal person. Through deepening this relationship, I began finding similarities between Indigenous intergenerational trauma and the genocide experienced by my Jewish family in WW2. The connection has been profound and enabled me to identify with "belonging to Australia first", before describing myself as a Jewish immigrant.

Australia's TBP began as a response to the invitation by First Nations leaders to all Australians to join in "a movement towards fair and truthful relationships". Their vision is expressed in the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* (n.d.), which was issued in 2017 at a national convention to consider changes to the Australian Constitution, which has no recognition of the 60,000 years of First Nations' possession and heritage on the Australian continent. The agenda of establishing a First Nations Voice to Parliament (the "Voice") and a commission to oversee a treaty and truth-telling process was only taken seriously by the federal government in 2022. The TBP project, "Our Uluru Response", was intended to support a national movement towards this agenda. However, the proposal for the Voice was soundly defeated in a referendum. Now more than ever, allies need to continue their support for First Peoples' self-determination. One response to this challenge is the "Three Story Australians" project, an outreach strategy involving First Nations, white "mainstream", and the growing multicultural communities. It uses story-sharing and truth-telling to reach unhealed traumas in each of these populations at a community level as a way of penetrating the anger, fear, and hardheartedness evident in the

national response to the Voice. The programme is also increasingly offering services to businesses.

Active Conflict

The Ukrainian Trustbuilding Program is unique in its focus on social integration by reducing tensions and building stronger relationships through dialogues between internally displaced persons (IDPs), local authorities, and host communities. Tensions arise primarily from differences in language and culture, and they existed even before the Russian invasion and internal displacement. A trustbuilding leadership programme is being delivered in several cities, despite the constant danger of incoming missiles. Leonid Donos, the project coordinator, says, "Trust become especially important in the brutal reality of war. The stakes are extremely high because our safety, life and ability to survive depends on the strength of the bonds we form". His team has held several camps for activists committed to building trust in their communities and has held dialogues between authorities and IDPs in Poltava, Lviv, and Kyiv. The initiative includes providing psychological support for IDPs and creating "places of strength" where community members can meet and bond. "We have ambitious plans to train local facilitators in ten communities, conduct forums and round tables dedicated to building trust, and initiate dialogues aimed at reconciliation and unity, even in frontline areas".

Reviewing Six Years of Work

As it completes its sixth year, the international Trustbuilding Programme has reached more than 18,000 beneficiaries and trained over 3,000 local leaders on five continents. The teams share experiences and support each other through a Community of Practice that meets and exchanges regularly. In a new development, teams in Brazil and Uruguay are preparing to launch a project addressing the growing challenge of migration. Another team in Lebanon is working on a programme aimed at training teachers in Muslim and Christian schools.

Experience demonstrates that incorporating certain aspects into a project is likely to result in effective outcomes. These include:

- Diverse cohorts representing multiple sectors of the community.
- Diverse faculty teams.
- Focus on the local/regional historical context.
- Input from respected authorities to provide critical data.
- A mix of didactic, experiential, and interactive activities.
- Small informal groups and one-on-one conversations.

- Conducive "container" or space where participants feel comfortable.
- Adequate time for personal reflection.
- Opportunities for the cohort to come together over the course of several weeks or months, recognizing that the process of trustbuilding takes time and that there are many skills and insights to learn and absorb.

Our local teams on the ground are hugely dedicated, making personal and professional sacrifices to do this work, including nearly 41,000 volunteer hours. In 2021, the Trustbuilding Programme was given the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) Intercultural Innovation Award, and it was selected from over 400 applications to present at the 2023 World Forum for Democracy on the panel "New ways of conflict resolution".

Building trust is long-term work, and we must build for sustainability. The relationships forged in Richmond decades ago are still the foundation for the ongoing effort for healing and repair in that community, and the approaches to building trust forged in that city offer hope for conflict situations globally. In the United States and every other country, transformative healing and repair require skills of the head and the heart. The goal of the Trustbuilding Programme is not just to run a project but to equip people for a life's work. As I write in *Trustbuilding*:

> By identifying and releasing personal "baggage", we can create a welcoming environment for others. Through inclusive dialogue, we can hear each other's stories and invite others to share our journey. In acknowledging painful history, we can move towards understanding, shared responsibility, and ultimately forgiveness and reconciliation. Through genuine partnerships and sustained teamwork, we can begin to build trust and to bring about change where it is most difficult and most needed.
>
> *(Corcoran, 2010)*

Notes

1 www.iofc.org/en
2 Joseph V. Montville (1937–2022) was a US diplomat, founder of Toward the Abrahamic Family Reunion, and Chair of the Board and Senior Fellow for the Center for World Religion, Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution at George Mason University. His perspectives were a significant contribution to the development of Richmond's approach to racial healing.
3 To read about John V. Moeser's work, see: Moeser (2020).
4 Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels. https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal16
5 All quotes from project reports are from monthly reports and the website.

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9

BEYOND TRAUMA

Rx Racial Healing

Gail C. Christopher

This chapter presents concepts on healing, repair, and transforming traumatized communities. The lessons learned over the last five decades are about healing at the societal and individual levels and have implications for our global community. It may be helpful to share a little of my personal journey and story.

My Story

My career has spanned the areas of clinical practice, social programme design, community organizing and non-profit leadership, public administration and public policy, and philanthropy. This journey was inspired by the loss of my firstborn child. It was through this traumatic experience that I learned about the phenomenon of infant mortality disparity disproportionately experienced by African American women and families in the United States. It was in the early 1970s that I experienced holding the deceased body of my child. When I arrived at a local hospital emergency room, I had no understanding of the judicial and systemic consequences of that moment. Her death was diagnosed as "crib death" as she died in her sleep, but in actuality, she had been diagnosed with a congenital heart defect a few weeks prior. We had been informed that surgery might be an option for her when she reached five years of age. In truth, I believe the doctors who sent her home with us knew that she would not live much longer. We were in no way prepared for this.

It was fully two decades later that I learned that the surgery that could have possibly saved her life had been invented decades before the birth of

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my daughter and successfully given to thousands of babies, but my daughter was not offered that surgery – I believe because she was an African American child. When I learned in the 1990s about the surgery, I also learned that it had been invented by an African American man, Vivien Thomas, who, because of his colour, was not allowed to get a medical doctorate degree, but who worked closely with a leading cardiologist, Dr Alfred Blalock. Vivien Thomas was eventually given an honorary degree by the university (Thomas, 1998). I had first-hand experience of the trauma that can be associated with racism in America. This experience launched my career to help others avoid needless losses and ultimately to try and help our country move beyond its adherence to a belief in a false hierarchy of human value. As my life and career reflect, I am so much more than my traumatic experience. This idea of being more than our trauma was driven home to me decades ago while working in a programme that I designed for women in Chicago whose children had been removed by the child welfare system and placed in foster care. One of the mothers said with a great deal of defiance: "I am so much more than my trauma!" She had been analyzed and social-worked and pathologized to the limit of her tolerance. The authenticity of her statement affected me deeply. While a great deal of progress has been made over the last few decades in understanding the effects of traumatic experiences and generating protocols and procedures for clinical settings which integrate this understanding, my own lived experiences and that of thousands of people whose lives I've touched over the years have helped me prioritize resilience and the importance of moving through and beyond trauma.

Key Insights into Racial Healing

Both my own healing and recovery from this traumatic experience and my decades of work with communities living with the trauma caused by racial hierarchy have taught me some critical lessons. One of the most important lessons that I've learned is the awareness that healing is a natural and ongoing process within all living things, particularly within the human body. This awareness and understanding enable us to view healing beyond a deficit framework or mindset. We engage in healing not because we are broken, but because we are continuing to develop and evolve. A non-deficit framework for healing invites a holistic approach that honours multiple dimensions – physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. As nations grapple with how to address the harms generated by centuries of colonialism, slavery, racism, and imperialism, it is important that we employ tools and resources that foster love and connection and transform our perceptions towards the equal and inherent value of all people. Healing circles can be helpful tools in this process because they bring

people together in facilitated and moderated settings that can be designed to generate needed connections and positive relationships.

Researcher Barbara Fredrickson and her colleagues have conducted extensive surveys and experimental studies to document the power of positive, cognitive, and emotional patterns in improving well-being and opportunities to flourish (Fredrickson, 2009). They have developed a quantitative approach that suggests a ratio of 3:1 of positive versus negative emotions supports the best outcomes. Fredrickson has proposed a framework that emphasizes the value of positivity as a balance to the 20th and 21st centuries focus on the stress response. The concept of human adaptation to threats, commonly regarded as the fight or flight response, is innately balanced by the human response to love and kindness. Fredrickson describes this as broadening and building (Fredrickson, 2009). Perhaps the most fundamental aspect of our humanity rests in the primacy of relationships. Relationships are foundational to our humanity but also to our innate capacity for healing. So much of the Western paradigm concerning health and healing is pathology-focused, with understanding of the innate capacities of the human body concentrated on adaptation to stress and the immune system's response to threat. A lesser-understood, but equally significant, aspect of the human body's innate capacity is the capacity to develop and to heal. Embryonic and foetal development, as well as the lifelong capacities for healing and growth, are dependent upon optimal, nurturing, and loving relationships. This understanding of the importance of relationships is central to our efforts to address and redress the legacies of racial hierarchy.

Dr Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that" (Luther King, 1957). The journey to love and light requires clear intention and the investment of time and resources. Human beings evolved over the millennia to socialize in an affirmative way with one another. When systems have been designed to deny the fundamental human need for connection as a biological and psychological reality, those systems are harmful to all. The consequences of this harm are multidimensional. Their impact can be viewed holistically, affecting the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual potential for well-being for individuals and society as a whole. Efforts to heal must be grounded in this understanding and designed to address psychological needs while simultaneously mitigating and not reinforcing experiences of trauma. There is a tendency to view the human body as a "thinking body with feeling"; a more realistic understanding would view it as a "feeling body that thinks". Therefore, I believe effective healing methodologies require a focus on positive emotions. This approach views healing not as a deficit-narrative or within a

deficit framework, but recognizes that healing is like development or evolution, and is embedded as a natural phenomenon. While I learned about the work of Barbara Fredrickson and her colleagues in 2024, I am pleased to be able to cite it to substantiate the Rx Racial Healing principles and methodology.

Rx Racial Healing Circles

The Rx Racial Healing Circle™ methodology engages approximately 24 individuals in a series of facilitated activities designed to elicit authentic human stories. Participants work in pairs, or dyads, followed by full-group sharing. The stories are told in response to a common prompt that intentionally stimulates memories of positive experiences and related feelings with an emphasis on agency and resilience. The circle experience generates positive resonance among the participants and deepens perceptions of human connection and commonality, as 24 individuals share stories related to the same prompt. They receive affirming feedback from one another as their stories are shared in the full circle.

Participants may be asked to share stories within their dyads about a time in their lives when they needed to be heard or seen, and that need was recognized and met. Participants describe the experience, specifically how it made them feel, and how it may have affected them throughout their lives. Hearing stories that portray multiple responses to this prompt from diverse human-lived experiences broadens the perspectives of participants and helps to build their capacity for empathy and compassion.

Rx Racial Healing Circle™ methodology is a tool for helping diverse communities within the United States address and overcome the legacy of an entrenched ideology of racial hierarchy. Rx Racial Healing is defined as the individual, collective, and societal process of replacing the now consciously and unconsciously embedded belief in a false taxonomy and hierarchy of human value with a heartfelt awareness, appreciation, and belief in the sacred interdependence and interconnectedness of humanity. It is the process of learning that we are one expansive human family. This is a journey from fractionalization to wholeness, from division and separateness to unity. It is a recommended protocol for increasing individual and collective capacity for perspective taking and empathy (Christopher, 2022). When we conduct workshops designed to prepare people to be effective co-facilitators of the Rx Racial Healing Circle methodology, we clarify what the process is versus what it is not.

This circle methodology is not an attempt to address racial or social issues in a dialogue or community forum. It is also not an anti-racism circle experience where people are asked to describe their experiences with racism. It is also not a series of courageous or confrontational conversations

about race or racism, nor is it a restorative justice circle or a self-help fixing or correcting community. It is a rare opportunity for diverse people to come together, suspend judgement, and listen deeply to the authentic stories of people whose lived experiences may be very different from their own. From these stories, a sense of common humanity emerges. These circles must be co-facilitated by individuals who have been prepared and certified to conduct this unique circle experience.

The Rx Racial Healing Circle™ process is used to facilitate trust and enhance the quality of relationships among the coalition members. The positive experiences of sharing personal stories within facilitated circles help to build the connective tissue that these coalitions need to address the structural barriers to opportunity that exist within their communities. Communities may choose to implement a series of circles over a three-to-six-month period or a single community-wide circle day, build on relationships generated through that process. Each circle requires co-facilitation by two individuals who are usually of different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

There are over 1,000 Rx Racial Healing trained facilitators in communities across the United States. It is clear, however, that engaging in the authentic sharing of human stories with the intention of generating positive resonance among participants has a healing effect. What do I mean by healing effect? The immersion in this two-to-three-hour experience reduces the cascade of stress-related hormones (cortisol) and replaces them with the opposite hormones of balance and restoration (oxytocin). Oxytocin is the hormone that has been defined as the love or bonding chemical hormone produced by the human body.

The American Association of Colleges and Universities has published my book, *Rx Racial Healing: A Guide to Embracing Our Humanity*, which can be accessed through the publication section of its website. It offers guidance for the facilitation and hosting of Rx Racial Healing Circles.

We will now explore how this circle methodology plays a central role in a broad-based local and national truth strategy and process: Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation™ (TRHT™).

Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation

Inspired by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) processes that have been implemented across the globe, the TRHT framework and process are comprehensive in design and attempt to leverage the positive potential of a democratically structured society. After reviewing over 40 TRC efforts from countries around the world, this model was designed to address the unique, centuries-old legacy of racism in the United States in

ways that honour the broad diversity of the US population. The foundation of a democracy is citizen engagement in more than political processes. Viable democracies depend on the capacities for effective communication and social engagement with one another that deepen abilities for empathy and compassion.

The TRHT framework consists of five core pillars: 1) narrative change; 2) racial healing and relationship building; 3) separation; 4) law; and 5) economy. Narrative change engages communities and representatives from multiple sectors of society in creating a *new story* of America that reflects the true diversity of the nation, the struggle towards equity, and the resilience that has defined the experiences of diverse groups. The racial healing and relationship-building pillar invites engagement in intimate dialogue and circle sharing experiences designed to provide shared moments of positive resonance and the healing effects. Three pillars of the framework (separation, law, and economy) answer the question: "How has the antiquated ideology of a racial hierarchy been institutionalized and maintained for so many centuries within the United States?" Institutionalized racism is embedded through separation systems such as land allocation, e.g., reservations for Indigenous and Native American populations, and residential segregation; legal systems, such as denial of the right to vote; and economic systems, evident in persistent wealth divides and racialized poverty.

Both the Rx Racial Healing Circle™ methodology and the TRHT community coalitions are strategies for envisioning and actualizing a society no longer entrenched in the false ideology of a hierarchy of human value. This comprehensive approach is designed to overcome traditional dichotomies within the fields of social justice. There is a longstanding debate about whether relational work or systemic work should take priority. In designing the TRHT framework, I attempted to address this tension by indicating the necessity of doing both relational *and* systemic work.

When local communities or college campuses commit to implementing the TRHT framework and process, they begin by identifying local leaders to participate in a coalition effort that relates to the framework's five pillars. This community coalition then engages in a five-step process:

Step 1: Envisioning a successful outcome. The first step, unlike many social justice strategies, begins with working together to create a clear vision for success. Coalition members answer the question:

> What will the new narrative and reality be for our community when we have jettisoned the belief in a false hierarchy of human value and

replaced it with a commitment to acknowledging and embracing the full humanity of every community member?

The answer to this question produces a vision that serves as a North Star for the work of these coalitions. This is an example of a vision statement created by participants in the national TRHT design experience:

> We imagine an America where all people are seen through the lens of our common humanity, and we see ourselves in one another. This new society is characterized by love, interconnectedness, mutual respect, accountability, empathy, honoring nature, and care for the environment. In this society, healing and justice flow from authentic relationships. Our children and grandchildren feel safe and secure in who they are and proud of their heritage and culture. They are able to look within themselves and to their communities to find their identity; they recognize and value the differences inherent in all of us, while celebrating the common threads that bind us all together.

Step 2: Data-driven landscape analysis. This process uses data to establish where the community is at the beginning of the work in relation to the envisioned success. Participants answer the question: "Where are we now?" They research available data to be able to answer that question. For example, the answers explore the realities of housing economics, access to quality food distribution, educational completion, environmental toxicity, and/or life expectancy.

Step 3: Stakeholder analysis. In this step, participants assess the assets of the coalition members and decide who should be involved and who may not be involved. Participants then agree to expand the coalition to engage pivotal players.

Step 4: Agreeing on concrete actions. Based on the agreed-upon vision for success, coalition members prioritize achievable yet aspirational goals and needed immediate, short- and long-term activities.

Step 5: Sustainability plans. Coalition members begin to explore ways of ensuring the long-term viability of their efforts. Examples include key partnerships, fundraising strategies, and/or ways to monetize ongoing activities.

This five-step process has been implemented and is being adapted by many communities within the United States. The original organizations that participated in the design phase of TRHT in 2016 were included in an online platform, Connected Communities, created by WKKF (W.K. Kellogg Foundation). Based on preliminary research using this platform, participating organizations and representatives from over 150 non-profit

entities had the capacity to reach well over 189 million people in the United States (Christopher, 2024). A lot has happened since 2016. The momentum continues to increase for the expansion of local and national efforts to address and heal from the historical and contemporary effects of racism.

Health and Well-Being Imperative

The 21st century is presenting opportunities for addressing the harms caused by colonialism, imperialism, and slavery. This often takes the form of calls for reparations. In October 2024, nations that comprise the British Commonwealth held their annual Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Samoa. Some Commonwealth nations, including Caribbean countries and African nations, demanded reparations for the transatlantic slave trade and years of colonization. In a speech to the summit, King Charles said that the Commonwealth should acknowledge its "painful" history. He said, "I understand from listening to people across the Commonwealth how the most painful aspects of our past continue to resonate. It is vital, therefore, that we understand our history, to guide us toward making the right choices in future" (Redmayne et al., 2024). While King Charles acknowledged the need for understanding, neither he nor the prime minister, Keir Starmer, expressed a willingness for Britain to pay reparations.

The resistance to the Caribbean and African nations' demands for reparations is parallel to the resistance to reparations for African Americans due to centuries of slavery in the United States. The missing component for the strategy for creating reparations is healing. The willingness to repair the damage or to account for the harm is derived from a sincere recognition of the humanity of the parties harmed. Getting to this recognition and to a compassionate, empathetic understanding of the mutual benefits that can come from reparative justice requires intentional efforts for individual and collective healing as part of the larger reparative strategy. Unfortunately, most efforts to address the legacies of structural racism, colonialism, imperialism, and slavery do not include healing strategies. The full-scale implementation of Rx Racial Healing Circle™ processes is recommended for societies that are struggling to find a way to redress legacies of harm and injustice that are rooted in adherence to racial hierarchy.

One of the most costly consequences of failing to address and redress the harms from the protracted denial of the humanity of persons within hierarchically structured societies, such as in colonialism and slavery, is an unequal burden of chronic diseases and related disabilities. This burden is disproportionately experienced by the individuals whose humanity has

been denied by the dominant group – most often people of colour. These chronic, non-communicable diseases, such as diabetes, chronic heart disease, obesity, and neurodegenerative conditions, as well as inflammatory diseases such as myriad forms of arthritis, are all precipitated by conditions that generate an ongoing metabolic stress reaction. The nations of the Caribbean that experienced colonization and enslavement led the global movement to develop a strategy to address the epidemic of these non-communicable diseases (Legetic et al., 2016). A parallel global movement has been focused on what we term the social determinants of health and well-being (SDOH). This concept begins to acknowledge that the environmental conditions that exist within societies and communities literally get under the skin by thwarting or providing opportunities for individuals to thrive.

The exact mechanisms by which environmental and social conditions generate illness are being elucidated through the genomic revolution. The science of epigenetics has revealed how environmental factors such as optimal nutrition and the hormones associated with stress determine how genes are expressed throughout the life cycle. These same conditions, the surge of stress-related hormones or access to optimal nutrients, are controllable and depend upon societal/policy decisions. The allocation of resources and the availability of opportunities are factors shaped by the decisions of governmental and political leaders. However, the motivation to make decisions and to allocate resources equitably is rooted in our capacity to value the humanity of all members of society equally. In the United States, life expectancy projections parallel historic and contemporary maps of segregation and investment or disinvestment in geographic areas such as residential communities. It has been said that in the United States, one's zip code or geographic designation for place of residence is a better predictor of health outcomes or life expectancy than a person's genetic code. This reality undergirds the imperative for implementing comprehensive approaches to racial healing as part of America's public health strategies, such as those embodied in the TRHT framework and process.

Launching TRHT with Philanthropic and Public Sector Support

From 2016 to 2017, 14 multisector TRHT Place coalitions emerged in locations across the United States and received funding from WKKF and other local funders. The National Collaborative for Health Equity (NCHE) is now engaging with these original 14 TRHT Places and an additional WKKF-funded TRHT place to expand a community of learning and practice in which these 15 TRHT places can work together to continue their journey of leading transformational change. NCHE is a

non-profit organization based in Washington, DC. Formerly known as the Health Policy Institute, it supports many of the programmes and initiatives incubated over many years at the Health Policy Institute of the Joint Center for Political & Economic Studies, while also working to develop new initiatives to advance the health and racial equity movement and to leverage its 20+ year history as a national convener and coalition builder. NCHE equips institutions and leaders from historically marginalized and excluded communities with tools to improve the social, economic, and environmental conditions that shape health. These tools include leadership development, policy analysis, data mining, and analysis, as well as community organizing and mobilization to address a range of issues that are the ultimate determinants of health.

Launched with an inaugural cohort of ten campus centres in 2018, the American Association of Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) has been partnering with higher education institutions to develop TRHT Campus Centers (AAC&U, n.d.). Guided by a common vision, each of the TRHT Campus Centers develops and implements a visionary action plan to engage and empower campus and community stakeholders to uproot biases and inspire the next generation of leaders and thinkers to advance justice and build more equitable communities. Currently, there are over 70 TRHT Campus Centers across the United States.

Thirty-five libraries across the United States were selected in 2019 to participate in the American Library Association's TRHT Great Stories Club, a thematic reading and discussion programme series that engages underserved teens through literature-based library outreach programmes and racial healing work (ALA, n.d.). According to an internal report in 2019, the work had expanded to 70 sites. These efforts were funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities and WKKF. The grantees represent public libraries, academic libraries, school/K-12 libraries, library associations, and community partner organizations, including alternative schools, youth detention centres, afterschool programmes, and other organizations that serve youth.

NCHE Support for an Expanding TRHT Movement

In 2021, NCHE created a Culture of Health Leadership Institute for Racial Healing (CoHLI). This is an 18-month leadership experience supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) that uses the TRHT framework to strengthen the ecosystem of practitioners advancing racial and health equity in their work (NCHE, n.d.-a). As of writing, NCHE has supported three cohorts, with a total of 120 diverse leaders from various states and local jurisdictions across the United States representing many experts working within the five TRHT pillars. Leaders exchange ideas

and present work based on their equity and advocacy efforts in local communities to see how they can further enhance applying the TRHT strategic framework and process described above.

The success of these TRHT efforts and the expansion of the movement have generated some "backlash" or political strategies that aim to sabotage this work. Examples include the movement to ban books that create a more authentic narrative of the nation's history by representing diverse voices that were previously excluded. Other examples are the denial of access to medical care for transgender youth and the reversal by the Supreme Court of affirmative action.

Healing from the harmful effects of centuries of adherence to racial hierarchy requires a collective commitment to end racism. As of writing, the political climate of the United States embodies efforts to sabotage this collective commitment by mobilizing fear, hatred, and defensiveness. These negative emotions have been leveraged to achieve political and economic victories, but may in fact lead to further division in the American population. The lessons of my decades-long career and my understanding of the power of healing, love, and positive emotions have led me to believe that this current negative momentum can be reversed through the continued mobilization of the goodwill of the people of America. NCHE's polling efforts, the Heart of America Annual Survey, have shown that a majority of the US population wants us to heal (NCHE, n.d.-b). I think this process of healing is possible if we draw on the lessons presented in this chapter, as summarized below:

1. **Centring Rx Racial Healing as a methodology for society.** The cyclical nature of progress towards addressing the harmful consequences of societal adherence to racial hierarchy can only be interrupted when a critical mass of people has relinquished the idea of racial hierarchy and replaced it with a heartfelt desire to connect with other human beings as equals. The real work of healing as societies and countries is the work of building individual capacity for caring and extending love.
2. **Rx Racial Healing interventions must be viewed within the broader context of policy, practice, and resource allocation transformation, such as those used in the TRHT framework.** Governance and institutional structures across all sectors must be engaged in a well-resourced effort to transform entrenched barriers to opportunity that create patterns of inequity. In a democratic society, this level of commitment requires a majority, if not a supermajority, of citizens willing to prioritize the work. Today's rapidly evolving media landscape and the promise of artificial intelligence should be leveraged to generate

the needed majority and supermajority. Social media platforms could play a critical positive role in meeting this urgent need.

3. **The work of healing and societal transformation requires a long view.** I am reminded that it took over 100 years of a multiracial, cross-gender, multireligious, broad geographic effort to end slavery across the United States. However, the ultimate victory of ending that practice did not result in the elimination of the belief in a false hierarchy of human value. The belief system became embedded in other institutions in American society. It is now time to focus on jettisoning this belief system as core to our continued efforts for racial justice and health equity. The Rx Racial Healing Circle methodology is an important tool to be used in this process.

As stated earlier in this chapter, experiences of positive resonance are important catalysts for well-being and flourishing. The Rx Racial Healing Circle™ methodology delivers opportunities for diverse individuals to experience affirmation, appreciation, a sense of belonging, and a fundamental shift in their perceptions and consciousness as it relates to the humanity of perceived "others". This type of experience is the missing element in our ongoing efforts to redress the legacy of centuries of adherence to a false hierarchy of human value.

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10

INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE AND INQUIRY (IDI) TOWARDS COLLECTIVE HEALING

Experiences from Global Communities

Ojeriakhi Oluwaseyi , Diane Regisford, Gloria Patricia Moreno, and Casey Overton

Intergenerational Dialogue and Inquiry

Intergenerational dialogue has long been integrated into processes aimed at breaking the silence following atrocities. Dialogue across the generations can bring to light both insights into the community's past experiences and the wisdom of older generations in enriching resources for well-being (Bell, 2021). Research has identified that young people are key to driving these processes (Fromm, 2022), and that it is important to break the silence between generations and sustain cultural continuation through intergenerational dialogue (Wallace et al., 2014).

Over time, many communities have employed intergenerational dialogue in their processes of truth-telling, healing, reconciliation, and peacebuilding. For instance, throughout truth and reconciliation commissions, intergenerational dialogue has been a key element of truth-telling and mutual witnessing (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2016). Similarly, intergenerational dialogue was integrated into the healing process following the Holocaust (Roth-Howe, 2007), genocide in Cambodia (Cooke et al., 2023), and the Rwandan Tutsi genocide (Wallace et al., 2014). In Canada, to heal from the harm of residential schools, First Nations elders and young people have also engaged in story-sharing and listening in the hope of fostering dialogue and healing (Archibald, 2008).

Although community forums, educational programmes, and public spaces such as museums have provided opportunities for narrative and memory sharing, few have intentionally integrated intergenerational dialogue to heal the wounds and address the legacies of the transatlantic trade of enslaved Africans, enslavement, and colonization.

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In 2022–2024, a pilot Intergenerational Dialogue and Inquiry (IDI) programme was conducted by UNESCO's Routes of Enslaved Peoples in global communities formerly impacted by the history of transatlantic slavery and colonization to co-create spaces for intergenerational dialogue, cultural continuation, and collective healing. Within a common conceptual framework for IDI, communities were encouraged to draw on their own cultural traditions and practices of intergenerational dialogue, rather than taking a uniform approach.

The IDI pilot was carried out by grassroots organizations and their professional facilitators in nine communities on four continents. In total, 150 young participants (aged 18–34) and close to 500 adults (aged 35+) and older participants (aged 60+) took part. The pilot results showed that IDI participants of all ages experienced mutual affection, affirmation of cultural identity and dignity, and, above all, healing and well-being. More importantly, they developed a better understanding of the systemic violence and discrimination underlying the community's ill-being and explored the structural conditions necessary for all to flourish.

UNESCO IDI Programme

UNESCO IDI programme aims to co-create a new narrative for communities to live by, in the service of healing. When young adults listen to elders, and elders listen to the young, stories are invited, created, (re)narrated, curated, and transformed. Listening and storytelling can engender a better understanding of the roots of dehumanization. Through deep dialogue and inquiry, young adults, elders and other community stakeholders can become consciously aware of the harms inflicted through past and present acts of dehumanization. Such an awareness can be felt as light that permeates the layers of scars. It gives voice to the silenced pains and grievances and draws attention to their traumatic effects.

In this process, IDI also revives ancestral wisdom, traditional practices, and other resources that have sustained successive generations, revealing 'treasures' once hidden but now rediscovered and recollected. In naming and reclaiming communal gems, IDI supports cultural continuation. When shared, communal gems can enable all stakeholders to reconnect with their dignity and deepen their consciousness of the equal intrinsic value of all persons – recognising that we are all souls and beings of non-instrumental value.

As a community, we can then reflect upon the structural conditions necessary to enhance healing, enrich well-being, and enable community regeneration. IDI can inspire innovative ways to pursue collective well-being.

Through its intergenerational processes, the UNESCO Collective Healing Initiative can support communities to integrate their histories,

identify place-based cultural wisdom, spiritual practices, and other resources, and form future-facing narratives.

IDI Processes

The IDI programme aims to offer facilitated spaces in order to: 1) enable mutual listening and dialogue about historical atrocities and their continued legacies in people's everyday lived realities; 2) identify cultural wisdom and communal resources for restoring a sense of wholeness and sustaining resilience; 3) deepen relational bonds among participants and expand solidarity to other stakeholders; and 4) co-construct common visions for a humane and caring world, including proposing institutional conditions for a just society and the well-being of all.

IDI facilitators understand that creating spaces for intergenerational dialogue in communities suffering historical atrocities and continued structural brutality requires skilled facilitation and involves caringly and sensitively holding the spaces for listening, remembering, and sharing. IDI also depends on the trust and relational bonds between older generations and young adults, and respects each community's traditional intergenerational etiquette and practice.

Grassroots partners are recommended to implement three key components as part of a systemic approach to achieving the programme's aims and objectives. These components are based on the concept that the IDI process should formulate spaces for the following: 1) a one-to-one process between an elder and a youth that includes the elder's remembering and re-storying, intergenerational listening, and dialogue using youth-prepared questions; 2) a focus group process where participants, both older and younger, come together to share, in small groups, insights and communal "treasures"; and 3) a stakeholder process involving major change-agents in the community.

Each component builds upon the previous one so that the IDI takes the listening, questioning, remembering, dialogue, and inquiry to a deeper level. Ultimately, all participants are involved in conversations that explore the structural conditions and institutional processes required for collective healing. With communal wisdom and resources as the basis, and with the renewed relational bonds in the community, the stakeholders can begin to co-inquire into the possibilities for systemic transformation towards peace, a just society, and well-being of all.

IDI Practices

The IDI process starts with breaking the silence about past atrocities and recognizing the ongoing traumatic experience of dehumanization. By

explicitly focusing on remembering and recollecting cultural wisdom and resources of resilience, IDI serves to reaffirm participants' dignity and help restore a sense of wholeness at an individual and communal level.

Several practices are significant to participants' healing. Although reviewed one by one below, they are intertwined rather than separate.

Trust

Trust between the generations and among the participants is a key to IDI, but trust does not necessarily arrive naturally just because people share similar social backgrounds such as ethnicity, geographical location, skin colour, or class. Instead, time, space, and pace of activities are required to establish, enrich, and sustain trust. IDI builds trust mainly through three moves: 1) by helping younger participants become more emotionally attuned with elders (Hübl, 2023) through engaging in activities such as a visit to a significant historical site, communal hospitality, or rituals; 2) by strengthening the sensitivity of younger participants to the generational differences in terms of experiences, perspectives, and wisdom through an openness, genuine curiosity, and appreciation of what the elders have to share; and 3) by nurturing the growing trust through providing time and space for continued intergenerational encounter. With these elements in place, intergenerational trust emerges and continues to deepen, alongside increased self-trust, mutual trust, and a culture of trust in the community (cf. Covey, 2006).

Active Listening

Throughout the IDI process, when young adults listen to elders, and elders listen to the young, stories are invited, created, (re)narrated, curated, and transformed. Listening and storytelling are intertwined relational moves: without one, there cannot be another. In IDI, the practice of listening is active. Listening is regarded as an art that can be learned, nurtured, and further developed. Active listening is particularly important for young adult participants who initiate the intergenerational dialogue. Listening starts with positive curiosity (following trustbuilding), which suggests that young participants believe that there is something meaningful to emerge from the intergenerational dialogue, and therefore they attend to it and take responsibility for its emergence. One elder in the pilot programme pointed out that listening invites words not previously uttered: "Being able to put wounds into words with other members of the community is in itself healing".

Questioning

Active listening is supported by meaningful questions, which can help the elders become more open and more caring in their sharing. Questions allow intergenerational dialogue to acknowledge but not dwell on the trauma following past brutalities such as slavery, the Middle Passage, and the loss and suffering of ancestors. Instead, young adults use questions to bring out the older generation's strengths, resilience, and practices of well-being. This has been the IDI's strategy to avoid re-traumatization – through the process design and through the young and the older adults attuning to each other's needs and building on interconnection and interdependence (Hübl, 2023).

Remembering by Re-Storying

IDI gives voice to the silenced. Remembering enables the stories to rise above the typical narratives that Africans, African diasporas, and Indigenous people are subject to. Instead, remembering brings to the fore stories where the Africans, African diaspora and Indigenous people are actors and agents in their own scenarios. Remembering in this way can help the community better understand their collective stories. Stories flow from the older participants to the young, and later in the other direction, from the young to the older. Amidst storying is re-storying, which is like threading, stitching, and weaving until the community can reclaim its past and reaffirm its strength, revealing the communal "treasures" long hidden but now recollected and re-integrated. Re-storying fills the participants with emotions of gratitude and feelings of heightened dignity. Additionally, these treasures reconnect the community with qualities such as tenacity and resilience, as well as traditional rhythm, movement, songs, dance, food, and so forth. According to a youth participant, "our collective strength comes through the stories of the tenacity of the elders". This suggests that in times of adversity, remembering and reconnecting to these precious gifts from older generations and ancestors restores young people's faith in the community and in the possibility of healing.

Deep Dialogue

Dialogue goes beyond superficial exchange and can serve as a gateway to new understanding, including understanding the historical "truths" from the perspectives of the elders and their ancestors, but also from the younger generations. In deep dialogue, there is a movement from each party knowing historical facts better to understanding what it means to live a present life defined by a common history. Both young and old can see that history

is not just about the past, as Baldwin points out: history is present in the ways that each person embodies and enacts the implications of history in their everyday life (Baldwin, 1955). Furthermore, through deep dialogue, the young and the older partake in each other's lived experiences emotionally, allowing each to step outside of their individual cocoon into the space of communing. Deep dialogue thus transcends the intergenerational gap and cultural distance owing to the modern ways of life. Deep dialogue becomes a relational process through which people can live a common life together. Deep dialogue in this sense is community-making in an inclusive and caring "WE" space.

Co-inquiry

For IDI, co-inquiry is not linear; however, but intertwined in all the steps of IDI. Co-inquiry takes place when the young, the older, and other stakeholders of the community come together through caring curiosity (rather than mere critique) to pose questions and inquire into the community's past, present, and future, such as co-envisioning the future of the community in 10, 25, and 50 years' time. Co-inquiry thereby gathers perspectives across differences – generations, backgrounds, identities, places of origins, and more. Multiplicity of ideas emerge simultaneously and helps direct collective energy away from waiting for individuals in power to act towards imagining the architecture of a just society and systemic transformation. One facilitator reflected that "It feels like some sort of light … coming in, permeating the layers of scars… It transcends our grievance… With this light, there comes a sense of lightness".

Case Studies of IDI in Global Communities

IDI thus builds on collective memory and promotes common action. For IDI participants, listening, storytelling, questioning, dialogue, and co-inquiry are all, in part, community action. More importantly, deep dialogue inspires (co)action, including engaging in IDI circles.

The remainder of this chapter features insights from four IDI projects from around the world.

Case Study 1: Intergenerational Dialogue and Inquiry in Lagos, Nigeria

By Okeriakhi Oluwaseyi

I was a last-year law student at the University of Lagos when I took part in the local IDI workshop.

My experience of IDI started right upon arrival. Even though we were students, we were received like dignitaries. Our hosts, members of the local partner organization, Initiatives of Change, made us feel comfortable from the start. They let us know they had heard about us before we got there. In five minutes, the room felt more like a reunion than an introduction. Our facilitator's embrace is etched in my mind. It was certainly powerful in breaking down the walls that often chaperone me in my first visit anywhere. While making acquaintances, I was reminded tacitly that looking someone in the eyes while shaking their hands is the most appropriate way to greet them, as the workshop host had looked me right in my eyes while shaking my hands. Although only the first day, I already felt at home.

That first evening, a webinar was hosted by Prof. Scherto Gill involving dialogue between Dr Thomas Hübl and Dr Joy DeGruy. During this webinar, the purposes of the UNESCO Routes of Enslaved Peoples project were properly delineated, which aided a better understanding of the essence of collective healing and the wider project. A point that resonated with me most was the panel's prognosis that the next stage of human evolution and advancement will necessarily require cooperation rather than competition and exploitation. This is why all countries need to heal from the trauma caused by the well-documented history of exploitation. I had not thought of it like that before that day.

The next day, the day of the intergenerational dialogue, lived up to all its expectations. It was an opportunity for us to tap from the well of experience of those who have come before us. The sessions I had were interestingly more conversational than sermonic. And I realized from those discussions that vices and virtues have remained the same for generations. Our elders had the same dreams and distractions we have now, but they employed values we too need to learn and employ now to confront those vices.

The first elder I spoke to shared how he had learned to choose humility over ego at one point in his life. He had sought the counsel of a supposed junior colleague, due to the stagnation he was experiencing in his career. Said colleague told him to relocate his chambers. Although he had reasons not to listen, he simply heeded. This ended up being a decision that moved his legal practice to the next level.

He further talked about how positive parenting, through conscious, loving, and affirmative actions by an uncle, helped shift his trajectory in life. As a boy growing up in Ijora, a deprived area in Lagos, with a father who employed corporal-style parenting, violence was his reality – one which resulted in his developing a truant and rebellious spirit. He told me of the days he chose to skip school, to bathe in the lagoon, and to fish for

crabs that he would then sell. He believed that he owed the person he is now to his uncle's intervention. For me, his story reinforced the need for responsibility and accountability, even within our community, because I believe a community is only as strong as its weakest people. If that elder's uncle had not built enough values within himself to pass on to the next generation, who knows…

My second dialogue partner, an octogenarian woman, shared her exciting but arduous journey of formal education at a time when it was not possible, least of all for a girl-child, to receive an education. She also told me of the palpable pressure, after succeeding in schooling, to take bribes as a financial auditor – a problem that continues to haunt Nigeria. She recalled that while in school, it was necessary for her to translate English written texts to the local dialect of Yoruba to aid understanding. I thought that was impressive given the times and circumstances in which she lived as a young woman. I was also reminded of the privileges I have had in being of a more tech-savvy generation. Compared to her generation, learning is much easier and resources much more readily available. So there's less excuse for us not to take advantage of the opportunities for learning. Through contentment and commitment to honesty, which was owed to her religious beliefs, she overcame the pressure to participate in corruption. The practice of faith in guiding us through life came to bear in her story. She made me aware that no matter how technology has advanced, morals and ethics will never be outdated.

Day three, the day of the exploration about the impact of the trauma caused by the trade of enslaved people in Africa, particularly in Nigeria, left me with the realization that the ultimate trauma caused is the legacy of a pervasive inferiority complex in the modern African worldview, which is constructed by the systemic demonization of the totality of African values by European colonizers. African values, like the priority of communal and collective well-being, have been relatively rejected in favour of individualism and selfhood, which has manifested as bad governance and self-actualizing policy by an emerged elite class in countries like Nigeria. So, it's safe to say that Nigeria's sub-optimal socioeconomic and political status is a manifestation of trauma caused by slavery and neo-colonialism.

Traditional African values are not perfect, but I'd argue they are sufficient for who we are now and who we want to become. For instance, in the old Oyo civilization of southwestern Nigeria, although the Alaafin (the king) was regarded as divine, checks on the Alaafin's powers existed in the form of a Natural Rule of Law, which predates the writings of John Locke and Thomas Hobbes. If the Alaafin overstepped the border of reason in enforcing his powers, he could face an abdication ceremony. This involved a Symbolic Calabash with a parrot inside being placed on

his throne by the "Oyo Mesi", the kingmakers, which meant the people or land had rejected his rule. The impeachment doctrine found in our contemporary parliamentary and presidential systems of governance clearly imitates this abdication ceremony.

While things were far from perfect back then, it's clear that Africans were not barbaric, despite the descriptions in multiple colonial expedition journals; Africans organized themselves to the extent of full communal integration for everyone. From my perspective, the way forward is for us Africans to look inward as rational beings, but also backward into history, to properly aggregate what truly matters for our advancement and for the advancement of the world at large.

Case Study 2: Intergenerational Dialogue and Inquiry in Oxford, UK

By Dianne Regisford

Let me say greetings.

I'd like to begin by inviting some spaciousness into this collective inquiry. And as we do this, in time-honored tradition, I invite all of us to pause. For the work of healing centuries of harm requires spaciousness.

It requires that we engage beyond the cerebrum and come into our bodies. As James Baldwin said: "history is literally present in all that we do" (Baldwin, 1980). Everything that we have lived, including the traumas, live within us intergenerationally. It's not just dialogue with others that brings the intergenerational element; it's also what and whom we carry in us, encoded in our DNA.

The call to engage, to act, to participate as a player in an intergenerational field of inquiry often stems from a deep yearning for belonging. That yearning has been with me ever since I've known myself. I have been introduced as being from Oxford, but I do not consider myself to be from Oxford. I identify as a first-generation Black woman of African-Caribbean heritage. There is ancestry in my lineage where many were forcibly removed from their ancestral lands. So, it is highly problematic for me to consider myself to be from Oxford. I'm currently based in Oxford. As I am first generation, my children live here, and I think of our great-grandchildren to come.

The origin story becomes one of contested and complex grounds when engaging in inquiry with migrant communities, especially those with lived experience of the oppression of colonialism, enslavement, and disconnection from one's ancestral lands. When working with historically, or, more recently, displaced communities, the question of "local" is one that can be contentious. There is an intergenerational imprint of lived experience that is said to live on from generation to generation, encoded

into our DNA. It is said that we carry seven generations of genetic encoding of this intergenerational trauma, these intergenerational knowings, within us. In my lineage, I carry the encoding of fierce resistance and the inevitable traumas of the experience of the transatlantic slave trade. By the time our great-grandchildren inhabit this earth, it is my hope that they will be the first generation to not have the imprint of enslavement within their encoding.

I was born in Oxford, but three days before my first birthday, my parents moved to Zambia, and I had the absolute joy and privilege of celebrating my first birthday on the banks of the Zambezi River at the Victoria Falls. From that moment, I have been exposed to many different cultures in many different lands. My parents cultivated a culture of curiosity, respect, and reciprocity towards those who are different to you. My siblings and I were guided to know our (cultural) roots and met many people of different cultures; we were taught to open ourselves to receive differences as gifts.

And so, after much soul searching, I have chosen to accept my multifaceted identity as I continue along my auto-ethnographic research pathway. My own work of Evoking Belonging[1] takes me to a place where I no longer quest for belonging. Instead, I evoke belonging every day through my being as an intentional ARTivist practice. I consider my body as a mobile museum in which I am expressing a living history that is co-created with others every day. I posit in my research and through my body of works that "belonging is a co-created cultural practice" (Regisford, 2020). These are acts of Social Sculpture.

The potential for healing is as deeply rooted as the yearning for belonging. For voices that have been silenced for generations by dominant cultures and globally imposed forces, this is a fundamental awakening.

And so, here is an invitation to all of us today to soften our gaze. And in time-honored tradition, to call in our ancestors, those who came before us, living or transitioned to other realms. Call them in, sense into who is walking with you. Who is present with you? Who would you like to be present with you? Call in those that came before, and also those who are still to come – our descendants. As the IDI inquiry process explores, there is interconnection and interbeing between the generations. I invite you to call their names out loud, to speak them into the room. And as you do, I will offer here an evocation:

Ubuntu… Without you, I do not exist…!

Ubuntu… Without you, I do not exist…!

Ubuntu… Without you, I do not exist…!

This is a form of incantation, a prayer, an evocation inspired by the impulse of the African Bantu philosophy and cultural practice of Ubuntu.

In essence, Ubuntu speaks to our shared humanity, our connection to each other and to the earth.

Ubuntu, for me, is a clarion call to a re-awakening of our soul's deepest knowing – that we are all connected, that truly, deeply, without you, I do not exist. It is a call to move beyond our cerebral conditioning and move into the unseen realms, the unknown spaces within. For as we gather, intergenerationally, we become aware of who we are and, importantly, *whose* we are. As we gather, we become ever more conscious of how our lived experience expresses itself in repeating patterns of trauma, resistance, traditions, attitudes, and more. All these live within our "cultural imaginary". These are the fibres weaving the cocoon of the UbuntuSphere[2] – our gathering place of intergenerational inquiry.

I offer this evocation as a hope for our collective re-membering, for our collective futures – a hope that we come back to this way of knowing. And for me, this is what the invitation to participate as an elder in the IDI process opened up. This possibility of returning to deeply embedded knowledge systems. Through the IDI processes, we co-created ways of transferring knowledge, not only experience and wisdom, but also the *prima materia* that makes up our being. I see these as inner materials. The *prima materia* are facets which shape our cultural imaginary. Specifically, our ways of seeing, our ways of knowing, and our ways of being.

It was a bright but chilly Saturday morning when I was first introduced to the circle of young people and the other elders who gathered in Oxford to journey into the IDI. While there was clear respect and honour for the elders, this process was designed as a participatory journey, led by the young people, an intentional way of shifting traditional power hierarchies and creating the conditions for the young people to lead. On that day, I had the privilege and honour of sitting with two young women. I was deeply touched by their probing questions, their curiosity, their openness, and their willingness to receive my offerings.

This was the first of two encounters with the young women. The next gathering was in London. As we sat amidst various invited guests, the young women shared their journey beyond the Oxford session through storytelling, exhibits, poetry, and presentations. At that London session, I saw how the young people began to share with each other, in an outward expression of what they had internalized and carried home with them from our initial meeting. It was clear that some of the questions they carried within were finding expression, not only through their voices but also, viscerally, through my own body as I sat in the room. Our interconnectedness, our interbeing, became evident as each young woman shared with emotive poise. I was bearing witness to how we, as a connected circle of inquiry, answered *the call*. In that room, I saw how

the call to tend to our healing will lead us time and time again to the need to create spaces for care. This rang loud in my consciousness and in my being.

Evidently, the telling and the re-telling of our stories is a powerful and evocative healing practice. Through my work in Evoking Belonging, this is the impulse we work with. By using *evocative* narrative inquiry, we connect to our inner worlds through imaginative voyaging and other Evoke practices to be able to sense deeply, to encounter and enliven our inner materials. The resources required for such community-led processes require a container to hold the people, the stories, the memories, and the new forms emerging. In such containers, we are able to, with equitable stewardship and holding, access our knowings and local knowledge(s). These are the intergenerational knowings, passed down through parable, story, mythology, and other tangible and intangible forms of cultural heritage.

And so, the first question I would like to pose is how can we deeply care for each other as we unfold into these narratives of belonging – seeking to heal our truncated lineage discords? Trauma arises in many forms. While we understand that the voicing of our stories can be a healing practice, let us ensure the adequate provision of a trauma-informed support system so that we are all cared for. How do we shape appropriate containers which engender conditions to nurture deep trust as we co-sign to confidentiality and the collective journey? This includes the need for dialogue initiatives like the IDI to be financed, to ensure legacy. This is fundamental. I envision a collective community fund that holds the community's co-created intellectual property of the intangible heritage shared in the storytelling.

I'd then like to ask, as we consider legacy, how do we document these processes? What will our great-grandchildren inherit? What will our children inherit from our lived experiences? How will those of us who are not sitting in the circles inhabited by generations who came before hearing their soul song, inherit? How can our young people capture, translate, and weave intergenerational wisdom to help them navigate the issues they are grappling with?

These questions provide fertile ground upon which we can ideate, as we continue to unfold into the emergent design of spiralling dialogic processes like the IDI. For if we are truly being co-creative in this approach, we will need to create open space for emergent outcomes. This is an expression of the spaciousness I anchored at the beginning. Perhaps the goal of "outcomes" is not relevant in this approach. Perhaps we simply reach milestones on our collective journey. There will be an emotional patina etched on our hearts as we continue to tell our stories. The outcomes are

most likely intangible. How we translate our learnings into practice is the invitation, and that, too, its own journey.

The third question is, how do we develop cultures of equitable inquiry? What does equitable inquiry look like and, importantly, what could it feel like? It's one thing to be given a space at the table, but that is a meaningless action if I do not have access to the language spoken at the table. I may understand what is being said, but I may not have the agency to amplify my voice amidst the vestiges of power that others at the "table" are likely to be endowed with. When we are engaging in processes designed to address and redress systemic oppression, there are tendencies for the act of gathering to be a celebration, without due examination of how extractive such dialogue processes can be. As such, the shaping of our own questions is a veritable skill set and a necessary inquiry of its own. Let us create space to self-examine how we hold those questions, how we unfold into them reflexively, and, ultimately, how we may come together to co-create new forms of knowing in an equitable way. This means on our own terms, framed in our own agendas, priorities, and deep knowing.

The evocation of the Ubuntu Chant took us into a spiritual dimension. This, too, is a critical dimension of healing inquiry. For we are spirit beings in physical form. Our ancestral knowings show us this. Oppressive forces have understood this over time and so have sought to separate us from our spirit being. As we heal, we re-member and reconnect the pieces of our soul.

As we do so, I invite you to consider what belonging means to you. I offer this inquiry as a call to evoke and embody the call into the UbuntuSphere.

All are welcome!

Case Study 3: Intergenerational Dialogue and Inquiry in Aricapa, Colombia

By Gloria Patricia Moreno

I am Gloria Patricia Moreno Aricapa, a spiritual healer and Indigenous medicine practitioner from the municipality of Supía, in the department of Caldas, within the Cañamomo Lomaprieta Indigenous Reserve. This reserve, of colonial origin, comprises 32 Indigenous communities and is guided by organizational processes that have allowed us to participate in various regional, national, and international spaces and gatherings.

One of the most important things I wish to share is the reason behind my participation in each of these IDI circles and dialogues. I participated because I wanted to convey the experiences and the work we are undertaking in Caldas to restore harmony within our territory and among our community members through spiritual healing. Through

this experience of the IDI, we have succeeded in bringing together young people with our elders, allowing us to listen to the diverse life stories and histories of our elders – stories often marked by pain and sorrow caused by various forms of violence. Yet, thanks to their resilience and wisdom, we have continued the struggle to preserve our harmony and ensure our survival.

As Indigenous peoples, we seek to share these experiences in as many spaces as possible, to inspire our youth to reconnect with their roots and reclaim ancestral, cultural, and traditional practices through a spiritual lens. This is what we have carried to different spaces and places where the universe has given us the opportunity to share – not only do we teach, but we also learn from our brothers and sisters. The experiences of other territories and regions have led us to seek strategies that enable us to remain present and contribute meaningfully to these important dialogues.

The intergenerational encounters between elders and young people have been profoundly significant – not only for me but also for the youth who have participated in these circles. These gatherings have allowed the convergence of two worlds: one in which we see the lifelong struggles of our elders to maintain our way of life, and another where young people perceive and understand the world differently. These encounters have granted us a deeper awareness of what is truly happening in our society today. This underscores the importance of ensuring that young people listen to, learn from, and engage with their elders, while also ensuring that our elders continue to transmit their knowledge across generations. Listening to our elders and sharing their stories is a way of reviving their lives, allowing us to understand the long journey they have undertaken to survive. This reflection compels us to ask ourselves: What are we doing for our youth? Have we truly become aware of the challenges and difficulties facing the younger generations?

These IDI spaces require profound knowledge and careful guidance. During our gatherings, we always prioritize listening and the spoken word. Young people seek to hear from their elders, and our elders, with patience and wisdom, use their words to share lived experiences and offer valuable advice. From our experience, this journey has been both beautiful and essential. We have managed to reach the youth, engaging them in a process of healing and restoring harmony. Alongside healthcare professionals, our spiritual healers, traditional doctors, midwives, and various sages have developed strategies that have enabled many to reclaim their inner balance. This is the knowledge we wish to bring to our neighbouring territories in Colombia.

At every moment, we have learned and become aware of the diverse circumstances and challenges affecting other territories. As spiritual healers

and sages, we have encountered brothers and sisters who, after long silences, have finally raised their voices – expressing themselves, understanding, accepting, forgiving, and, ultimately, healing the deep pain they have carried. We have witnessed the immense hardship they have endured, and we continue to see how violence affects our youth, leading many to lose their identity. Youth perceive the modern world and urban centres as places of greater opportunity, where they believe they can earn more money. However, in reality, what they often encounter is violence and a profound loss of their cultural identity.

Living this experience and seeing how our spiritual healing practices can help – both at an individual and collective level – with love, responsibility, and an unwavering commitment to the legacy of our elders has been deeply meaningful and fulfilling for us. For this reason, this experience has been so inspiring and enriching. Even though many young people have drifted away from their culture, there is still a willingness among them to sit and listen to their elders, and a longing to reconnect with their roots.

This is the essence of our work in each gathering. We share words, we share wisdom, and, guided by our natural law and the spiritual knowledge passed down by our elders, we offer this understanding to those who seek it. The past, present, and future call upon us to reflect on how we will return to our origins – how we will reclaim our diverse healing practices, rediscover spirituality, and reconnect with the spiritual beings that our elders have taught us to honour. We call upon our people to return to our roots. We wish to guide our youth so they do not take the easy path but rather listen to their elders, heed their advice, and embrace their wisdom. We have sought to return to the healing power of nature and the wisdom of our ancestors, to preserve our ancestral practices – returning to the mountains and rivers, reconnecting with the great force of Mother Earth.

This connection has brought us peace and tranquility, enabling our youth and children to heal from wounds – wounds that were sometimes inflicted by previous generations or carried forward from the past. The violence and war we have endured have driven us back to our ancestral practices and cultural traditions. In doing so, we teach our youth and children about the strength of Indigenous identity, which lies at the heart of our spirituality. In these sacred spaces, they reconnect with Mother Earth. We have struggled tirelessly to heal this generation and the children who will follow in our footsteps, leaving them a better world.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to all the elders who have been present at each of our gatherings. Their knowledge and cultural practices have enriched these spaces – these intergenerational circles and encounters that we consider so vital. It fills us with wonder to see our youth actively learning in these circles, listening to their elders. This is

why we must continue working with our young people, always accompanied by our elders.

Thank you very much, and I wish you all a beautiful day.

ARAKIRUMA (Thank you).

Case Study 4: Intergenerational Dialogue and Inquiry in Richmond, United States

By Casey Overton

The original home of the Powhatan peoples, what is now Richmond, Virginia, was cursed, as if by somebody's god, to become the cradle of American racism. Born on the lands cared for by Chesapeake, Lumbee, and Nansemond peoples, not far from where the first of our captive ancestors were dragged ashore, I am made up of the blood and sweat-soaked soil that has absorbed racialized terror against Black people and grew trees whose wood made slave cabins that remain today. If some cabins still stand proudly in plain view, imagine the residues of enslavement preserved in the infamous monuments, the General Assembly, the schools, the housing authority, the churches.

We erected for ourselves a cathedral where the handful of us might seek sanctification. A sacred intergenerational space, familiar like a cookout, a reunion, a homegoing, a game of spades or Uno, or dominoes. Beneath their towering splendours, many cathedrals conceal catacombs below – stagnating rivers where something once living congeals and toxifies. Perhaps the tomb is the response to the steeple's call. The sepulchre may be proof of the sacred in some scandalous dialectic. Congregation is complicated; I was glad to be in our circle, an altar at our centre, even while unsure of who I could trust or how much of my mind I should speak.

I find God in the silence, which could make dialogue constraining for the reticent like myself. I find Divinity in my femininity, which could make dialogue contentious in a circle of bodies assigned male. I find Truth in spiritual exploration, which could make dialogue conflicting as a wayward lay queer among pastors, preachers, and reverends. I find Love in the whimsy of children, which could make dialogue challenging as the second youngest. We all arrived uncertain but not without hope. We were neighbours before we entered; we would leave as such or even forge friendships. Our grounding principles served as our intention to maintain our ties.

Without the levity and comfort of kinship bonds, perhaps also with added observer bias – mysterious pressures and shifts in power dynamics from scrutiny – our circle began as distant as it was familiar. Reminiscent but not quite warm. We took ownership and blessed our space with an

altar at our centre, calling in ancestors to hold us. The group of us with the Saturday mornings to spare assembled in creative spirit and generated relationship in a space we may have only been able to partially claim at the start.

Black autonomous space within the reeking bowels of empire is the ripe fruit of miracles. The Great Dismal Swamp to our southeast was so named as the site where such miraculous marronage mobilized against manifest destiny. Formidable land was held usufruct … for a time. Truly autonomous space tends towards the informal if not feral, which is not to say unintentional. Our circle's formality pointed to unnatural external influence, as all peacemaking bodies are designed to be. At their worst, peacebuilding and intervention clasp hands in lockstep, our circle among its smallest fractals. We are not a community at conflict, we are a demographic dispossessed and under further duress after our movements were clotheslined by counterrevolution tactics. We have always known the way to freedom, and it has always become illegal.

In such a context, dialogue is therapeutic, which is to say, limited. Black Americans are injured, not infirm. We knew the circle alone could not heal us, especially as the injury continues. The great mystery is not the nature of our trauma; we know our pain better than we know ourselves at times. We have never met ourselves without racial wounds, even if only epigenetic (and there's nothing "only" about that). These wounds rend the fabric of our imaginations to where we can hardly agree on an end to which we'll design our means. We are constantly braiding back together shredded psyches in real time, making ways out of no way while the rest of the world clamours to match our fly.

If elders are ancestors-in-training, as some call themselves, they sought less instruction from us youth. If we young ones see visions, we had more in our circle dreaming dreams to which we youth might strive to hold fast if they're worth holding onto. Herein, we younger visionaries keep our hands on the plough, knowing the harvest will be plentiful despite few labourers. When labor is scarce, abundance is veiled to bear resemblance to excess, like Leah passed for Rachel in Laban's scheme. Black people have done far more than our fair share of labour, yet we've won a silly prize in the goofy game we've played of aspiring to patriarchal power – ownership driven by wanton desire, defined by exclusivity. Owners are not caregivers because they assume risk and have return on investment as their predominant interest.

Ancestors-in-training are what many of us youth experience as ancestors-under-conditioning, ancestors indoctrinated, ancestors assimilated. As our love for our elders runs deep, the line between capitulating for survival or sport has been blurred beyond recognition. Black pariahs or Black

parvenus – see also: patriarchs? Is there an option where no bride is considered private property? Is there an option that doesn't melt profit motive into a golden calf? We'll soon learn we can't drink gold. Assimilation into corporate culture cannot be a prerequisite for liberation – yet here we are all speaking our good English like they taught us, and we followed suit when we should have reneged. Did our ancestors train us to play fair when our survival is gamified?

Our ancestors trained the Black midwives with better survival rates than the medical-industrial complex. Our ancestors trained us to fish and forage for ourselves before this was legislated out of our collective memory. Our ancestors trained us to seek out our own salvation by making Jesus Black again. Our circle welcomed heads of at least three Black churches. My peers and I, no less spiritual, have grievances with the church – supremacy, hypocrisy, mismanagement, unmarked graves of queer loves and trancestors in the catacombs, if they were valued enough to be buried at all. Few pulpits will say their names. Resistance has left the chat. Is this how we will self-determine? Begging to drink from the slime trail of Babylonian budgets?

The ancestors-in-training, my elders, had no choice but to offer their autobiographical vignettes and sometimes transgressive sermons to our circle in good English, like the surname my family never asked for. They use sacred texts in ways that suggest young prophets are rare. But Joseph was interpreting dreams at 17. Samuel heard God at 12. Esther may have saved her people as a teenager. Jesus began ministry at 30. Nat Turner rebelled at 31. Gabriel Prosser revolted at 24. Martin Luther King dreamed at 34. Fred Hampton was murdered at 21. Assata Shakur escaped at 32. Angela Davis was acquitted at 28. These youth feared the continuation of their status quo more than they feared death. Our circle was not binaried by old and young, nor was youth directly correlative to radical energy, despite there being a definite association.

My elder church leaders extended the kindest of invitations into their fellowships. While the Black church has fortified the radical spirit of youth across generations, its exclusivity cements that it cannot be the sole social change engine for Black Americans. Many of its leaders agree, yet few other institutions can sustain financial or spiritual investment to make intergenerational engagement a lasting regularity. The youngest with the least responsibilities are burdened by their confinement within compulsory schooling and a legal label that restricts their autonomy – institutions whose important purposes are perhaps better served if we young people are allowed to make the decisions that impact us most.

Where we had ample sympathy and courtesy for one another, we lacked collective strategy, resources, and power. We began to develop a practice

of sharing. An elder could look out for the job application of a friend. A youth-run organization could resource an elder's ministry development to protect queer life. The same elder could weave another youth into his succession plan. Another elder told me of the family who lived in the home I purchased. Two youths discovered their shared heritage – they were cousins. My home is shared with youth in need of affordable housing. Others in our circle have done the same.

In our areas of hesitancy, I wedged myself in the spaces opening up for further questioning in our circle of how we move forward as a community. These questions of power, questions around resource distribution, questions around the state, questions around the structuring of our economies – these are the major preoccupations among nearly all oppressed people.

We are in need of spiritual healing, and more so, we are in need of social healing mediated through material. So, for those questions of resource, capital, material, statehood, borders – where is it that we should begin to demand concessions of people in power, understanding that the dialogue need not only be between folks who have faced violence? Perhaps there need not be dialogue with those who have been aggressors and causes of violence – it seems that no way that oppressed communities respond to the violence meted out against them is the "correct way" to respond to ongoing catastrophe.

As we youth unanimously (perhaps suspiciously) yielded much of the speaking space in our circle to those older than us, we have our own inquiry that should continue from this joint dialogue experience. For our participation to be authentic, what are other institutions' relationships with institutions of learning that are in dire need of transformation? Such transformation is essential to overturn their current impact of isolating us away from the public square where decisions are made, where we can influence the institutions we are quite questionably forced into.

We can insist on education that prioritizes space and freedom for young people to meaningfully participate as decision makers in collaboration with those granted access to the full autonomy of adulthood as we've socially constructed it. Those of us who are ready, as always, will be waiting in the Black autonomous hush harbours where political will and radical imagination meet.

Meet us there.

Notes

1 Evoking Belonging is a transdisciplinary practice conceived by Dr Dianne Regisford, which focuses on culture, racial justice, equity, and healing, through the lens of Ubuntu, for the enlivenment of Belonging for all communities.
2 The UbuntuSphere is a concept imagined and created by Dr Dianne Regisford in her doctoral research (Regisford, 2020).

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PART III

Architecture of Just Society and Communal Well-Being

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11

BUILDING THE ARCHITECTURE FOR TRAUMA-INFORMED SOCIETIES

Liberating Humanity's Deepest Capacity to Facilitate Healing at Scale

Thomas Hübl

Since 1990, when post-traumatic stress disorder was first recognized in the International Classification of Diseases, 10th Edition, and endorsed by the World Health Organization, interest in and research into the subject of psychological trauma have grown exponentially. While the medical and psychological communities were initially slow to embrace psychological trauma as core to so many forms of human disease and dysfunction, it seems society at large had very little difficulty catching on. Google searches for the word "trauma" have steadily risen over the last 20 years, peaking around the time of the COVID-19 pandemic (Google, n.d.). By 2022, *Vox* had designated "trauma" as the word of the decade (Pandell, 2022). Yet, despite overwhelming interest in the subject, its various causes, and real-world effects on human lives, there is still so much about trauma that we do not understand. As Peter Levine, PhD, American clinical psychologist and developer of Somatic Experiencing®, explains, trauma is the "most avoided, ignored, denied, misunderstood, and untreated cause of human suffering" (Levine, 2008). Despite the growing popularity of the subject, I believe this is still the case.

For example, even with increasing interest around topics like collective or historical trauma and the intergenerational transmission of trauma, many still conceptualize the underlying phenomenon as a primarily individual concern, and thus, a "private" matter. As a result, less is understood about the fundamentally shared or relational nature of traumatization, or the systemic and long-standing impacts of unattended personal, familial, and socio-cultural wounds. Yet, the more we study the strange and seemingly all-pervasive phenomenon of traumatization, the more we see how

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the cast-off subtle *substance* left behind by traumatic experiences accrues over time, becoming the sand in the engine of collective human affairs. In this way, the unconscious residue of unprocessed generational suffering formulates a kind of trauma or shadow matrix, a net of conditions that underlies humanity's non-emergent, ceaselessly repetitive social cycles – the patterns of behaviour at the root of societal conflict, disconnection, disaffection, and other poor social outcomes. Left unacknowledged, these residues create fractures in the social architecture, preventing the full expression of qualities like social cohesion, cooperation, and future innovation. Without these transformational capacities, institutional decay – and perhaps civilizational collapse – is inevitable.

This picture provides a deeper understanding of what complexity theorists Edgar Morin and Anne Kern first termed the *polycrisis*, referring to the cascade of multiple and seemingly intractable social challenges humanity faces at this time. As they write, there is "no single vital problem, but many vital problems, and it is this complex intersolidarity of problems, antagonisms, crises, uncontrolled processes, and the general crisis of the planet that constitutes the number one vital problem" (Morin & Kern, 1999). We see evidence of the polycrisis all around us: in the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, large-scale population displacement, continued social inequality and economic disparity, cyber insecurity, information wars, accelerating climate crisis, and in many other complex problems. As historian Adam Tooze told the World Economic Forum in 2008, "If you've been feeling confused and as though everything is impacting on you all at the same time, this is not a personal, private experience. This is actually a collective experience" (Chetty & Patel, 2023).

These mounting collective challenges require a sane and coherent global response; however, nearly everywhere in the world, social fragmentation and political polarization appear starker than ever. Nevertheless, as with any illness or disorder, to understand and coherently address the symptoms, one must first be willing to contemplate deeper root causes. While each set of systemic concerns involves countless tangible, real-world causal factors, an unseen root cause lies in the hidden substance of unhealed collective trauma, which manifests in perennial cycles of social disruption. To address the invisible roots, we must first understand the natural, biological mechanisms that underlie the evolutionary trauma response.

Understanding Trauma

When we speak of trauma at the individual level, we are really referring to an internal, sometimes emotional, often invisible response to any experience or series of experiences that were perceived as shocking, overwhelming, or destabilizing to one's sense of safety and psychological or physical

well-being. As Gabor Maté, MD, explains, trauma "is not what happens to you; it is what happens inside you as a result of what happens to you" (Bramley, 2023). Or as Peter Levine, PhD, writes, "Trauma is in the nervous system – not in the event" (Levine & Kline, 2007).

There are several broad categories of psychological trauma:

- **Acute trauma**. Results from a single distressing event, such as experiencing a natural disaster or violent assault.
- **Chronic trauma**. Arises from repeated and prolonged exposure to harmful situations, such as ongoing abuse or domestic violence.
- **Complex trauma**. Results from exposure to multiple or continuous traumatic events, often during the formative years, such as exposure to prolonged abuse or neglect. Complex trauma occurring early in life can leave someone especially vulnerable to attachment injury, making it difficult to recognize and sustain healthy relationships later in life.
- **Vicarious trauma**. Occurs when individuals are exposed indirectly to the trauma of others, usually through relationships or interactions with traumatized people, such as in a workplace setting, as in the roles of first responders, healthcare professionals, crisis aid workers, etc.

Generally speaking, the various symptoms of trauma fall along a spectrum that reflects the nervous system's ancient, evolutionary stress response, known commonly as fight, flight, or freeze. When confronted with a powerful stressor, the sympathetic nervous system engages the body's defences, signalling the adrenal glands to release adrenaline and cortisol, and fuelling up heart rate and blood pressure. These tactical biological measures prepare the body to outrun or fight off a potential threat – or when that is not an option, to "freeze" or immobilize the body. At one end of this spectrum, the nervous system utilizes hyper-arousal (e.g., hypervigilance, aggression, anxiety) and at the other end, hypo-arousal (e.g., avoidance, numbness, or shut down). The full spectrum reflects the body's natural, intelligent evolutionary defences, which arose over millions of years of life.

Fundamentally, these defence strategies are responsible for our (mammalian) evolutionary success up to now. When trauma first occurs, any of these defences is adaptive; it serves survival. The problem occurs when the same set of defences continues to repeat long after the initial threat has passed. Anxiety and hypervigilance, for example, help you recognize the presence of danger and act to save yourself. But in the course of ordinary life, when no real danger is present, these same strategies become a drain – not just on the body and mind, but on your deepest internal resources. When the otherwise natural survival response becomes locked into the nervous system and all too easily activated by seemingly

ambiguous conditions in the environment, the same cascade of defences has now become *mal*adaptive, and we call them the symptoms of unhealed trauma. It is as if the initial shock creates a skip in the vinyl record so that the body, mind, and emotions are now playing out of time. The picture we often see depicted is of a traumatized person who is largely shut down except in moments of sudden and overwhelming anxiety or consuming anger, for example, which makes work, family, community life, and relationships difficult.

Beyond the pain and confusion of post-traumatic symptoms, there is no greater impact of psychological trauma than its power to disrupt the natural order of human development. An infant or young child exposed to psychological abuse or neglect may experience multiple types of developmental injury or delay, including exposure to neurological, emotional, and behavioural functioning. As the child grows, they may struggle to form attachment bonds, and they may express difficulties with thinking and learning, grapple with negative self-concept, and lack the ability to think clearly about or plan for their future (Cruz et al., 2022). Throughout the child's lifespan, they may struggle financially and encounter a greater risk of addiction, mental health concerns, or physical illness (Webster, 2022). The potential for these outcomes is heightened merely by the presence of complex trauma, largely due to its power to hinder and even regress the natural developmental process.

Psychological trauma is often unspeakable, even invisible. In the moment it occurs, severe trauma creates a fragmentation of the self or life force, splitting off a moment in time and creating a displacement from the present. In response to such experiences, the human psyche developed powerful mechanisms for survival – namely, denial, amnesia, dissociation, and suppression. Both victims and oppressors, however, are driven by the unconscious motivation to forget, bury, and disown. Nevertheless, as William Faulkner famously wrote, "The past is never dead. It's not even past" (Faulkner, 1950). The split-off fragments of the unconscious past and self must be reintegrated through conscious presence in order for the human soul to be healed and made whole. Without work in this direction, the traumatized, be they individuals, families, communities, or societies, will continue to struggle with some limitation to their natural potential.

Symptoms of Societal Trauma

Collective trauma refers to the psychological and emotional impact experienced by a group of people as a result of a shared traumatic event or series of events. While individual trauma is personal and specific, collective trauma is broad and often systemic. The residue of collective trauma

influences entire communities and societies, altering their cultural, social, and emotional fabric. Collective trauma can occur in the wake of many types of social experiences, such as natural disasters; large-scale accidents; pandemics and other large-scale medical crises; community violence; mass shootings; all forms of human trafficking; forced migration; terrorism; gender, racial, ethnic, religious, and other forms of targeted violence; spiritual abuse; war; genocide; systemic oppression; and poisoning and theft of generational lands. Furthermore, acts of cultural erasure and denial of harm compound the communal and generational trauma experience for survivors. The inherently shared nature of such experiences embeds them into the collective consciousness, shaping group identities and affecting the health and developmental progress of a given community or region over time. For this reason, unaddressed social trauma becomes both multigenerational and systemic, broadly impacting the communal structures and ways of life of a people.

Enduring social and historical traumas are written into the code of culture and reflected in societal conditions today. At the collective level, symptoms like hypervigilance, aggression, anxiety, dissociation, numbness, and shutdown take different shapes: militancy, hawkishness, heightened surveillance, political violence, bureaucratic ineptitude, systemic sluggishness, lack of innovation, social regression, grid failure. Paradoxically, even wealthy and powerful nations struggle against infrastructure erosion, institutional corruption, and many other forms of interpersonal, organizational, and societal dysfunction.

Collective bodies develop or mature in stages, much the same way individual people do. As such, unresolved collective trauma has the power to stall or even regress the natural unfolding of large populations, perhaps even slowing the development of human consciousness itself. When past abuses are not rectified in the public consciousness, the residual energy of those experiences accrues in the collective shadow or trauma matrix, a propagative absence into which everything we are that we cannot yet own – the seeds of tribal enmity, outrage, fear, antipathy, and disgust, but also the potential for our highest future becoming. Frozen and buried out of sight, this psychic substance remains hidden from awareness until activated by external conditions and erupts to the surface again.

Despite humankind's dazzling potential for creaturely brilliance – feats of imagination in art, music, dance, literature, architecture, technology – in our short time on Earth, humans are responsible for terrible acts of bloodshed, oppression, and genocide. Just in the last 120 years, we have enacted a reign of technological terror unlike any in recorded memory. Such human-perpetrated traumas have a long history, however, and most were never captured in evidence on film or in writing. Whether or not we

come to know of our ancestors' suffering, the residue of their unprocessed experiences is etched on the collective psyche, where it continues to influence the course of events and behaviour.

Yet, we see in the symptoms and cycles of trauma one of the more mysterious and fundamental workings of nature and the human soul: the eternal capacity for healing and restoration.

The Hidden Wisdom in the Trauma Response

It seems that nature has devised a sacred remedy, one which ensures that the fragmented, dissociated, and disowned energies of past trauma are eventually reintegrated into the life of the organism and restored back into the flow of evolutionary forward momentum. This occurs through an unconscious cycling function, by which the shadow layers mysteriously resurface, offering repeated opportunities to be consciously confronted, explored, and thereby healed. "Many traumatized people expose themselves, seemingly compulsively, to situations reminiscent of the original trauma", writes Bessel van der Kolk, Dutch psychiatrist and author of *The Body Keeps the Score*. "These behavioral reenactments are rarely consciously understood to be related to earlier life experiences" (van der Kolk, 1989). We see this most often in the lives of people who flee unhealthy relationships only to find themselves involved in similar entanglements, unaware of the forces that seem to draw them repeatedly towards the same dynamics. A similar phenomenon is observed at the collective level, for example, when a people group endures atrocity only to repeat similar patterns of oppression against another group or nation mere decades down the line.

Freud called this tendency *Wiederholungszwang*, or "repetition compulsion", theorizing that unconscious retraumatization experiences are the attempt of the individual to seek conscious resolution to the original distressing experience. When deeply traumatic experiences are not fully processed and integrated, humans are seemingly bound to repeat them endlessly in myriad new forms. This is the mystery at the heart of philosopher George Santayana's words, "Those who cannot remember the past are doomed to repeat it" (Santayana, 1980).

Interestingly, the word "karma" comes from the Sanskrit word *karman,* meaning action, effect, or fate (Oxford English Dictionary, 2024). What we ordinarily think of as destiny is in fact the unintegrated past, our unconscious and unattended trauma – a form of false future programming based on shadows of the unhealed past within. The point of these karmic cycles, however, is not punitive, but restorative. It is the impulse of life to become whole: to re-*member* as an act of anamnesis and integration. Some measure of suffering and discomfort often accompanies the

initiatory process, yet at each stage, there is an invitation to more deeply awaken.

The True Cost of the Unaddressed Wound

As we entered the digital era and shifted towards an information technology-centred global economy, human events took on an unprecedented level of intensity and complexity – and the transformational changes have yet to slow down. When so much change occurs in an environment of social fragmentation, underlying traumas, regardless of how long buried or frozen, are forced to the surface of human affairs – and this is the context in which we collectively find ourselves. Again, to quote Tooze: "If you've been feeling confused and as though everything is impacting on you all at the same time, this is … actually a collective experience".

Amidst cascading large-scale social challenges, there is an urgency to consider and address root causes. We know too much about the near- and long-term consequences of unhealed trauma to continue behaving as if the world's civil, political, environmental, technological, and other social problems can be solved in the future through some means not yet devised; we must first attend to the unresolved psychic burdens of the past. These challenges have cascaded as they have precisely because the past has not been settled.

Consider the recent example of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Despite scientists predicting for decades that another worldwide virus was inevitable, most communities were taken entirely by surprise. Even in prosperous nations, the hospitals, governmental bodies, and other vital institutions struggled to contend with pressures caused by the wave of sudden infections and shutdowns. For a time, the global supply chain buckled. Perhaps the most interesting consequence of this powerful shared stress experience was seen in the intense and polarizing disagreements around both the science and practice of masking and vaccines, a potent divide that continues years on from the initial occurrence. Family relationships, long-held friendships, and professional connections were fractured as a result. Researchers are also noting other negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as a rise in psychiatric symptoms like suicidality (Pathirathna et al., 2022).

From a national and organizational perspective, there was a profound lack of failure-readiness or failure-resilience. For many, the tendency towards blame and chaos was stronger than towards learning and adaptation, even though scientists had predicted a global pandemic as inevitable. Leaders in every nation were aware of the dangers. Smart people with capable organizations and useful technologies were available to plan and prepare, and many had done so. So, the question is: What prevented us

from more successfully rising to meet the pandemic challenge we knew was coming and for which many had prepared?

I believe the answer is internal, psychological, and unconscious. We could not adequately address the present in 2020–2022, etc., because the *past* was standing in our way. Our vision was impaired, distorted by the cloud of collective denial, dissociation, disconnection, and separation. We were operating from the repetitive dysfunction of the unhealed past, which inhibits the human capacity to collectively presence and sense-make what lies within and before us. And what happens if we do not take time and space to presence our collective experiences? Consider another mass event that kicked off shortly after the pandemic began.

In May 2020, George Floyd, a Black American, was murdered in Minneapolis at the hands of a white police officer. His brutal death was captured on video by onlookers, posted to the Internet, and instantly shared with millions. The 8-minute and 48-second video induced a wave of secondary trauma that ignited the largest racial justice protests in the history of the United States (Sanchez, 2023). The power of this shared experience spread across the world, initiating deeper awareness around the realities of historical racial trauma impacting people of colour for centuries and the oppressive systems and practices that continue to impact lives in the nation today.

The intensity of the George Floyd protests demonstrated the power of unresolved historical, yet ever-present, trauma – what is not healed will continue to resurface, and mass traumatization demands a collective accounting. Nevertheless, a not insignificant percentage of media and civic responses blamed Floyd for his own death, accused civil and nonviolent protesters of criminal violence and looting, and politicized the ensuing murder trial. The scale of group denial and projection illustrates again the power of trauma to inhibit or regress the natural development of social consciousness.

At least in part, these starkly opposed social forces are themselves reflective of a collective immune response, and through them, the larger society is attempting to work through its present-day and historical traumas. The good news is that there is a natural, inbuilt healing function at the level of the collective nervous system, one that reflects the very same mechanisms of the individual brain and body. Neuroplasticity refers to the brain's remarkable ability to reorganize itself by forming new neural connections throughout the lifespan. This capability is fundamental to the brain's resilience against injury, stress, and psychological trauma. When a region of the brain is injured, such as through a stroke or sudden accident, neuroplasticity allows other parts of the brain to compensate by taking over functions that were once handled by the damaged region. This

whole-brain adaptability ensures functionality and accelerates recovery, even while the injured areas are compromised.

In the context of stress and psychological trauma, neuroplasticity is a secret safety mechanism. With sufficient social support in place, neuroplasticity allows even a badly hurting brain to modify its wiring and potentially transform the way it responds to new experiences and challenges. This flexibility gives individuals an opportunity, with attention, effort, and practice, to develop coping strategies, recover from emotional distress, and even transform negative experiences into sources of strength. Neuroplasticity also underpins learning and memory, meaning the brain can constantly refine its responses and adapt to new environments or situations. This ongoing capacity for change makes the brain extraordinarily resilient, allowing it to recover, adapt, and thrive even in the face of significant challenges. All of these qualities reflect the higher-order systems intelligence found in nature. If the brain and body can reorganize after injury in such a miraculous way, surely *many* minds working together can achieve new levels of systems awareness and collective healing.

So, what is preventing us?

The burden of unmet social trauma mirrors effects in the lives of individuals and families, but at the societal scale. Identity disintegration becomes social fragmentation, and relational conflicts become social polarization, communal apathy, indifference, and disorder, or worse, social conflict, crime, and violence. While we tend to assume that the responsibility for healing individual trauma belongs to victims and families, when we look at our communities, it becomes clear that the responsibility for healing, care, and social repair is necessarily mutual. If we wish to live in a civil society, then as citizens, it is our innate responsibility[1] to put in place the entities and structures that allow us to work actively towards the integration of our cultural wounds.

Trauma leaves its imprint on and in our bodies, altering the nervous system and impacting our emotional and perceptual responses. In the same way, an accumulation of unmet personal, ancestral, and collective trauma creates dissociated or *absenced* – anesthetized, shut down, and disconnected – areas in the collective body. When an individual carries unhealed trauma inside, they are unable to fully inhabit the body, and, over time, this can impact them physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. When *billions* of people hold trauma inside, a large portion of humanity is disembodied, disconnected from itself, and alienated from nature. In lieu of healthful, sustainable partnerships with one another and the planet, we see recurring social conflicts and the exploitation of the natural world. Additionally, trauma creates a fundamental sense of scarcity, which leads to people and nations fighting over what they view as limited resources. Paradoxically, despite these scarcity-driven conflicts, there is a profound

degree of wastefulness everywhere in the modern world. This is because of the way unhealed trauma distorts perception and delays (psychological and emotional) development, disconnecting us further from ourselves and the world around us.

Case in point: despite overwhelming evidence and urgency, nations the world over struggle to agree on and implement adequate climate change measures. Even in wealthy nations, finding the political will to agree that such measures are important is repeatedly met with massive resistance in the form of denial, suspicion, disinformation, and indifference. A large share of that resistance exists due to centuries of unhealed collective trauma, which inhibits our developmental potential by instead freezing, suppressing, and disintegrating the human psyche ("psyche" comes from the Greek word for "soul").

As human beings, however, we are not simply on the planet; we *are* the planet. And in very large part, the climate crisis is an expression of our unmet collective trauma, resulting in the persistent mind/body (or life/planet) dualism that has dominated Western thinking for the better part of 400 years. This separation between interiors and exteriors – between the mind/heart and the body/nature – is a psychic root cause of the environmental crisis (and many others) in which we find ourselves. Whatever its material solutions – limiting greenhouse gas emissions, sustainable land use and agriculture, protecting and restoring ecosystems, investing in carbon capture and renewable technology, and so on – we cannot adequately address the symptoms without going to the underlying cause, which I propose exists at the level of our unaddressed historical wounds and the psychic injuries they leave behind. Therefore, to confront the root problem beneath the climate crisis, we must teach and practice trauma-informed awareness and begin to innovate and scale social therapies for *collective* healing, much as we have been doing for trauma healing at the individual level over the past two-plus decades.

The Case for Trauma-Restorative Social Architectures

In the last 30 years, our understanding of the science of trauma has grown considerably, and with luck, will continue to deepen. Many important therapeutic modalities have been developed and demonstrated to have efficacy in assisting individuals with healing after traumatic experiences. Research into methods that both buffer against post-traumatic harm and help to restore impacted lives afterward has been fruitful and will continue to expand. But there are likely many more benefits to this kind of work. Skilful trauma-informed approaches not only help to prevent injury but also encourage deeper authenticity and new levels of communication,

collaboration, and collective intelligence. Such practices are not about reliving terrible experiences or focusing on yesterday, but are much more an ethos of attunement, connection, and genuine human relating. And this is why they work. Our task now is to scale this wisdom to meet the needs of ailing communities by building out healing architectures for social repair and future flourishing.

In functioning communities, when news goes out that a person has been badly hurt, service-oriented citizens surround that individual with care and assistance, extending outreach and ongoing support. This is a function of the healthy collective nervous system, a balanced community immune response. We would not design municipalities without hospitals, police departments, fire stations, and other emergency response services to attend to those who are sick and in crisis. Likewise, a few populous places in the world lack religious and other spiritual organizations to meet the inner needs of their communities. As a social species, we consider all such institutions a matter of civic duty, a shared moral and spiritual responsibility, and all must confront human trauma on a direct and indirect basis.

Now, in a time of growing volatility and uncertainty, even ordinary public services like schools and universities, transportation services (e.g., buses, trains, and airlines), economic institutions, and virtually every other type of organization must contend with heightened social tensions and potentially traumatizing events. In the digital age, one need not even leave home to find oneself exposed to unintended psychic injury.

Collective healing principles and modalities are vitally needed for communities to integrate the wisdom of trauma, so that instead of division, polarization, and breakdown, we can begin to collaborate from a place of resilience, strength, and renewal. And it is worth our time, energy, and effort to do so. Unhealed post-traumatic stress is shown to negatively impact physical, mental, and emotional health, and these impacts create economic, not just social, burdens for people and communities. Thus, it is practical – indeed, *essential* – to consider the short- and long-term benefits of minimizing these costs by addressing trauma more directly at the social level. And the reasons to do so are all around us. For example, studies indicate that trauma-informed interventions support emotion regulation in at-risk youth populations, which is linked to reduced criminal recidivism (Dumornay, 2022). By creating skilful trauma-informed social architectures at all levels of society, I believe crime would decrease over time and healthcare costs would lessen.

Attending wisely to collective trauma involves acknowledging and validating the experiences of affected groups, fostering communal healing

processes, and addressing the underlying causes of trauma. Group work must be facilitated in an environment of psychological safety and trust, and can be aided by awareness-based practices, like facilitated group presencing, shared storytelling, generative listening (Scharmer, 2013), and other transformational social arts and practices.

To paraphrase Krishnamurti, it is impossible to remain individually healthy in a profoundly unhealthy society, as it simply requires too much energy. Resistance to social healing is itself a symptom of the original trauma, and it requires care and holding to be processed. To face what lies ahead, we must heal what came before. To do so, we must create cultures of well-being, establishing architectures of care, building out the infrastructure to meet, hold, address, and process collective trauma so that communities and societies can flourish as the intelligent living systems they are, not merely "function" or "operate" as if machines. We would not design municipalities without hospitals. For the same reasons, it is irresponsible to leave unattended the structural mechanisms of historical and cultural trauma. It is time to innovate across the organizational space by upgrading the work we do in all sectors of society, incorporating trauma-wise, awareness-based practices.

To be trauma-informed is to be trauma-aware. It is to recognize that whatever part of the human story has not been included, acknowledged, and appropriately sorted, but has instead been rejected, denied, and suppressed – will inevitably resurface to be reenacted in various forms, practically in perpetuity. Is it right for us to continue avoiding what is uncomfortable and defer our responsibility by passing down all that unclaimed pain to our children and succeeding generations? If so, what hope do they have of meeting the future against the accelerating social crises ahead? As famed Swiss poet, philosopher, and linguist Jean Gebser wrote in his 1949 masterwork, *The Ever-Present Origin*: "Before we can discern the new, we must know the old".

Piloting Collective Healing Initiatives

Just as individuals need therapeutic support to help them attend to psychological health after a crisis, communities should have healing support designed to address collective psychological wounds and their manifestations. Such healing systems do not currently exist as an integrated part of contemporary society. This is why I am passionate about the creation of pilot initiatives designed to innovate cultural healing architectures as a collaboration between public institutions and governmental organizations – such as those responsible for national healthcare and education services – together with valued non-governmental organizations, innovative brands

and corporations, philanthropic groups, and passionate thought leaders willing to champion such leading-edge, but vitally necessary, ideas.

The aim of social healing architectures would be to function as the conscious immune system (i.e., the awakened self-healing mechanism) of the collective with which we address communal, regional, national, and global systemic traumas for the purpose of facilitating group integration and support. As we undertake this work, we seek to transform community injuries into new soil for post-traumatic growth and future wisdom.

As Carl Jung once wrote, "The psychological rule says that when an inner situation is not made conscious, it happens outside, as fate" (Jung, 1979). This "rule" applies equally in the lives of people as it does in the lives of nations. By making conscious our unintegrated past, we liberate massive portions of human potential that had been anesthetized and frozen, freeing them to become new growth, development, and creativity. By designing healing architectures that invite collective sense-making and coherence-building in the context of high-competency, deeply attuned group facilitation, and which utilize creative and healing arts – such as music, storytelling, movement, poetry, healing ceremonies, and other culturally specific practices – we will begin to create new neuropathways of restoration throughout the collective nervous system. These initiatives would take on the work of broader public education and leadership training and development around trauma-informed and restorative healing practices, with the work done in communities resonating outward, opening new social potentials, locally and globally.

The vast degree of systemic trauma present in the world today requires the formation of social healing architectures. Entire populations and all areas of society and culture – whether in the West or East, in rich nations or poor – are touched by the impacts of unhealed historical trauma. Below is a list of potential objectives as we work to erect and pilot social healing initiatives.

- Establish cross-sector collaboration across multiple pillars of society – e.g., healthcare, education, economy, social sciences, legal, and military – focused on a common agenda, shared goals and values, mutually reinforcing activities, and continuous communication.
- Develop innovative training and education in the large-scale facilitated healing and integration of systemic trauma (leading to the development of new academic disciplines and the creation of new jobs).
- Plan and strategize the establishment of social spaces where people can take part in large-scale facilitated integration work and community-focused healing events.

- Establish a core international advisory body to oversee and ensure the highest integrity, transparency, and accountability among initiative leaders, facilitators, therapists, and organizers.
- Open the work to near-term and longitudinal academic research and use the science to guide future social healing change efforts for the benefit of humanity.
- Pilot international restoration and restorative processes between nations with the aim to aid in the healing of residual trauma left behind by war, colonialism, mass migration, gender and racial oppression, and other large-scale social challenges.
- Launch preemptive social healing movements (coalition building, strategy planning, advocacy, science-based research, government involvement, advocacy, mass communication, etc.) in preparation for future mass migration brought on by climate change, with the aim of helping minimize further collective trauma and potential future conflict.
- Organize experts, advocacy groups, and policymakers around the drafting and implementation of trauma-informed policy for the benefit of communities and nations.
- Develop a task force that tracks, supports, and shares the ethical learning that comes from collective trauma healing and global restoration.

Keep in mind that this list is intended to help us imagine. For something so new (and urgently necessary) as social healing architectures to come into being, it will require the creative will and collective intelligence of many minds and hearts coming together around a common aim. By collaborating on these and other objectives, over time, we may expect to see: a reduction in crime, mental health crises, and civil litigation; a reduction in racism, antisemitism, gender violence, armed conflict, and warfare; reduced strain on hospitals, police, and courts, and a requisite reduction in expenditures by those agencies. At the same time, we may expect to see improved community relations; improved physical and mental health across all ages and demographics; strengthened ecosystem awareness and improved collaboration around climate action; improved biodiversity and other benchmarks for ecological health; increased momentum towards (internal and external) developmental advancement; and new areas of innovation, well-being, and societal flourishing.

Imagine, for a moment, how even a few of these changes could alter the story of humanity's future from any we have recently envisioned. And is not the power of healing transformation at the heart of the very best hero's journey?

Presencing True Futures

The same *Vox* article that coined "trauma" the word of the decade bemoaned its seeming overuse and abundant misapplication. While these are valid concerns, I believe any social trend in the direction of trauma awareness is a net positive. The consequence of the unhealed past is its tremendous power to distort our perception of the present and disrupt our ability to meet the future. Trauma keeps us in repetitive programming, where "tomorrow" is never a genuine new day, but a reiteration of past themes. In that cycle, we pass on our hurts to others in an endless cycle. And as theologian Richard Rohr writes, "If we do not transform our pain, we will most assuredly transmit it" (Rohr, 2018). When we heal from trauma, we transmute our suffering into wisdom.

Over millions of years, the human nervous system evolved this brilliant evolutionary defence against emotional shock – to repress, suppress, and deny from awareness what is too overwhelming and painful to feel, and cannot be changed alone. But we have also evolved the capacity to later reintegrate those experiences – to re-member the past, however dark, and to heal, restore, and make ourselves whole again, or anew. As such, people impacted by devastating pain and violence have managed to come through their experiences with tremendous resilience and solidarity. Survival was a feat in itself, but they did more than survive – they overcame, and they flourished.

At this time in our history, we must learn to access this strength as a core capacity of human systems intelligence – a fundamental transformation we can consciously and collectively undertake. By creating ways to come together, to witness and receive one another's pain without judgement, minimization, or shame, we can discover our essential unity. It is not only about healing, you see, but about growing up as a species. It is about consciously evolving who we are by choosing who we will become.

Note

1 To be response-*able*, i.e., empowered and indebted to respond.

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12

ARCHITECTURE, ART AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Lord John Alderdice[1]

Many peacebuilding strategies in divided societies begin by designing new political structures, presuming that communities will act rationally within them. Yet, as decades of conflict in Northern Ireland and other communities sabotaged by injustice have clearly shown, communities scarred by collective trauma rarely follow rational paths or respond to logic perceived as reasonable by outsiders. Instead, peace processes and healing become possible only when we recognize the profound historical, emotional, and cultural dimensions underpinning community relations. Two transformative practices have emerged from this recognition: 1) dialogue aimed explicitly at articulating deeply held emotional narratives; and 2) creative arts serving as a medium to explore, express, and ultimately heal collective trauma. This chapter draws upon my personal experiences in Northern Ireland and elsewhere to illustrate how consciously integrating emotional dialogue and artistic expression into community architecture provides a pathway towards reconciliation, collective healing, and sustainable peace.

Architecture

Architecture as a motif or model has been used to describe work undertaken to achieve just societies and collective well-being. But what architecture? The ideal kind? Or the kind designed for those who would live their lives within the space?

Take the house my wife and I live in as an example. It was built in the 1600s. I like to sit by the fire on a winter evening and think about what

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may have been going on in our village hundreds of years ago. Those were very different times, but people were still struggling with war and peace, sickness and health, and trying to keep their families warm and well-fed. When we inherit an old building, it will likely have all sorts of quirks. It may have things that don't work very well – a leaky roof or faulty plumbing – but the question for us is: what do we do about it? Do we simply allow ourselves to get used to it? Or do we try to change it for the better? Do we adapt our way of living to the place in which we live, or do we try to change the place in which we live so that it fits with how we want to conduct our lives?

Our eldest son, Stephen, is an architect, and it has been interesting to watch him engage with clients when deciding how to help them improve the design of spaces and how they live their lives. He usually spends some time with the client, observing how they live in their home and asking them how they would like to live. The client will often start by saying, "We have seen this kind of furniture and those windows and so on, so perhaps we should have them". Stephen will respond, "Before you start telling me about design, please tell me about the way you currently live, and how you would like to live, and then we will propose a design that fits your ideal way of life".

That was the way it worked with our peace process in Northern Ireland. We did not import a peace process from somewhere else. We started by exploring the various sets of disturbed historic relationships that affected our community. We then developed a peace process with architects who recognized those disturbed relationships and the actors involved. We then got people to engage with one another and construct a new way forward together. It is not so much about the ideal structure of society, or the architecture of where and how you live, as it is about how you *wish* to live. Once you are clear about that, it is possible to start thinking about producing societal structures that will mirror and facilitate that way of living.

Architecture is about creating structures within which we can live. At a personal or family level, that is a house – a home. At a community level, it means addressing the kinds of relationships we have and want to have between the different sections of our communities. Most people want to find a way of living together that engenders mutually enriching relationships between groups and communities. The question is, what approaches can we use to make this a reality?

The Limits of Rationality

When I was growing up in Northern Ireland and coming into my teens in the late 1960s, everything was beginning to break down into violence. The questions for me, as for most of us at various points in our lives, were:

"How do I understand this? How do I make some kind of sense of what is going on? Is this the way I want our society to live in peace?"

The political science explanations current at that time assumed that people functioned as rational actors operating in their own best socioeconomic and power interests, whether as individuals or as communities. However, that assumption did not seem to fit with the reality that I was observing. Instead, in my community, people, as individuals and groups, were harming themselves. They weren't operating in their best socioeconomic or political interests. Nobody was gaining any more power, and everything was being wrecked and destroyed. Ordinary people's lives were being disrupted, and the elites weren't getting what they wanted either.

I decided that I needed to find some way to understand the reasons for this damaging behaviour. It did not seem *rational* to me, but there had to be a reason. I thought that if I could understand why individual people did self-damaging things, then perhaps I could begin to understand why a whole community acted in that way. I decided to go into medicine, psychiatry, and then psychoanalysis to try to find the answers. As my training progressed, I started to treat patients and train other colleagues to do so. I also began to take my developing knowledge and experience into political life.

By the time I came into politics, everything was being damaged and disrupted in Northern Ireland, and that included the political system/structure. The British and Irish governments had been trying to work together, but the provincial institutions had broken down – the main political parties weren't meeting and talking with each other, and the army and the police were barely containing the terrorism and violence conducted by paramilitary organizations from both the Catholic Nationalist/Republican side of the community and from the Protestant Unionist/Loyalist side. Some politicians struggled along, attempting to keep a semblance of democratic debates alive; others operated only in their own section of the community. There were those who had abandoned all hope that democratic politics could solve anything, and some turned to violence.

That violence continued for many years, and we were at a point where the situation almost broke down into open civil war. I was asking myself, "What is happening here and how can it be addressed more satisfactorily?" It became clear to me that while we like to think of ourselves as operating rationally, and indeed, one of the consequences of the Enlightenment was that people believed that most healthy human beings functioned rationally, in fact, many of the most important decisions we make in life are not particularly rational at all. They are mostly based on the power of

emotion. It is how we *feel* about things that drives many of our decisions, more than what we think about them.

One of the challenges in my work as a young psychiatrist was that the kinds of things that you could test through traditional forms of rational scientific research and experimentation – double-blind crossover trials and the like – bore little relation to what was really important to people in their lives. Such research was not the way to find out whether you loved your partner and, more importantly, whether they loved you or somebody else more than you. It did not really tell you what kind of job you should be doing or whether you enjoyed yourself, nor did it explain why you found a particular painting more beautiful than another. It didn't explain music very much either, although later we came to understand a little more about the importance and value of music. It seemed to me that I had to find a way of understanding the power of feelings, of emotion, and not merely to regard feelings as a nuisance or a distraction that we could set aside so that we could simply operate on a rational basis. Indeed, as time has gone on, it has become clearer that although emotions can operate in a destructive way, they can also operate in a very powerfully constructive way too.

One of my colleagues at Oxford, Dominic Johnson, has written a book about political strategy in which he shows that, contrary to received wisdom, if people operate all the time by making rational decisions about political strategy, based on assumed cost-benefit analysis, they may well lose. However, if they are driven by commitment to a cause, however unlikely it may seem, they may succeed (Johnson, 2020). He points out in his book that if George Washington had rationally weighed up the costs and benefits of the war against the British, with their professional army and massive resources, he would have given up and gone back to his estate. However, he refused to accept the rational argument that the enormous army and resources against him and his colleagues would inevitably be victorious, even after he and his forces had been defeated a number of times. That determination and commitment resulted in the achievement of American independence – an outcome that changed the world.

Such outcomes are contrary to the widely held view that if only we could think rationally all the time and deal with all our problems rationally, we would resolve them to our advantage. I do not think there is good evidence that operating rationally in social questions is a guarantee of success. It seems to me that a rationalistic approach often fails to address some of our most important questions, while the power of emotion can give us the energy, dynamism, and creativity to take things forward.

Culture as Ways of Being

When I decided to get involved with politics, I wrote to the various political parties in Northern Ireland. Of the five main parties, the one that I chose to join was the Alliance Party because, in our context, dealing with the deep division between Protestants and Catholics was the most important political challenge, and in the Alliance Party (as its name suggests), I could engage with people from all sides of the community.

Initially, I did what I, and everybody else, thought was reasonable, which was *not* to attempt to connect with those who were involved in the violence. I assumed, as did most people, that these groups were not interested in engaging in dialogue but rather committed to the use of physical force to bring the results that they wanted. Instead, I would talk with all the other political parties that were trying to do something using democratic politics alone. The only problem with this approach was that it did not work. This was because the people on the extremes – those doing the violence – could always, quite literally, blow the process apart and destroy all the things that we were trying to achieve.

It became clear just how strong the emotions were. Art and cultural emblems demonstrated this – not the kind of art that we have in exhibitions and galleries, but the murals painted on the gable walls of houses in Loyalist and Republican areas. People would use those walls as the canvas to demonstrate what was really important to them – what was powerful, potent, and significant about their history and about the current conflict. Music was another way of demonstrating how they felt as a community – not the sophisticated music of orchestras and concert performances, but the music of marching bands. Young men, and some young women too, would devote a great deal of time and effort to raise money for the purchase of instruments and uniforms. They would polish up the brass buttons on their jackets and give time to rehearse together. Even though they could not read a music score, they could play their tunes with passionate enthusiasm. In Northern Ireland, there are many young bandsmen and women who march and play their tunes in a very passionate and robust way. You could not fail to understand what they are feeling through their music.

When I was training and working in psychiatry and psychotherapy, I engaged with people as persons – not bundles of signs and symptoms, but people who were expressing their troubles in words and actions characteristic of their personality. If I wanted to engage them in the healing process, I had to understand not only why they fell ill with these particular symptoms at this time in their lives, but what kind of person they were. I started to do something similar as a politician – I engaged with individual personalities, of course, but I also had to appreciate the culture of the community. From a psychological perspective, culture is the group equivalent

of personality. Culture is often understood as the songs, the paintings, the national costume, and foods characteristic of a community, but these are the symbols or emblems of culture. Culture itself is "being-in-the-world" of a community of people. It is a shared experience and a shared way of "being" in community. We find all sorts of ways of expressing it and conveying that "way-of-being". Those of us who want to help people in conflict, communities affected by disturbed historic relations with other communities, need to listen to these expressions of emotion and come to an emotional understanding of them.

Cultural diplomacy is about finding ways to engage with communities and those who represent them, *across* the boundaries of their different ways of being, relating, and expressing themselves and *with* their conflicting beliefs and feelings. There are profound differences between communities and cultures because there are different ways of "being-in-the-world". It's not as though if we all found a way of listening and engaging with each other we would find agreement. We will not all agree because, as John Gray, writing about Isaiah Berlin's "value pluralism", puts it, "human values are irreducibly multiple" (Gray, 1996/2003).

Cultural diplomacy, then, is not just about finding ways to engage with those with a different background; it should also involve finding how we can express our disagreements respectfully. I often say that the achievement of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland was not that we found a way of agreeing, but that we found a way of disagreeing without killing each other, and that required us to find a way of listening respectfully, or at least tolerantly, to "the Other".

Isaiah Berlin's idea of value pluralism was not that we would all have the same hymn sheet, and certainly not that we would all agree, but that we would understand that our perspective of the world was not the total answer, and that the other person had a valid way of seeing, experiencing, and describing their world in words, actions, and in art of all kinds. I would go beyond that (and beyond where many other people might be prepared to follow) by maintaining that without the contribution of "the Other", my understanding of the world is incomplete.

One of my psychoanalytic friends put it very concisely. Edward Shapiro said that what he had learned over many years working with individuals and communities in conflict was that when he met someone with whom he profoundly disagreed, the key question he had to ask himself was: "What are they right about?" One may be able to write volumes about what they are wrong about, but what we need to understand about the person and the group with whom we disagree is why they are so passionately committed to something that seems so foreign or unacceptable. In our world of modernity, for example, one major challenge is to understand that

Indigenous peoples have an appreciation of the world that often appears to be in conflict with a scientific understanding (as we understand science) and a modern way of governing (as we understand governance). However, if we listen carefully, we may find that they still remember important things about our world and its mysteries that we have forgotten.

I remember talking with an Indigenous chief on the west coast of America. He complained to me about how environmentalists were destroying the world. I said that I expected that they saw it differently and asked him what was wrong. He said, "I had an argument with this environmental official and complained that they were stopping us hunting. The environmentalist said, 'I'm protecting the environment', and I told him, 'I'm part of the environment, and you're not protecting me'". They had very different views of "the environment". The official saw himself as a steward of the environment. The Indigenous chief saw himself as a very small part of a living universe, and for him, it was about having a relationship with the rest of that universe. His "world" and "way of life" were being destroyed by the environmentalist. Listening to that perspective challenged and added to my understanding of the world I lived in, and I have never forgotten it.

How do we listen to and engage with those who have a different culture, whether, as in my part of the world, they are Protestants and Catholics, Unionists and Nationalists; or whether, much more problematically, there is conflict between people from Indigenous communities and those from what we might think of as more advanced communities; or whether there are global political level tensions between China and the West? These are really tough challenges. Cultural diplomacy does not require that you simply present a group of people from the West with Chinese culture (or vice versa) and hope that they find it mildly interesting. Engaging with each other culturally is something more profound.

Embodiment and Arts

It is becoming clear that many of the experiences that we have, and the ways that we engage with and understand them, are actually impacting us physically as well as psychologically and intellectually.

My colleagues conducted functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) of the brains of young people and compared age-matched groups from stable, peaceful communities with those who had become involved in terrorism, and they discovered that the brain operates differently in people having different experiences of the world. If you live in a stable, peaceful, and prosperous part of the world, you will likely be thinking in a relatively rational fashion, weighing up your options using a form

of cost-benefit analysis. You will think about what will be helpful to you, and that guides your choices. However, some people operate not as "rational actors" but as "devoted actors" because in their community, they are experiencing existential challenges. During these times, decision making operates through different centres in the brain than when things are calm and non-threatening. The centre that those facing challenges are using makes judgements based on what they deem to be "right or wrong", whether or not it personally benefits them.

Another change is emerging in our understanding of how people experience things. When I was at school, we were told that when you got your genes from your parents, you had to be very careful to choose the right parents because once you got the genes, there was nothing you could do about it – they didn't change. What we have begun to discover is that while indeed the genes may not change, the way that they are *expressed* can be impacted by our experiences, and it may even be that this can be passed on to the next generation. So, for young children suffering from communal violence, or indeed family violence, even if the trauma were to stop tomorrow, the impact of the trauma would continue for the rest of their lives and would be physically coded in their brains. In other words, we are all the time discovering that we are much more complex beings than we realized, and that there is a lot more to us that we cannot necessarily understand through the traditional "Enlightenment" ways of science, rationality, and logic.

This is where art is so important because it goes beyond that way of thinking. When we are trying to express something that cannot be coded in a simple, linear, rational way, what do we do? We turn to music, art, drama, poetry, and literature, as well as religious or spiritual ways of engaging, because these are ways of expressing ourselves that go "beyond". There used to be an advertisement for Heineken beer that claimed it was the one beer that reached the places other beers didn't reach. Art, in the broadest sense, touches and expresses the parts that the rational self cannot reach or only reaches in a very partial way.

The fact that the arts and other such modalities have these properties was very important in our experience of dealing with the disturbed historical relations in Ireland. We were trying to get these people from very different cultures to work together. Some people realized this and started to use the arts quite early in the process. I remember a group called Different Drums of Ireland doing this. There are two kinds of drums in Ireland that are traditional expressions of the culture of the two communities. Unionists have a huge, deafening drum called a Lambeg drum. The other drum, a single skin drum called a Bodhrán, was more associated with Irish Nationalist musical groups and is usually played as part of

a folk group. Different Drums brought together a group of musicians to play these two very different kinds of drums, representing two different and opposing traditions, along with musicians singing and playing other instruments, including the tin whistle and the Uilleann or elbow pipes. It was a marvellous cultural expression of diversity working in an enriching rather than damaging way.

Dialogue and Cultural Diplomacy

At a meeting of the Salzburg Seminar in 1995, where people were being brought together from various parts of the world and cultures to try to understand how to engage with each other, I began to focus on the idea of not only cultural diversity but also cultural leadership. I was asked to lead some sessions about cultural leadership with an African American colleague, Bobby Austin.[2] The aim was to explore how to develop inspirational leadership for the creation of a diverse and pluralist society, and I began to think much more about how we might be able to do that at home.

An important opportunity opened up after the Good Friday Agreement when I decided, after 11 years of leading the Alliance Party, that I would step down from that position. I was appointed the Speaker of the new Northern Ireland Assembly – a power-sharing parliamentary assembly that was a key element of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. An interesting aspect of being Speaker in the British tradition, which is very different from the American tradition, is that the Speaker (somewhat ironically) cannot make political speeches because the role they undertake is that of the non-partisan moderator of the Assembly. The question for me, as the first Speaker of the new Northern Ireland Assembly, was how to contribute to ensuring that it would survive without me being able to make political speeches addressing the inevitable challenges.

It became clear that there would be many opportunities. We had to agree on how to construct a debating chamber in which these different cultures and communities could engage with each other. The original chamber in Parliament Buildings at Stormont had been destroyed by fire. After the fire, the responsible authorities had carefully replaced all the beautiful walnut wooden panelling, repaired the columns, and replaced the gold leaf decoration, but the floor was left as a flat concrete space because no one knew how many members would be elected to any future assembly, how many parties there would be, and how they would wish to be seated. This gave me an opportunity to explore how the architecture and décor of the chamber could be developed with the different parties after the Agreement. I brought the various representatives into the chamber and asked them what they would like to do.

The pro-British Unionists said that they would like to model the furnishings of the chamber on the British Parliament at Westminster – on one side the Unionists, facing their Nationalist opponents on the other side. The Irish Nationalists unsurprisingly disagreed and demanded a European-style seating arrangement. They did not want people to be set on opposite sides; they wanted a hemicycle like the European Parliament, which they felt worked marvellously well with traditional enemies debating together democratically. We talked about it for a while, and I got the staff to do some computer modelling of the options, through which it became clear that the chamber wouldn't be large enough to accommodate all members of the legislative assembly (MLAs) in a hemicycle. However, it would be large enough to have a horseshoe shape, which was something of a compromise between parallel rows and a hemicycle.

They did not actually agree to this. What I found then, and regularly after that, was that following discussion and argument back and forth about the various possibilities and no agreement reached, I would venture that I felt that "for the moment" we could try one of the options which I judged to be acceptable, and when no one objected too strongly or came up with a more widely agreeable idea, we would try that "provisionally". When we had to agree on the colour of the leather furnishings, we ruled out green because it was a Nationalist colour, but blue was acceptable to both sides. The Unionists wanted benches like those at Westminster; the Nationalists wanted each MLA to have a desk and chair as in the US Congress. Eventually, the compromise they accepted from me, "for the present", was to have desks and chairs at the front and benches at the back.

We were developing working relationships by agreeing a shared concrete and wooden reality about where we would work together. That continued as we discussed and reached acceptable arrangements for the seating arrangements in the new chamber, the positioning of offices, the provision of security, and the employment of staff in the rest of the building.

The community had lived through decades, arguably hundreds of years, of violence and hate, and we were now trying to envision a new and better future. How would we symbolize that? We tried to get various paintings and other artefacts from all sides of the community. In earlier times, the Northern Ireland Parliament Building had been exclusively run by the pro-British Unionists, and there were absolutely no Nationalist emblems at all. The view of the British government officials was that the Unionist symbols should be cleared out. They thought that the solution to the absence of Nationalist symbols was to remove all symbols and have the building like a clinic with no representation of anything at all. That, they said, would stop any arguments about décor.

Ironically, it was me – the doctor – who said that we wanted a home for the new Assembly, not a "clinic". I told them that I knew what clinics were like because I had worked in them a lot, and while they are very good for some things, they do not give people a feeling of warmth. I insisted that instead of getting rid of the Unionist emblems that were there, we should try to bring in the Nationalist emblems that had been excluded. It was agreed, and we went on a search for appropriate paintings and artefacts. This proved to be surprisingly difficult. When we went to some of our friends in the museums, they said that they didn't want to get involved in the politics of the conflict, and, in any case, they thought that we would not be able to provide satisfactory conservation for historic pieces. I was impatient to make progress, so I proposed that we commission some paintings ourselves.[3]

When Seamus Mallon, the Deputy First Minister, who was a Catholic Nationalist, stood down, we commissioned a painting. It was the first time there had ever been such a commission of an Irish Nationalist for the Parliament Building, but we got over any awkwardness in a typically Irish way – with humour. When his portrait was completed, Seamus came to the unveiling and commented that he liked it, and that some of his political opponents would also be very happy to see a Nationalist "hanging on the walls". It was a very particular and slightly dark kind of Irish humour, which everyone understood, and it helped people accommodate the new dispensation. It also created a precedent, and thereafter, when first ministers, deputy first ministers, and speakers retired, portraits were commissioned to hang on the walls.

We often criticize the press, but sometimes journalists can be helpful. One of the most energetic members of the Northern Ireland press corps in those days was a journalist called Eamonn Mallie. As well as politics, Eamonn is very interested in art, and he has written a number of books about Irish artists. One day, he came to interview me in the Speaker's Office, and before he started the interview, he noticed a painting on the wall. "That's a Conor painting – A William Conor painting!" he exclaimed with some excitement. I said that he was absolutely right and explained that we had found it in the store. This small painting had been produced by the Irish artist as part of his preparations for a major commission by the Northern Ireland Parliament for the first sitting of the Parliament in 1921. The sitting was attended by King George V and Queen Mary, and the Parliament actually sat in Belfast City Hall because the new Parliament Buildings would take some years to build.

William Conor was an up-and-coming artist at the time, and while I had placed this little preparatory mock-up in my office, the full-size version, for which he was never paid in full, was hanging in the Senate

Chamber. Eamonn then got very excited: "Mr. Speaker, you must commission a painting of the members of the new Northern Ireland Assembly". I countered that he and his journalistic colleagues would write about the narcissism of the Speaker and his colleagues using public money to have paintings made of themselves. "No, you must do it. This is historic". he said. "Yes, Eamonn, but I don't want to become history just as quickly as that". I replied. We talked a little more, and I proposed a deal with him. If he would "clear it" with his journalistic colleagues and explain why we were doing it, I would let him choose the artist. So Eamonn chose a capable young artist to do a very large painting of all the members, and because it was a painting and not a photograph, we were able to include not only all the members of the Assembly and some of the staff, but also three members of the Assembly who were no longer members. That was very much appreciated by their families.

How to pay for it without being a drain on the public purse? I decided that we would arrange for a limited edition print to be made – enough for all the members of the Assembly to buy one for themselves, and I knew them well enough to know that they would be prepared to pay a little bit for a historic print of themselves. We were able to produce it without journalistic criticism, and no public money had to be used. This was a piece of internal, not external, cultural diplomacy. We were not trying to persuade anybody else to think well of us, but we were persuading MLAs to allow themselves to be painted in the same picture as their traditional enemies, to be seen now and by future generations, which was another little step towards the resolution of the conflict.

That was not the end of the story of the painting, for Eamonn had another bright idea. He suggested that, as it was being painted, we should get a film made of the members sitting for their individual portraits. I agreed, and he offered this opportunity to the BBC. They said that no one would be interested, and he got the same response from Ulster Television (UTV). So, he went to Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTE), the Irish national broadcaster. They thought that it was a wonderful idea, and so while the artist, Noel Murphy, was painting all the different MLAs, a cameraman filmed and an interviewer asked some questions.

The members relaxed as they were painted and were able to respond to questions, often in ways that they probably would not have done had they been in a normal interview situation. When this marvellous documentary was produced, it was so successful that I understand the BBC, which had refused the opportunity to participate, had to obtain a copy from RTE for broadcasting. Here was a way that a cultural process – the production of a painting and a film – could bring alive the whole question of how politicians express themselves and are seen by

themselves and others. It was also an example of how art can contribute to the "healing process".

Although we were now expressing artistically how a positive way forward was possible, I felt that it was also necessary to recognize the trauma and pain that society had endured. I discussed this with my colleagues, and one of them drew my attention to how the names of two members from previous parliamentary assemblies in Stormont had been carved into the marble walls near the Commons Chamber, which was now being used by the new Northern Ireland Assembly. The two members were Sir Norman Stronge and Edgar Graham. Stronge and his son were killed at their Tynan Abbey home by the Provisional IRA in 1981. From 1945 until 1969, he had occupied the Speaker's chair, as I now did. Edgar Graham had been a school friend of mine in Ballymena and was a bright young law lecturer at Queen's University and an Ulster Unionist Party Assembly Member in the power-sharing legislature of the mid-1980s. He was murdered by the Provisional IRA outside the law faculty of Queen's University in 1983. I felt some personal identification with these two former members, but they were not the only parliamentarians who had been murdered during "the Troubles". Two Senators from the old Stormont Parliament had also been killed. Senator Paddy Wilson was a Catholic member of the Nationalist Social Democratic and Labour Party who was murdered in 1973 alongside his Protestant friend Irene Andrews by John White – later a leading member of the Ulster Democratic Party following his release from prison. Senator Jack Barnhill was a member of the Ulster Unionist Party shot dead by members of the Official Irish Republican Army in 1971. We arranged for the names of these two former Senators and tributes to them to be carved into the marble walls outside the Senate Chamber in which they had served, and the unveiling took place jointly by their two families in the presence of senior political figures, including some who had been active paramilitaries and others who had been threatened or attacked by them. It was a very moving occasion, and the fact that MLAs (Members of the Legislative Assembly) now pass these memorials every day as they move in and out of the two chambers ensures that the painful past is not forgotten, but is a reminder of what happens when politics fails and our differences are expressed in physical violence rather than political debate.

We found many other ways in which the arts could make a positive contribution to the Irish Peace Process. My wife, Joan, who is a very insightful person, noted that leading figures in the Northern Ireland political class kept returning to the United States to celebrate St Patrick's Day each year. One day, she remarked to me that the real mark of progress in the peace process would be when we could celebrate St Patrick's Day together

in Belfast instead of New York and Washington, DC. She was right, of course, and so I decided that instead of accepting the invitations to the White House and other events, I would organize a major celebration at Parliament Buildings on 17 March 1999 when we would bring music, art, dance, and poetry from all sections of the community together.

It had never been done before for a St Patrick's Day in Northern Ireland, and it needed to be done now as part of the healing process. I was assisted by the Assembly staff and especially by my Private Secretary, Ms Georgie Campbell, the Speaker's Adviser, Niall Johnston, and also the late, great, John Anderson of the BBC, whose network of performers and inspirational musical talent firmly established this initial healing cultural event so that each year since then my successors as Speaker have continued what has become a very positive tradition. There is no need to argue about whether St Patrick was a Protestant or a Catholic; they just engage with, enjoy, and benefit from celebrating together.

Rituals and Ceremonial Healing

As we explored the role of art and culture in our own community in the context of the peace process, we came to recognize how important it was for others. One day, my Private Secretary, Georgie, rang through to say that a group of First Nations people from North America wanted to see me. I said that I would be delighted to meet with them, and so six or eight leaders of Indigenous communities in North America arrived in my office. After welcoming them, I inquired why they wanted to meet with me. Their response was fascinating.

They told me that things had not been going well for their people for a long time. They had a lot of problems with alcoholism, drug addiction, sexual violence, and child abuse. They had been trying to understand why they were doing this to themselves, and they had concluded that although there were many contributory factors, one reason was that they had never forgiven the ancestors of my people in the north of Ireland and south of Scotland for what they did to their Indigenous ancestors. They described it as follows:

> Your ancestors came to our place, and they stole our country. They made agreements, and then they betrayed us. They drove us from our traditional hunting grounds on what became known as the Trail of Tears, out into the wilderness. We've never forgiven them and we think it's eating us up.

I said that this made great sense to me, but what did they want to do about it? The senior chief said:

> We've come here, and we wanted to meet you, because we think that you're a representative of your community as a whole, not of one side or the other. What we would like to do is to have your permission to have a forgiveness ceremony here in Parliament Buildings.

I was deeply touched by their comments. I immediately agreed to their request and suggested that the forgiveness ceremony could be conducted in the central entrance hall of the Parliament Building because from there the sound would go right up through the whole building, and staff and members could hear it and would be able to come down to watch and engage with it. So that is what they did. They came with all their leathers and feathers and drums and conducted a marvellous and moving ceremony. People came down from their offices to see it and listened. Some were very interested because they already knew that many of the people from the north of Ireland had fled to North America, and because there were lots of stories about that, they could connect with it.

It was very successful, and the Indigenous people asked me to come and meet with the Cherokees next time I was in North America. Accordingly, the next time I was across the Atlantic, I arranged to go and meet with them. It so happened that a troupe of Irish dancers was visiting at the same time, and we had a wonderful day of celebration with Cherokees and Irish dancers mixing and merging their cultures with each other.

The relationship that developed through these meetings made it possible to do other things that continue today. Some time later, I went to Nashville to meet with the governor and elected representatives who were interested to learn about the Irish Peace Process. I invited some of my First Nations friends to join me. I asked if they could also come into the Capitol Building, and we had some excellent meetings. I asked the governor if he would consider finding ways of building some practical cooperation with the Indigenous people in the state of Tennessee, and he agreed that he would. When we all came away from the State Capitol, I asked my First Nations friends if they were content with the visit, and they told me that this was more important than I realized because it was the very first time that they had been able to come into the State Capitol as First Nations people.

I have continued to keep in touch with them, and in 2023, I was invited back to Georgia, which I had visited years before, because progress had eventually been made in the engagement between the First Nations people and the governor, senators, and congress members of the State of Georgia. Again, we had a marvellous celebration, and there was practical evidence of an improvement in relations between the communities.

I give these examples, and I could mention many more, in North and South America, in Australia, and elsewhere, where we have discovered that it is possible to build on some of the lessons that we learned on the "internal" cultural diplomacy journey in Ireland, north and south. The same principles apply to "external" cultural diplomacy. It is not a replacement for all the other things that one must do in building peace processes. Engaging in cultural diplomacy does not suddenly result in sweetness and light breaking out. When we were working with the marching bands as they expressed their militaristic culture, and when we viewed the angry murals on the walls in Belfast that expressed the divergent and conflicting cultures in the Northern Irish communities, the music and art were very impressive, but they didn't bring people together.

However, if you could reflect on and engage with what you saw and heard, and were conscious of what they were trying to say in their art and music, it became possible not to argue the point and win the argument – in such situations, you will never win the argument – but to begin healing. If you can find ways of crossing historic barriers and divisions and engaging with each other through culture in its broadest sense, the experience can contribute to healing.

Relational Healing

All relationships need to be nourished and worked at if they are to prosper, and if neglected, they fall into disrepair. That is why in Ireland it is necessary to continue to promote "the art of healing" long after the end of the inter-communal violence, the achievement of the Good Friday Agreement, and the establishment of shared institutions. Not just past history, but current external disruptions have to be weathered. In recent times, the decision by people in England and Wales to take the United Kingdom out of the European Union after 40 years has created a rupture that threatens to return us to the "disturbed historic relations" we hoped had been consigned to history. An example of the continuing work on cultural diplomacy is provided by some of the activities of the Centre for Democracy and Peace Building that we established under the leadership of a Polish friend and colleague, Eva Grosman.

Earlier, I mentioned the marching bands that are such a feature of Protestant Unionist or Loyalist culture, but that can be a provocation to Catholic Nationalists and Republicans. Since trouble had begun to re-emerge around their parades, I asked Eva to go and talk with them about the meaning and significance of their music and parading. She returned to say that they were determined to continue, often with some provocative and even paramilitary trappings, but that perhaps if we offered to help them improve their musical understanding and performance, we

could build a healthier cultural expression. They were astonished when we offered to provide free tuition rather than criticize and attack them, and they were even prepared to accept mentoring from outsiders from a different racial and cultural background.

We invited my friend Patrick Ayrton, the French-Swiss harpsichordist, to come with his German violinist colleague to conduct a short mentoring exercise for a few days, culminating in a performance for this rural band in a beautiful building in the centre of Belfast. They started to enjoy the music and were surprised when Patrick explained that he was playing music from the 17th century – the time of King William of Orange, the central hero in the Loyalist cultural and historical narrative – and performing it on a harpsichord, which was just the sort of instrument that William would have heard played. But their astonishment grew when the violinist explained that she was playing a tune that was composed by the secretary to General Schomburg, one of William's military chiefs, whose name was well known to the Loyalist bandsmen and women. They were quite moved as they joined in playing this musical and cultural link with a past that they valued so deeply, but with the help of these two continental musicians, a man from France and a woman from Germany, they experienced in music how their hero, King William, came from continental Europe and was helped in winning the Battle of the Boyne that they celebrate each year, by soldiers from continental Europe from which they now wanted to distance themselves. It was a stunning example of how engaging in music and the performative arts can facilitate positive reflections on community relationships.

Just before he died in 1963, J. Ernest Davey, a leading Presbyterian minister and one of the greatest Irish theologians of the 20th century (and himself an accomplished musician), wrote a book about religious experience (Davey, 2021). With his death, it was unavailable to the public until its recent publication, but in it he pointed out that when people of different religions get together in formal interfaith conferences, they usually talk about their beliefs, their liturgies, their structures of authority, and their various religious practices – in other words, all the things they disagree on. That is one reason why such ecumenical conversations do not usually get very far.

However, if it becomes possible to engage in shared *experience*, then a new relationship becomes possible because of this common human experience. When we look up at the magnificence of high mountains, all of us feel a sense of awe about them – their enormity and our smallness. We may give different explanations – religious, secular, scientific, artistic, or psychological – but the experience itself will be a common human experience – the awe of engaging with creation.

I think that is what art can do for us. It can give us that *experience*. Of course, we can talk about it intellectually, but it is being moved by the experience that is the powerhouse of art and culture, whether it is music, drama, poetry, art, novels, or literature. Art can take us beyond. It has a quality of transcendence. That is why it has the potential for healing in some of the most divided communities in our divided world. It helps us to go beyond the boundaries of ourselves and create new structures – a new architecture for our societies.

Notes

1 This chapter is written based on lectures delivered at symposia in London in 2023 on "A Global Healing Architecture" organized by UNESCO and the Global Humanity for Peace Institute, and on "Cultural Diplomacy" by the Polish Cultural Institute and the Centre for Democracy and Peace Building.
2 Bobby W. Austin is now President of the Neighborhood Associates Corporation in Washington, DC.
3 Link to Northern Ireland Assembly paintings: www.niassembly.gov.uk/about-the-assembly/assembly-artwork/

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13

POLITICS OF DIGNITY

Structural Justice for Collective Healing and Global Flourishing

Scherto R. Gill

Humanity today is confronted with crises across multiple domains, not least political instability, violent international conflicts, ecological degradation, mass migration, social divisiveness, racialized inequality, and a sense of despair and ill-being among youth. For some, these crises can be explained by a Hobbesian diagnosis of human nature as being solitary and selfish, leading to power-thirsty politics and a perpetual war of all against all. For others, however, these crises are rooted in a complex, interconnected web of causes, including the structural and temporal accumulation of harms through continued legacies of inhumanity, the social and cultural adaptation to unexamined narratives, and the compounding of unmediated or unresolved grievances. Hence, the result is massive alienation under systemic decline.

This chapter draws on the latter analysis. In particular, it explores the structural, temporal, and cultural interwovenness of our global systems. In doing so, it offers an understanding of the ethical framework necessary for designing a just system that advocates for the dignity of life, enriches the relational nature of our well-being, and advances the temporal continuity of flourishing.

Understanding Structural Injustice

We live in an unjust world. We can clearly observe unfairness in the plight of some and the privilege of others, yet we cannot always identify precisely what has produced these disparate situations. These patterns of disadvantage and deprivation persist across entire societies, and indeed globally, irrespective of individual attitudes or actions. Unlike *overt* forms

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of discrimination that hinge upon explicit personal biases, systemic and entrenched inequalities are maintained through structural injustice.

Structural injustice can be a contentious concept. For thinkers such as Iris Marion Young, structural injustice is effectively a set of "collective unintended consequences" that directly affects the opportunities available to different groups. More specifically, Young argues that structural injustice exists:

> [A]s a consequence of many individuals and institutions acting to pursue their particular goals and interests, for the most part within the limits of accepted rules and norms … when social processes put large groups under systematic threat of domination or deprivation of the means to develop and exercise their capacities, at the same time that these processes enable others to dominate or to have a wide range of opportunities for developing and exercising capacities available to them.
>
> *(Young, 2011, p. 52)*

For others, the injustice is not "unintended consequences", but the historically accumulated forms of discrimination, enduring harms, embedded prejudices, institutionalized oppression, and systematically reproduced inequalities that are embedded within institutions and practices (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Nuti, 2019; Wilkerson, 2020). Even for Young herself, despite her framing structural justice around "unintended consequences", she acknowledges injustice to be deeply embedded within historical and institutional practices. She argues that structural injustice persists precisely because institutions, norms, and cultural assumptions systematically reproduce disparities over time, even without explicit malicious intent.

In Western philosophy, understandings of lives within structural injustice tend to hinge on how structure is defined and expressed. For instance, for Félix Guattari (1972), *structure* refers to the contingent and historically specific arrangements that arise from the productive force of "machines". He differentiates structure from machine, stating that "a machine is inseparable from its structural articulations and, conversely, that each contingent structure is dominated … by a system of machines" (Guattari, 2015, p. 318). Structures are characterized by the relationships and exchanges between elements within a given system, whereas machines are the repetitive and productive forces that generate these structures. The machine metaphor is employed to show how institutions, rather than remaining static or purely top-down, dynamically embed a broader structural logic, in particular, the "axiomatic" of unfettered capital

accumulation. In these machinic processes (sometimes called "desiring-machines"), human work, creativity, and activism are channelled into capitalism's fluid cycles of production.

Guattari sees structures as the organized and relational outcomes of underlying machinic processes, which are historically contingent. This intersection between the economy of desire and the economy of politics underscores that systematic inequalities do not result solely from intentional oppression but from the continual re-coding of social, cultural, and economic spheres by capitalist imperatives. Gilles Deleuze joins Guattari to expand on this in a postmodern context by describing how deterritorialization and reterritorialization enable the capitalist "machine" to permeate every barrier, encoding our desires, perceptions, and social relations (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980). No longer a clearly centralized or hierarchical apparatus, the machine takes shape as an enmeshed and distributed network in which transnational corporations, global finance, and international labour forces perpetuate exploitation and stratification, often with little overt coordination. Through this lens, structural injustice endures because the machine flexibly integrates or reterritorializes attempts at resistance, ultimately harnessing personal aspirations and institutional reforms back into its endless pursuit of capital accumulation.

The integration of structure and machine effectively demonstrates how structural arrangements preconfigure relationships and interactions across multiple levels: among systems, institutions, organizations, groups, individuals, and even between humans and other beings in nature. Within this interconnected "machine", interlocking rules, norms, resource flows, and distributions, as well as cultural assumptions, narratives, and identities, mutually reinforce each other to sustain the structure itself. For instance, at the macro level, the legal apparatus – such as laws and tax codes – is translated into institutional norms and policies at the meso level (e.g., HR guidelines, administrative protocols), ultimately shaping experiences at the micro level, where individuals (e.g., a single mother of colour), families (e.g., migrant families), and groups (e.g., Indigenous peoples) encounter these systemic forces in everyday life. Through these mutually reinforcing interactions, structural injustice systematically privileges certain groups while oppressing and marginalizing others.

There are other metaphors to describe structural injustice. For example, Pulitzer Prize-winning author Isabel Wilkerson employs the metaphor of an *old house* to conceptualize the global systems within which we exist, by which our lives are shaped, according to which our relationships are defined, and through which our flourishing is determined. She describes our experiences living in an old house as follows:

> When people live in an old house, they come to adjust to the idiosyncrasies and outright dangers skulking in an old structure. They put buckets under a wet ceiling, prop up groaning floors, learn to step over that rotting wood tread in the staircase. The awkward becomes acceptable, and the unacceptable becomes merely inconvenient. Live with it long enough, and the unthinkable becomes normal. Exposed over the generations, we learn to believe that the incomprehensible is the way that life is supposed to be.
>
> *(Wilkerson, 2020, p. 16)*

Together, these metaphors can vividly capture how structural injustice operates and becomes entrenched through several constituting characteristics, which I shall elaborate below.

Structural Injustice Is Historical

Much of today's inequality has emerged from structural injustice in the past, not least slavery, colonial exploitation, gender oppression, land dispossession, violent conflicts, and wars. These dehumanizing legacies have been carried forward through institutions established during those periods (e.g., racial capitalism, property laws, geopolitical borders) and continue to shape contemporary systems at local, national, and global levels. Alasia Nuti's 2019 book, *Injustice and the Reproduction of History*, highlights that slavery and colonialism should not be treated as mere events of the past; rather, they continue to affect present-day institutions and social relations, with contemporary racism rooted in slavery and gender-based inequalities rooted in colonialism. These legacies are "reproduced over time through different means" (Nuti, 2019, p. 4), such as ongoing norms, policies, social attitudes, and everyday practices.

The historical structural injustice of transatlantic slavery has left enduring legacies. Despite globally pronounced abolition, slavery's institutional frameworks, cultural norms, and legal precedents have become embedded in subsequent systems, thereby extending oppressive effects across generations. For instance, in the United States, after the formal end of slavery (e.g., with the Thirteenth Amendment), laws and policies often replicated or rebranded forced labour conditions. Over decades, explicitly racist policies in housing (e.g., redlining,[1]), education (segregated schools), and employment (de facto discrimination) reproduced key inequalities reminiscent of enslavement, such as lack of property rights, poor wages, and restricted mobility. Slavery depended on ideologies that dehumanized enslaved persons, with traces of these attitudes woven into cultural norms (stereotypes, biases), shaping how formerly enslaved populations and their descendants have been perceived, policed, and governed. Such demonizing

stereotypes did not suddenly vanish with emancipation; they carried over into educational systems, popular culture, and law enforcement practices, sustaining structural inequalities through implicit bias, school segregation, or selective policing.

Slavery thus epitomizes how historical wrongdoing can become baked into subsequent institutions. Once these institutions are in place, whether in housing, labour, or law enforcement, they create feedback loops that reinforce disadvantage for historically oppressed groups, as we will explore later. In short, the example of slavery demonstrates how structural injustice can persist long after the original legal institution has ended. The systems, norms, and economic structures that evolved around slavery adapt and reappear in new guises, maintaining inequalities that reflect the original injustice but are more difficult to identify and uproot, hence illustrating the ongoing nature of structural injustice.

In a similar pattern, colonialism's relics are visible in many parts of the world. In South Africa, building on earlier colonial laws, the apartheid regime (1948–1994) enforced a caste-like social structure. Despite the formal end of apartheid, stark inequalities have endured: Black South Africans often reside in underdeveloped townships, experience disproportionately high unemployment, and have limited access to quality education, healthcare, and decent housing. The lingering concentration of land and business ownership among the white minority underscores how historical policies create persistent structural barriers. Likewise, in South America, Spanish and Portuguese colonial governance distributed enormous tracts of land to conquistadors, the church, and other favoured elites, establishing the foundation for lasting inequalities in land ownership. Today, rural poverty and deep-seated power disparities persist, with small-scale farmers struggling against agribusiness giants. Such inequitable distribution of land undermines local food security and fuels rural-urban migration, slum expansion, and continued economic inequality.

Structural injustice has also resulted in gender inequality. Nuti (2019) shows that laws, workplace norms, and caregiving roles established historically have continued to impose systematic obstacles for women, even in societies that appear formally egalitarian. Under structural injustice, when gender intersects with race, class, and other axes of identity, there are further compounding historically produced disadvantages. By focusing on gender, Nuti clarifies how seemingly "neutral" contemporary institutions can preserve entrenched power differentials that originated in earlier eras.

Indeed, as Wilkerson emphasizes, the past is not merely what has passed; history remains deeply present, shaping systemic features that privilege certain groups while disadvantaging others. Historical structural

injustice leaves decaying systems, which time does not heal but instead conceals. Thus, Wilkerson poignantly observes, "here we are, the current occupants of a property with stress cracks and bowed walls and fissures built into the foundation. We are the heirs to whatever is right or wrong with it" (Wilkerson, 2020, p. 16).

Structural Injustice Evades Blame and Responsibility

Often invisible to those who inhabit an unjust society, individuals are seldom aware of how their lives have been defined by structural forces. For example, an African American is likely to frequently encounter intersecting educational, economic, health, employment, and political disadvantages. Similarly, Black Americans are incarcerated at more than five times the rate of white Americans (Prison Policy Initiative). At an individual level, injustice is rarely directly traceable to the discrimination carried out by specific persons. Nonetheless, Black Americans, alongside people of Indigenous descent and other people of colour, continuously experience racialized prejudices. Many might acknowledge that some societies are fundamentally racist, yet few can clearly pinpoint specific culprits of structural racism, let alone racism's historical roots, e.g., slavery and colonialism. As Wilkerson highlights, structural injustice leads to society regarding it as "normal" or even "acceptable" for some parts of society to struggle, ignoring the historical root of racism.

Within everyday rationality, those born into social advantage may not recognize or acknowledge their privileges and may easily dismiss responsibility for structural inequalities: "It is not my fault these people are poor and live in desolation. I did not create the situation. I have already donated some money to help the homeless. What else can I possibly do?" Those who suffer under unjust systems may internalize their fate, believing that thriving like others is not possible. Thus, structural conditions serve as a breeding ground for ignorance, if not complicity, through which people can unconsciously perpetuate structural injustice.

At the same time, the apparent lack of individual blameworthiness clashes with a collective need for moral indignation aimed at naming wrongdoing explicitly. Indeed, moral anger is necessarily directed at identifiable individuals, groups, or institutions deemed culpable. David Estlund (2024), in his article, *What's Unjust About Structural Injustice?*, captures this tension compellingly.

Other theorists diverge. For instance, according to critical race theory, systems and institutions may exhibit racism without requiring explicit racist intent from participants. By contrast, Iris Marion Young argues that people collectively share responsibility for addressing structural injustice, even if no one is individually blameworthy. Young (2011)

further maintains that certain agents, such as corporations or states, bear heightened accountability and moral responsibilities, as evidenced in sweatshop labour practice where workers are made vulnerable by structural injustice.

Maeve McKeown (2024) applies a typology of three kinds of structural injustice to clarify who should be held accountable and have moral responsibility: 1) pure structural injustice obscures the identifiable perpetrator owing to the compounded actions resulting in seemingly non-blameworthiness; 2) avoidable structural injustice can be traced to agents in positions of power who are culpable for unjust structures, such as large global fashion brands that could end child labour. By evading responsibility, such actors commit 3) deliberate structural injustice for the sake of self-interest and profits.

These tensions highlight the complexity of showing that structural justice is "unjust", as it is omnipresent yet absent of specific culprits.

Structural Injustice Is Self-Reinforcing

Structural injustice is perpetuated through interlocking social, economic, and political processes and institutional practices. Take education as an example. In the United Kingdom, councils draw catchment boundaries where desirable schools and affluent neighbourhoods mutually reinforce one another. High-performing schools typically select students based on test scores, which correlate strongly with family income and social status. Because they admit more socioeconomically advantaged students, these selective schools achieve better test results than inclusive schools, and thus climb to higher positions in national league tables. Families with resources have the means to relocate to catchment areas known for stronger schools, providing the relevant councils with additional property tax revenue and philanthropic contributions. In turn, these flows raise the schools' performances and prestige. Conversely, students in poorer catchment areas often find themselves in schools with fewer educational resources, limited extracurricular support, higher teacher turnover, and lower expectations for achievement. Such schools tend to disproportionally enrol students from low-income families, racial and ethnic minorities, and those facing social instability, such as refugees or migrants.

In this manner, educational reinforcement is achieved through neoliberal economic values, property laws, discriminatory social policies, cultural imperialism, etc., all of which marginalize, alienate, and exploit those already sabotaged by structural injustice (Young, 1990). In a similar vein, institutional practices create cyclical patterns of injustice. For instance, in the poor catchment areas, limited access to loans means fewer

businesses, which leads to fewer jobs and lower tax revenues, thereby perpetuating inadequate public services and further entrenching poverty.

Institutions also reinforce structural injustice by imposing narratives and ideologies that normalize biases, discrimination, and oppression. Artefacts such as language, discourse, symbolism – e.g., qualification, diploma – and other material components form an integral part of the structural reinforcement. Sally Haslanger terms these material elements "cultural technē", further distinguishing between two broad types: 1) concepts, attitudes, and dispositions by which individuals coordinate information and action; and 2) tangible resources of value such as arable land, clean water, and implicit knowledge or know-how, all essential for social interaction (Haslanger, 2016).

Cultural technē, as material elements within societal structures, can either sustain injustice or become tools of resistance. Consider a recent example: *The New York Times* identified certain words deliberately excluded from the discourse of the 2025 US administration, such as LGBTQ, non-binary, Black, Latinx, Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), and transgender (Yourish et al., 2025). These omitted concepts would otherwise have directed our attention to diverse identities, shed light on implicit and unconscious biases, emphasized societal goods (clean energy, community, and diversity), and suggested paths towards achieving these ideals (activism, anti-racism, cultural sensitivity, and equal opportunity). The presence or absence of these words profoundly influences society's ability to resist structural injustice and advance a more equitable social order, a dimension explored further in the next section of this chapter.

Structural Injustice Defines Relationships in the Society

In shaping the relationships among systems, institutions, communities, and groups, structural injustice determines power dynamics and relational patterns within a society. These dynamics and patterns emerge in the fundamental ways societies are organized, through laws, policies, cultural norms, and resource allocations, which establish where individuals and groups are situated within existing social hierarchies. Such structural organization profoundly influences how institutions relate to one another, how people relate to institutions, and how individuals interact with one another.

Institutions, reinforced by their own designs, processes, and practices, perpetuate relational imbalance by reproducing uneven social relations. These institutions range in scale from intimate entities such as marriages, families, schools, and refugee detention centres to expansive structures such as national employment bureaus, states, international organizations, and transnational corporations. Institutional practices, embodied and

enacted by societal actors, thus become integrated into the mechanisms for reproducing social inequalities.

In these myriad ways, structural injustice arranges people into social groups, each placed advantageously or disadvantageously relative to one another. Such social positions shape human interactions, even across generations. Individuals born into specific social strata often internalize messages about their own value, trustworthiness, knowledge, and credibility, especially when compared to more privileged groups. Put differently, structural conditions dictate what and who is deemed valuable and regulate how and by whom the valued outcomes are pursued. Wilkerson's metaphor of navigating around structural cracks and idiosyncrasies poignantly captures this lived experience.

A more subtle aspect of structural relational imbalance is captured by Miranda Fricker's concept of epistemic injustice, defined as a distinctive type of injustice where a wrong is done to people in their capacity as knowers (Fricker, 2009). Individuals occupying certain social positions may find their voices dismissed or disregarded due to entrenched credibility biases. Fricker also describes *testimonial* injustice, whereby the accounts of certain groups, such as persons of colour, women, or non-citizens, are systematically deemed less credible as sources of knowledge. This is often observed in courts or public forums. Parallel to testimonial injustice is what Fricker refers to as *hermeneutical* injustice, in which the relative powerlessness of social groups leads to gaps in collective understanding. Fricker illustrates this with the discrimination against homosexuality, which prevented many from recognizing homosexual desire as a legitimate orientation. In such cases, marginalized groups cannot fully contribute to shared social meanings, resulting in a distorted or incomplete collective knowledge. Thus, epistemic injustice emerges from structurally defined relational imbalances, where certain voices – e.g., those of white, middle-class men – are prioritized as inherently more credible, while those of others – especially ethnic minorities or working-class women speaking about exploitation through sweatshop labour – are silenced. Epistemic injustice, therefore, constitutes an ethical dimension of structural injustice that has profound implications for societal relationships and power dynamics.

Recognizing the relational dimension of structural injustice requires understanding how every layer of social life, from macro-level policies to daily customs, interacts to produce (and often conceal) power imbalances in each encounter. Institutions do not simply allocate resources; they structure interactions among individuals and groups, setting conditions and shaping assumptions about authority, belonging, and legitimacy (Haslanger, 2012). Consequently, relational dynamics, from who trusts

or fears the police to who can change schools or jobs, are inseparable from structural factors. By recognizing and naming these institutionalized pathways, we gain deeper insight into why inequalities persist and how re-imagining these structures can foster more equitable social relations.

Structural Injustice Generates Compound Harm

Harms of structural injustice affect all members of society. As already noted, the harm of structural justice cannot be traced to a set of wrongs caused directly by individual actions or the specific unfair policies or practices of a particular institution. This understanding highlights that structural damage is diffuse. As Wolff (2024) summarizes, the harms of structural injustice lie in the fact that they systematically threaten or deprive certain groups, often those already disadvantaged, of important opportunities or critical resources. This goes beyond accidental or unfortunate events or outcomes, constituting a moral harm precisely because it entrenches and exacerbates vulnerabilities (e.g., racist housing markets, inequitable labour conditions).

The harm caused by structural injustice is necessarily multidimensional, damaging people materially, psycho-emotionally, and socially and relationally, and impacting on identity. It can even cause profound damage in the spiritual realm. The harm is experienced transgenerationally. It equally impacts the ecological integrity of our entire planet. Yet, harm can be an elusive notion in the context of structural injustice, because contemporary conceptions of harm tend to orient solely towards what is quantifiable or measurable, e.g., loss of earnings or property damage (Thomson, 2025), or clinically diagnosable, e.g., damage to bodies or mental health issues. Such conceptions overlook deeper forms of the harm, such as the traumatizing experience of separation, alienation, or cultural rupture, and intergenerational disruption, which are impossible to quantify. When harms are not countable, they are not counted and they are ignored (Bailey et al., 2017).

Harm at the spiritual level offers a telling illustration. While rarely acknowledged in Western philosophical discourse, many non-European traditions treat life as inherently spiritual. Spirituality implies that historical inhumanity can produce lingering wounds across generations, thereby constraining both collective and personal futures (Gill, 2025). In a moving article by Afua Hirsch (2020) for the *Guardian* newspaper, "The Injustice of Slavery Is Not Over: The Graves of the Enslaved Are Still Being Desecrated", she shows how the violent deaths and utter disrespect for enslaved Africans' remains constitute enduring harm. Hirsch notes:

> These discoveries are particularly egregious from an African perspective. In so many cultures across the continent, the only thing worse than being abused in life is being abused in death – without proper burial rites or the dignity befitting of ancestors.
>
> *(Hirsch, 2020)*

This underscores how the harm of structural injustice has indeed multiple dimensions, including spiritual and temporal dimensions, as spiritual and historical wounds and trauma can echo across generations.

Those who benefit from structural arrangements may see themselves as powerful beneficiaries, while those deprived by these structures experience vulnerability and victimization. But can the experiences of the privileged also be considered harmful? One useful approach to considering this is through the lens of well-being. In earlier work that I have undertaken with Garrett Thomson and Ivor Goodson, we maintain that well-being is relational, involving the richness of living a good life, such as the joy and delight of being together in community and society (Thomson et al., 2021). Where some parts of the society are made vulnerable, being oppressed, or alienated by structural injustice, it comprises a harm to everyone's well-being. As already suggested, well-being is inherently relational; no individual or group can genuinely thrive by perpetuating or ignoring the suffering and hardship of others. Indeed, beyond imposing barriers to relational flourishing, structural injustice contradicts the essence of living in a society that requires equal respect and caring for all. In other words, the good life demands relational equity and inclusive well-being. Deep social divisiveness undermines the prerequisites for mutual flourishing, vividly illustrating how structural injustice generates *compound harm* that touches every layer of communal existence.

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In sum, the above analysis effectively weaves together several key dimensions of structural injustice, historical continuity, diffuse culpability, self-reinforcing cycles, relational patterns, and compound harm. Although each section is discussed as if distinct, these are in effect overlapping aspects of systemic inequality, penetrating into the very fabric of social life. Disparities become normalized, almost as if inevitable. Furthermore, institutions historically shaped by discriminatory policies (e.g., colonial administrations, racially segregated housing) often continue operating along similar lines, with so-called "race-neutral" or "class-neutral" updates that fail to truly dismantle underlying biases.

Structural injustice is based on interlocking social *architectural tectonics*, and it can feel impossible to know where to start with the reform. For example, policing and prison practices cannot be changed without also tackling other complementary structural components, such as gun laws, employment laws, neighbourhood policy, public health, education, and gender-based policies. Even though incremental tweaks are introduced, without addressing the root causes of inequality, systemic transformation remains out of reach. Moreover, entrenched interests often have the power to resist or dilute reforms. Such interlocking systems are dynamic rather than static. This means that while institutions may shift or adapt to new conditions, they reconfigure (but still uphold) inequality, indicating that partial *fixes* cannot easily uproot injustice.

Resisting and Responding to Structural Injustice

Having identified the key dimensions through which structural injustice perpetuates historical harms and reproduces inequalities, this chapter now considers possibilities for resisting and responding effectively. While traditional frameworks of accountability, centred on direct culpability and individual responsibility, may seem inadequate given the diffuse and systemic nature of structural injustice, it remains crucial to explore how institutions and individuals can nonetheless challenge and mitigate such pervasive harms. This section examines two interrelated pathways for resistance and response: institutional accountability, which interrogates how institutions can recognize their complicity in perpetuating injustice and transform accordingly; and personal and collective responsibility, emphasizing the ethical duties borne by individuals and communities to critique, challenge, and actively seek the transformation of unjust structures. Together, these pathways offer the potential to resist ongoing injustices and lay the groundwork for deeper, systemic change.

Accountability

Typically, accounts of moral wrongdoing involve two parties: a *perpetrator* who commits an identifiable harm against a *victim*. The standard approach is that the victim seeks an apology, compensation, and redress, and the legal system punishes the perpetrator once deemed culpable or held accountable for the wrongdoing. However, as shown in the previous section, within structural injustice, this model of accountability for the harmful effects of the current systems has its limits.

As already discussed, a recurring theme of structural injustice is that there are no easily identifiable institutions or agents who can be solely blamed for structural injustice. Rather, injustice is at a systemic level,

involving historical legacies, the present reproduction of structures, and the self-reinforcing mechanisms. When harm isn't directly traceable to agents, traditional models of accountability (e.g., victim–perpetrator frameworks, legal punishment/redress for identifiable wrongdoing) often fail to address institutional culpability. In this case, accountability becomes murky because the system's rules themselves might be biased or exploitative, yet appear "legitimate" from within. This requires a different conception of institutional accountability that is not confined within the victim–perpetrator model. Instead, institutions should bear heightened moral accountability due to their power to enact large-scale changes.

Institutional accountability tends to be framed as corporate moral accountability (CMA). However, Rönnegard (2024) questions the notion of CMA and claims that it is built upon false assumptions and is therefore a fallacy. He analyzes that CMA implies that a corporation should be morally responsible for its actions and that such responsibility is distinct from that of its human members. Although set apart from human responsibility, in this context, the corporation is conceived of as if a person who has intention, is aware of its action, and is therefore a moral agent. According to Rönnegard:

> [A] corporation cannot be said to have intentions by virtue of the intentions of its members. A corporation must be able to form its own intentions to satisfy the autonomy condition. Only then can the corporation be morally responsible in a manner that is distinct from its members.
>
> *(Rönnegard, 2024, p. 33)*

This requirement is impossible to fulfil purely because any given decision that a corporation makes will involve one or more human beings who are corporate members. A corporation thus cannot be a moral agent independent of humans as moral agents. That corporations can hold themselves to be morally accountable is seemingly, therefore, an illusion. So the next question is: can a corporation be considered legally accountable through frameworks involving laws, procedures of checks and balances, and the reinforcement of such frameworks? Rönnegard is moderately optimistic about this prospect, and confirms that when elected representatives legislate the norms of acceptable corporate behaviour, "we can hold corporate legal entities legally accountable" (Rönnegard, 2024, p. 35).

To take this argument further, under an overarching unjust global architecture, i.e., one with a competitive environment designed to pursue wealth and material profit, for a corporation to be legally accountable

for resisting the moral wrongs of inequalities and injustice is overly ambitious, if not totally naïve. So long as a corporation seeks to serve its shareholders' interests, premised to be minimizing costs and maximizing gains, anticipating its capacity to act as if an agent with moral conscience will not be realistic. Nevertheless, the attributability remains valid for some corporations, institutions, and agencies to be held accountable for their role in perpetuating injustice, such as climate change (e.g., large fossil fuel producers) and sweatshop labour (e.g., fast fashion chains), despite the limited scope for corporation accountability.

This limitation might be overcome through Young's alternative approach, where accountability is reframed not in terms of blame but of reflective ethical engagement. Young (2011) suggests moving away from "who is at fault?" towards an ethical duty of institutions to examine, critique, and modify how their established policies, resource allocations, discourses, and practices systematically produce harm. This ethical accountability acknowledges institutions' embeddedness within unjust structures and thus emphasizes ongoing reflection, inclusive participation, and proactive responsibility for systemic change.

Institutional accountability thus conceived involves internal approaches, such as collaborative self-reflection, inclusive listening, participatory innovation, ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and learning, and a willingness to identify symptoms of structural injustice. Such a participatory process-driven approach may catalyze internal accountability mechanisms (e.g., creating ethics boards with real power to question decisions, implementing transparency protocols, ensuring that often marginalized voices are included, and tracking outcomes) and invite collective commitments to non-discrimination and communal well-being.

While corporations might resist ethical accountability due to shareholder imperatives, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or governmental agencies potentially offer more adaptable accountability models because their missions can explicitly foreground ethical commitments. Let's look at an example. Institutions and nations built upon past profits accumulated over time tend to be in a position of power to further benefit from the structurally designated advantages. For such institutions and government agencies, moral accountability must involve acknowledging past wounds and enduring harm, recognizing the traumatic effects that have been lived by successive generations of victims, rectifying demonizing narratives, and actively creating conditions for equal access to resources and opportunities. To these ends, global initiatives such as the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Reparations Commission, the Māori community's Grounded Accountability, and the Canadian government's agreement to heal the wounds inflicted upon communities of First Nations all

point to the important understanding that past, present, and future sit on a continuum, and moral accountability is beyond merely paying back the debt owed. Instead, moral accountability engages institutions, government agencies, and corporations in futures-forming approaches. Examples can be found in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Independent Assessment Process, equitable public health, collective healing, inclusive education, and many other forms of proactive engagement in improving institutional and societal conditions towards equality and fairness.

In undertaking accountability in this way, institutions and agencies may leverage reform to existing systemic norms, thus bearing truly *heightened* accountability not only to self-evaluate but also to engage with external demands for justice. For instance, mandatory reporting (e.g., gender/racial pay gap disclosures, environmental impact statements) can foster an external check on how institutional decisions perpetuate or alleviate structural injustice. Accordingly, corporations and public bodies must collaborate on solutions that ameliorate the symptoms of structural injustice by introducing living wages, robust safety nets, and equitable funding formulas. This could involve joining in wider concerted efforts towards shared accountability. For example, institutions and agencies can invite civil society organizations, think tanks, or citizen committees to evaluate institutional impacts, expose systematic harm or racism, and propose remedial measures to mitigate some harm.

Incremental reforms have provided partial progress, including immediate accountability paths (public scrutiny, corporate responsibilities, legislative reforms), and have helped reduce harm, shining a light on institutional complicity in structural injustice. In the long term, the goal is to forge institutions that align with a just society's moral imagination, thereby reducing the need for reactive accountability by preventing oppressive dynamics from arising in the first place. As exemplified in Scandinavian countries, social policies, including restorative justice, renewable energy, inclusive education, incorporating immigrants, and validating ethnic and racial diversity, can shift a society towards being more just and more egalitarian (Lakey, 2016). However, institutional accountability is inevitably constrained by entrenched power dynamics and profit-driven interests. This means that powerful institutions will always have excuses, manipulate accountability measures, or dilute reforms that threaten profits or disrupt established hierarchies.

This inertia demonstrates why institutional accountability can be slow or stifled, further necessitating external pressure and oversight, and ultimately a deeper structural redesign that aligns institutional practices with just principles and equitable societal ends.

Responsibilities

One insight drawn from the previous discussion is that meaningful accountability requires consistent personal responsibility and sustained collective action. Indeed, people have a moral duty to fellow human beings and other beings, and, therefore, we all have the ethical responsibility to critique, challenge, and right the wrongs. According to Simone Weil, our duty and obligation to each other can sustain the vibrancy of a political community, rather than the claim to, demand for, and defence against rights. For Weil, an "indispensable" human need involves taking initiative and exercising responsibility for each other's well-being and for the greater good in the world. This is, in part, our eternal unconditional duty of care that can serve as the foundation for shared common life. The good at which the caring is directed is "unique, unchanging and identical with itself for every man, from the cradle to the grave" (Weil, 1952/2002, p. 10). It is therefore applicable to all, but without the paternalistic tone. The responsibility for each other arises in the "depths of our being", and no one should suffer from hunger as long as there is someone who can help. Singer (2009) echoes this view and highlights that no child should be left unsaved when one can help.

Young's (2011) *social connection model* is rooted in the belief that everyone entwined in structural processes has the responsibility to remedy them. This is a shift from accountability to *political responsibility*, which is a forward-looking conception of responsibility that entails collective action. This perspective is echoed by Sardo (2022), who builds upon Nietzsche's concept of agency and ethical responsibility as inherently non-sovereign, suggesting that our agency and our responsibility do not reside in autonomous, isolated individuals but are normatively conceived, socially distributed, and historically conditioned. Responsibility, accordingly, cannot rely solely on personal choices or decisions. Instead, it must reflect awareness of the broader social and historical conditions that shape agency and responsibility. The interconnectedness of all actors within societal structures determines that responsibility cannot be reduced to personal accountability alone but must encompass collective responsibility for preserving and transforming the social conditions conducive to human flourishing.

Personal responsibility should not be viewed as isolated moral acts but as essential contributions to broader collective efforts. Such efforts thrive only when the ethical duty of care informs collective commitment to justice. These conceptions point to the integration of personal and collective responsibility.

Typically, those who benefit from privileges, such as wealthier groups in affluent communities or the global elite who gain economically,

socially, and politically from unequal resource distributions, carry greater personal responsibility. Such responsibility involves not only recognizing their advantageous positions in society, acknowledging their (implicit or unconscious) complicity in the unequal processes and practices, but also actively challenging unjust systems. Ethical responsibility for the elite moves beyond mere guilt or blameworthiness, which is predominantly moralistic. Instead, it serves as a call to action, urging each participant to reflect on their role within the wider social reproduction of power imbalance and inequality, and to contribute towards transformative change.

There is a question, however, in terms of whether those who are oppressed and discriminated against within an unjust system should also be called upon to take ethical responsibility for addressing systemic inequality. Young's response to this question is clear: victims who suffer due to structural injustice also bear the ethical responsibility of "naming" the system and its ills because it "is they who know the most about the harms they suffer, and thus it is up to them, though not them alone, to broadcast their situation and call it injustice" (Young, 2011, p. 146). For Jugov and Ypi (2019), the political responsibility of the oppressed is essential to challenging structural injustice. They believe that people who are most impacted by systems of oppression are more "epistemically aware" of the unjust conditions, their structural and historical nature, and how institutions are designed to disempower them as a social group. Therefore, both the elite and the oppressed bear personal responsibility for resisting the tendencies of structural injustice.

For the elite, there are many ways to act on their ethical responsibility, such as advocating for the fair redistribution of resources, investing in historically marginalized communities, sharing personal wealth, and providing funding for community programmes. Those who are in positions of power can publicly speak against discriminatory policies, amplify silenced voices, and draw attention to stories of systemic injustice. Ethical responsibility for the elite also lies in how they consciously divest from industries or companies implicated in perpetuating structural harm. This may mean divesting from fossil fuels, militarization, private prisons, or companies reliant on exploitative sweatshop labour practices.

For the oppressed, they can speak up about experiences of living under structural injustice, critically challenge discriminative narratives, actively reject stereotypes, and affirm inherent dignity. Within the communities of the oppressed, intergenerational dialogue is key to enabling younger generations to recognize historical structural injustice and patterns of oppression and inequality. In doing so, there can be renewed awareness

and appreciation of intergenerational strengths in resisting structural injustice, which will enhance resilience in rejecting complicity.

However, to foster ethical responsibility from all stakeholders, personal efforts are important but not enough – collective political action is also needed. According to Young (2011, p. 153),

> Such collective action is difficult. It requires organization, the will to cooperate on the part of many diverse actors, significant knowledge of how the actions of individuals and the rules and purposes of institutions conspire to produce injustice, and the ability to foresee the likely consequences of proposed remedies. One or more of these conditions is often absent.

To fulfil collective responsibility, Paulo Freire's notion of "naming the world" proves particularly powerful. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he writes:

> To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new naming. Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection.
>
> *(Freire, 1970, p. 88)*

By "naming" structural injustice explicitly, people can begin the crucial step towards transformative self-awareness and active ethical responsibility. Accordingly, when people can come together to name the world's problem, i.e., structural injustice, and recognize its myriad historical woundedness and enduring harm, they will also question the fundamental logic (e.g., unlimited capital accumulation, entrenched property laws) upon which institutions are built. Naming can also be connected to "creating conceptual and practical connections that generate new options (and new constraints) for agency" (Haslanger, 2023, p. 58).

Through naming the world, collective action, while demanding, is not impossible to engender transformative change. Grassroots movements such as the Civil Rights Movement, Indigenous land rights activism (e.g., Standing Rock protests), global climate strikes, and the Wellbeing Economy Alliance exemplify how people from all backgrounds and all positions in society can come together and take shared responsibility through organized collective socio-political action. Inspirational stories that have long-lasting impact include the Singing Revolution in the Balkans to resist repression and colonization (1987–1991), the "Sorry Day" march in Australia to promote Indigenous people's rights and

solidarity (inaugurated on 26 May 1998), the Hope in the Cities initiative across the United States to build trust, heal history, and resist racialized discrimination, and the UNESCO Collective Healing Initiative involving communities in 14 countries across four continents.

Naming, in the contexts of Indigenous communities' efforts towards epistemic emancipation, is the first step for many marginalized people to co-create platforms for sharing knowledge, promoting intergenerational and cultural wisdom that challenge harmful stereotypes and biases, and educating self and elite allies about structural injustices. Community centre activities, new narratives through social media and podcasts, or public forums are public spaces for naming systemic equality and fostering a new consciousness of the interconnections between structures, systems, institutions, groups, communities, and people. Dialogues and collaborative projects can bring the privileged and the marginalized into coordinated collective action to confront difficult histories and legacies of oppression.

***

While accountability and responsibility can, at best, *repair* or *improve* existing social conditions and institutional practices, the limitations of "fixing" inherently flawed systems highlight the need for a more radical restructuring. These strategies to resist and respond do not reach the core of structural injustice because they are intended to address the ills of existing structural design. While remedying the systemic malaise, we must set aside time and space for transformative initiatives beyond mere reform, resistance, and resilience. This requires reshaping the underlying ethical pillars for the architecture of a new *house*, aiming towards a just society where the dignity in the well-being of all persons in harmony with ecological integrity must be the primary focus of politics.

Politics of Dignity

To co-create a just society, institutions, organizations, and communities must collaboratively reimagine political structures, institutional processes, policies, and practices. As established earlier in this chapter, a structure comprises "the ways in which relevant institutions are systematically organized in relation to each other, as defined by a set of principles" (Thomson & Gill, 2024, p. 22). Given the five dimensions of structural injustice explored previously, envisioning a political project capable of transcending current impasses demands nothing less than a comprehensive *reset* that clearly articulates foundational principles for structural justice and a truly just society. These principles are of paramount importance

because they can define what our society ought to value, clarify the shared goals it should strive towards, and guide institutions and communities in working harmoniously to achieve collective flourishing.

In other words, the next step is to envision a "new house" founded upon ethical pillars to redefine the desirable societal architecture. This move from *mere reform* towards a deeper systemic redefinition signals the transition from a focus on patching structural injustices to creating systems designed to align with justice at every level. As argued elsewhere (Thomson & Gill, 2024), to imagine systemic transformation, we must start from evaluative claims about what is better and in what ways. Such a project requires a clear and thorough understanding of the normative basis of structural justice, which will serve as the design principles for a new form of society. These principles further provide insights into new approaches, processes, and practices of institutions, as well as the responsibilities of organizations, communities, groups, and individuals.

Dignity at the Heart of Justice

Justice is a perennial concern among thinkers and philosophers, reflected in the myriad conceptions developed within both Western and non-Western philosophical traditions. The diversity in interpretations only highlights the complexity inherent in proposing a universal understanding of the term. Justice emerges as a multifaceted notion, encompassing legal frameworks, virtues, individual freedom and autonomy, modes of distribution and representation, effects of policies or political decisions, and characteristics of social structures and institutional practices.

Central to contemporary debates are contentions between two primary perspectives: one rooted in Western political philosophy that emphasizes the equality of rights-bearing individuals before the law, and the other emerging from non-Western communities, including peoples of African and Indigenous descent, that is grounded in recognizing mutual belongingness and interconnectedness among persons and groups. Despite these differences, what unites these divergent views is the fundamental notion of dignity as the ethical core of justice.

Under the rights-based conception, dignity is prominently enshrined in international charters, declarations, and national constitutions. Despite this prominence, according to Hauke (2023), dignity only becomes evident through its absence, particularly in contexts marked by inequality and violation (Kaufmann et al., 2010). When groups such as sweatshop labourers, people of colour, and people who self-identify as intersectional in their identities are oppressed by structural injustice, they tend to experience emotions such as shame, resentment, indignation, and even outrage.

These are typically prompted by a sense of justice and dignity, at the recognition that justice or dignity has been infringed and disregarded.

In contrast, non-Western conceptions tend to regard human dignity as a relational concept, such as the traditional African Ubuntu ontology. From an Ubuntu perspective, a person is a person through other persons and in communing with others. South African philosopher Thaddeus Metz asked, "who are the others?" The answer he found was that others are those "who in principle are the most capable of communing" (Metz, 2014, p. 315). Being and becoming more fully human through mutual communing is the essence of dignity under Ubuntu. Dignity hinges upon our relational being through mutual identification/recognition and solidarity. Metz explains further that Ubuntu inspires that a person self-identifies as a "we", or part of a group who does "we" things together, in the example of joint projects of living a common life. Solidarity is our expression of this we-ness, or interrelatedness, through caring for our collective well-being. Ubuntu suggests that no one can thrive alone, and that personal well-being involves relational flourishing.

Bringing these two different vistas of dignity together, despite the conceptual variability, shows that dignity retains a consistent core – the recognition of the equal intrinsic value and inherent worth of every human being, which does not need to be earned and which all humans share. Thus, it is established that human "beings with dignity have the highest non-instrumental value such that they must be treated as having that kind of value" (Metz, 2014, p. 311). As bearers of intrinsic non-instrumental value, in no circumstances should a person be treated as less human (Thomson et al., 2021). Applying this imperative to examine structural injustice, we can see that systems thus denoted fail to uphold the equal respect for all persons and are hence deemed inhumane. Systems of inhumanity egregiously violate and degrade human dignity by commodifying, enslaving, colonizing, dispossessing, discriminating, or demonizing human beings.

Be it a normative conception or a relational understanding, human dignity stands as an essential ethical foundation for a just society. It evokes that human dignity must be constituted in forms of life shared by the communities (Pritchard, 1972). The notion of "forms of life" originates in Wittgenstein's (1953) *Philosophical Investigations*, in which he proposes that language consists in a multiplicity of "language games" *played* in agreement with people in the context of a linguistic community who are engaging in various non-linguistic activities and practices. Speaking a language and engaging in activities and practices comprise *a form of life*.

Human dignity connotes that forms of life within a just society cannot be conceived as politically naïve nor deployed within the political

apparatus of nation-states under a neoliberal or contractual and legalistic view of justice. Rather, as expounded by Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, "the world found nothing sacred in the abstract nakedness of being human" (Arendt, 1958, p. 295). Hence, a form of life, as conceived by Wittgenstein, is always located and grounded within a political realm, a community where equal respect for human dignity recognizes that we are *all* members of the 'political' community, and we are *all* co-creators of a common world. In other words, human dignity is not granted by authority; it is lived, enacted, and realized in our living an active life together through co-participation in a political community.

Positioning dignity at the core of justice, therefore, requires moving beyond transactional, individualistic, and legalistic conceptions of rights, towards an ethical and relational vision anchored in mutual respect and collective flourishing. This reorientation frames a just society as an inclusive community, whose members collaborate in the political project of pursuing a meaningful life together. Within this context, dignity functions both as a foundational ethical principle and as a transformative practice. Justice is thus not merely an abstract ideal but rather becomes embodied and expressed through collective actions that permeate and shape our shared existence. Institutions, agencies, and organizations play a crucial role in nurturing and sustaining such a vibrant, interconnected political community, actively enabling all persons to live, act, and flourish together.

An Ethical Framework for a Just Society

Pablo Gilabert (2023) proposes a three-dimensional framework essential for articulating a renewed vision to guide political practice. This comprehensive tripartite structure offers useful design principles for establishing the normative ethical foundations necessary for a just society. Gilabert's three dimensions include: 1) core principles, encompassing both evaluative and prescriptive elements; 2) institutions and social practices that embody these principles; and 3) processes of transformation that enable the actualization of these principles within society.

Below, I will apply this tripartite framework to explore the ethical pillars that underpin a global just society, the design blueprints for the relevant institutions and their practices, and the envisaged processes of engaging the whole society in pursuing common futures together.

In defining the core values foundational to our envisioned just society, two critical evaluative principles rooted in human dignity emerge clearly and may serve as the ethical pillars upon which a just society stands. Firstly, there must be respect for the equal intrinsic worth of all persons. This principle explicitly rejects treating individuals solely as a means

to an end, thus safeguarding against any forms of dehumanization, such as degradation, objectification, discrimination, and exploitation. Integrating intrinsic worth and non-instrumental value in human beings, equal respect for all provides the normative foundation for the common good, which should be central to the processes and practices of social institutions and political communities. Other societal ends, e.g., economic growth, and goods, e.g., social cohesion, are thus derivative, dependent upon recognizing and upholding this fundamental principle of dignity.

Secondly, society must firmly commit to a political objective aimed explicitly at enhancing and enriching human well-being in concert with ecological integrity. This political objective is located in the mutual constitutive-ness of human flourishing and well-being of other beings in nature (also see Chapter 7 of Gill & Thomson, 2019). This dual commitment ensures that the flourishing of individuals and communities aligns harmoniously with environmental sustainability and intergenerational continuity. Human dignity implies that well-being is always primarily normative. It raises essential questions such as "What matters most?" and "How should we live our lives?" (Thomson et al., 2021). Human well-being matters fundamentally because people matter as beings with inherent and non-instrumental value. Hence, both human lives and human well-being become central political objectives for a just society (Thomson & Gill, 2024).

Dignity emphasizes that well-being cannot be static or individualistic; instead, it is holistic, dynamic, and relational. It is holistic because life is multidimensional, and involves (a) the meaningful experiences in our activities and processes; (b) the quality of our awareness and recognition of the non-instrumental values in these experiences; (c) the congenial relationships inherent in our experiences; (e) our self-conscious awareness of our lives as being non-instrumentally valuable, overtime. Finally, our well-being involves (f) a synergy that all is going well at the same time, and along these dimensions (Thomson et al., 2021). Well-being is dynamic because life is continuously lived and realized through diverse personal and shared experiences and communal practices. It is relational because our own flourishing is inherently intertwined with that of others within the broader ecological environment. Seen in this way, nature and ecological systems are never merely instrumental to human interests but are integral to human well-being, reinforcing the imperative to preserve and nurture ecological integrity as part of a dignified collective existence.

These principles are evaluative because they provide the normative criteria for ethical commitments of institutions, policies, and practices within society. By highlighting human dignity as foundational, and the well-being of all as the common good, these evaluative principles serve as

benchmarks against which we gauge how effectively societal structures uphold the intrinsic worth of all individuals and promote shared flourishing. They serve as constant reminders regarding what is right, good, and just in a society, ensuring institutions and policies do not instrumentalize, exploit, or oppress persons but rather respect and nurture their inherent value and flourishing lives in harmony with the thriving of other beings in nature. Thus, these evaluative principles critically inform the ethical direction and objectives that a just society ought to pursue.

With these ethical pillars firmly established, institutions within the envisioned just society must uphold the principle of dignity and advocate for the common good of co-flourishing. This means that they first ought to intentionally foster conditions conducive to the well-being of all, proactively ensuring fair access to resources and equitable opportunities necessary for people to lead a dignified life. Secondly, institutions should cultivate our collective awareness of human dignity and nurture our capacities to pursue personal and communal well-being. By supporting aspirations and practical steps to lead rich and fulfiling lives, institutions can enable all to contribute meaningfully to a just society.

Concerning processes of transformation, it is important that for society to be just, institutions and communities must actively create and sustain spaces that facilitate congenial relational processes fundamental to vibrant public (political) engagement. These processes should build trust, foster respectful dialogue (intercultural, interreligious, intergenerational), deepen mutual understanding, and strengthen collective decision-making. Additionally, transformative processes should ensure the genuine and meaningful participation of all members in the active life of the political community. Such participatory and collaborative involvement can serve ethical, political, and practical purposes, enhancing democratic responsiveness and sustaining collective commitment to a just society.

Conclusion: Towards Global Flourishing

This chapter has analyzed the nature of structural injustice, illuminating how it perpetuates systemic racism, inequalities, and enduring unfairness. By identifying five interlocking dimensions through which injustice becomes embedded in society, it has been shown why institutional accountability and individual or collective responsibility alone cannot effectively address or dismantle these systemic challenges. In response, the chapter proposed a conceptual framework, outlining design principles for a renewed political architecture firmly rooted in ethical pillars: the inherent dignity of every person, ecological harmony, institutional accountability, and inclusive participatory processes.

While such a framework offers a robust foundation for collective flourishing, achieving a genuinely just society cannot occur without confronting historical inhumanity and the intergenerational transmission of trauma. Healing these profound wounds necessitates strengthening relational bonds within political communities, establishing public forums for intergenerational dialogue to acknowledge past sabotages, and openly recognizing ongoing harm. Through such collective processes, communities can reclaim dignity, drawing on intergenerational wisdom and cultural resilience to co-create better futures.

Ultimately, this chapter affirms that although the histories of many communities have been profoundly shaped by structural injustice, racial capitalism, and power-driven institutions, adopting a dignity-inspired and well-being-centred political design can foster a transformative politics of dignity. By constructing equitable and respectful social conditions and embracing an architecture of collective healing, we can cultivate societies that are capable of sustained global flourishing for generations to come.

Note

1 Redlining refers to the discriminatory practice, prevalent in the mid-20th century, where financial institutions and government agencies systematically denied mortgages, insurance, and other financial services to residents in predominantly minority neighbourhoods, effectively segregating communities and limiting wealth accumulation and socioeconomic mobility.

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