Becoming octopus: Indigenous ways of knowing and green leadership

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ABSTRACT

On 30 June 2014 we (a small group of academic women) opened our first Green Leadership School, an experiment in decolonising the classroom, exploring indigenous environmental knowledge, and creating a space of healing and love. This paper documents the process of healing and rejuvenating the lives of activists, government officials, trade unionists, and university students. Similar to the concept of Deleuze and Guattari's (2004) "becoming animal" and "becoming wolf", we represented the school as "becoming octopus" – a creature with green blood (becoming green), the highest brain-to-body ratio of any invertebrate, many slithering arms to twist and escape oppression and slide away from toxic spaces, and three hearts for the three-hearted practices of love, bodily integration, and mind-spirit awareness. Therefore, the pedagogical experiment focused on transmutation – connecting with the environment through merging human with animal, ritual and magic, gardening, yoga, storytelling, music, and art alongside more conventional lectures such as understanding climate change through South African vernaculars, 'land grabs' in Africa, pollution in South Durban, and environmental communication. Damaged by apartheid and post-apartheid wounds and worldwide ruptures in the socius – the participants experienced psychic healing. This paper discusses the role of joyful pedagogies in decolonising education.

Introduction

Transformation of higher education institutions (HEIs) was again put firmly on the agenda by the #FeesMustFall movement in 2015 and has remained on the South African – and even the global – agenda since then. Over time, decolonisation of higher education has involved:

> diverse efforts to resist the distinct but intertwined processes of colonization and racialization, to enact transformation and redress in reference to the historical and ongoing effects of these processes, and to create and keep alive modes of knowing, being, and relating that these processes seek to eradicate (Stein & De Andreotti, 2016: 1).

Since the end of apartheid, far from decolonising, South African universities have chased high global rankings and rolled out the commodification of education, with business-like performance criteria for academics (Heleta, 2023). Education in this system is perceived as the efficient transfer of knowledge, with the student as customer, who expects a degree at the end of the process, with the development of the intellect promoted over other forms of human development, such as physical, psychological, and spiritual. This ongoing colonised form of education is not only related to the spaces of the university (built with colonial features), or to the intellectual content of the lectures, but also to "deeply affective structures and sensibilities of coloniality entrenched in contemporary universities" (Zembylas, 2022: 1).

Apart from the affective impacts of coloniality in the university, many of those seeking education in South African have been robbed of their connections to the land and its knowledge (Sefa, 2020), after the creation of colonial and apartheid land ownership patterns that continue to hinder equitable land use (Moyo, 2007). In being torn from the land, and the land under colonialism and apartheid being ripped, stripped, and mined for large-scale agriculture and mining, both the earth and colonised subjects were injured (Barnwell, Makaulule, Stroud, Watson & Dima, 2021). At the same time, alongside the psychic wounds of apartheid, which continue to shape the present (Gagiano, 2012), the post-apartheid socio-political milieu has continued to wound and disenchant the populace, with extreme inequality, grinding poverty for most citizens, seemingly shameless corrupt elites, and at the global level, the inescapable demands of neoliberal capitalism. Also, insofar as a planetary awareness exists, many people are disenchanted with the destruction and degradation of the earth and its biosphere. Given the levels of abuse, our question was how to reinvigorate our political spaces with a rooted environmentalism. How would a decolonised HE system re-enchant our political practices and political practitioners to maintain energy and focus to drive change?

We launched the Green Leadership School in June 2014, led by its founder, Darlene Miller. With a curriculum that sought to address this disenchantment, and in thinking about the school, we found our answers in "becoming octopus" – not as a metaphor but as a practice: practices of green blood/becoming green, escape artist (a practice of finding gaps to escape oppression), and the mind connected to the three-hearted practices of love, bodily integration, and mind-spirit awareness. The point was not to reach the endpoint of being octopus, but always to be en route, allowing for cross-pollination: just as the wasp and the orchid in *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004) form a pollinating system or rhizome, so the connection between those attending the Green School and participating in octopus practices allowed the formation of a rhizomatic network, and from the cross-pollination came the seeds of new ways of thinking, feeling, and travelling through the world.

Because the wounds inflicted had scarred not only humans but also the land and environment, we wanted to examine how it might be possible, in a holistic way, to heal and re-enchant the world in what Crutzen and Stoemer (2000) call the "Age of the Anthropocene". As Guattari says in *The Three Ecologies* (2005: 35), the move towards an environmental and conscious way of being requires "ways of operating … more like that of the artist, rather than … an outmoded ideal of scientificity". We wanted to move away from the colonial, Cartesian, purely 'scientific' western mode of education with its focus only on thinking – "I think therefore I am" (Descartes, 2006: 28) – and towards a fluid becoming of green consciousness/escape artist/heart, body, mind, spirit. Whereas dominant cultures of environmentalism in South Africa have focused mostly on white, middle-class concerns with conservation (Khan, 2000), we sought to bridge the divide between social justice and ecological issues, as advocated by Cock (2004), working with activists, trade unionists, university students, and government officials who had not previously conceptualised their work as tied to environmental concerns. We understood that this was not merely about consciousness-raising, but about integrated practices that incorporated a full-body experience, opened people up to creativity, and awakened tired spirits.

Alongside the ripping from the land and forced urbanisation to create a mine workforce, South Africans were stripped of their knowledge about the land and environment ('indigenous knowledge'), including more scientific knowledge about plants and animals, the knowledge experienced through the body in nature, and psychic/ spiritual knowledge about our place in the cosomos (Bam, 2021). The land was also ripped and stripped for large-scale agriculture and mining, injuring both the earth and colonised subjects (Barnwell *et al.*, 2021). Post-apartheid, since the land

has not been restored to the communities who previously lived there, many South Africans still live, of necessity, in the disenchanted spaces of townships and informal settlements.

In the context of South African HE, in which many embark on their journey to secure a better job, our project was a radical departure, because centring the academy only on access to jobs has hollowed out the academy, leaving students without the bodily, emotional, and spiritual nourishment needed to navigate the world inside and outside the academy. Rooting our Green Leadership School in the indigenous knowledge of those few who continue to work the soil, we also examined the 'endogenous knowledge' of South Africans, in terms of their local modes of subsistence and consumption (for example, dietary practices). Our activities, which included lectures and other activities, sought to reconnect participants with the land, the environment, and ancestral histories – through lectures, gardening, physical activities, the arts, and ritual. Through these reconnections, participants experienced reinvigoration and re-enchantment through magic, aesthetics, and joy, as well as intellectual engagement – some in South African vernaculars.

Context: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Wasteocene, and the 'brown space' of disenchantment

In coining the term the 'Age of the Anthropocene', Crutzen and Stoemer (2000) argued that ecological and geological change in the current era could be wholly ascribed to human industrial action for the last 200 years. The focus on this claim, and similar claims by Costanza, Graumlich, Steffen, Crumley, Dearing, Hibbard *et al.* (2007), is on industrialisation in northern and western countries, which, particularly after the Second World War, has been accelerating. In focusing on industrialisation, the consciousness about Anthropocene changes remained rooted in Western scientific knowledge, where facts are separated from other life-knowledges, and other forms of knowledge are described as superstition.

Furthermore, as Moore (J. W. Moore, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c, 2014, 2015) points out, the current age did not start with the industrialisation of the North, but with the so-called 'Voyages of Discovery', in which Europeans spread across the world, stripped indigenous populations of their land, upturned political systems, and enslaved large populations. European knowledge and ideologies were used to justify ravaging human populations and the land. In this knowledge, nature – including humans – was commodified and exploited to generate profit, and knowledge was used to justify racial and gendered hierarchies. Moore calls this the 'Age of the Capitalocene', which he distinguishes from the

Age of the Anthropocene by acknowledging the social relations that created the current epoch and points out that it is not the entire species producing climate change, but capitalists. As Donna Haraway (2014a) argues:

> [T]he Anthropos did not do this thing that threatens mass extinction, and that if we were to use only one word … it should be the Capitalocene. (Haraway, 2014b, para. 17)

Armiero and De Angelis (2017) concur with Moore, but extend the discussion, describing the Capitalocene as a Wasteocene – forever producing wasteful externalities such as garbage mountains and pollution, which ravage bodies and the earth. In this Wasteocene, different strands of humanity clash. For example, capitalists clash with environmentalists and workers, sometimes workers and environmentalist clash (jobs vs. the planet), and sometimes environmentalists want to set up conservation areas and clash with indigenous populations who will be displaced from their land to make way for transnational parks (Thondhlana, Shackleton & Muchapondwa, 2011). This Capitalocene or Wasteocene move is not just reflected in the planet's biophysical base and the erosion of social relations, but also penetrates people's attitudes, sensibilities, and states of mind (Guattari, 2005). The assemblages that make up capitalism include individuals and our psyches, such that we keep generating waste, and the mental illnesses that go along with it.

In our Green Leadership Schools, we conceptualised the South African political space as a 'brown space', stripped of healthy 'green space'. The South African political culture is inscribed with a history of wounding because of colonialism and apartheid (Kearney, 2014). Even South African activists, in the face of gross inequality, deal with compassion fatigue. The destructive traumas of apartheid continue in the present, with South Africa being one of the most violent countries that is not at war (Gagiano, 2012).

Rape and murder are so common as to be rarely reported, and when reported, hardly investigated (Gouws, n.d.), especially when it is the rape and murder of black South Africans. Violence against women and children is spiralling. Xenophobia has become normalised, and attacks on foreign nationals are seen as understandable responses to poverty (Kaziboni, 2022). Race continues to be the focus of political intention in a situation in which racial injuries persist.

However, this violence is not part of the fabric of human nature, it is "constructed and maintained by multiple assemblages" (Guattari, 2005: 58). For example, the unaddressed and growing inequality in South African society – the most unequal society in the world (World Bank, 2022) – continues to

generate a violent attack on people's material existence and psyches, such that the assemblages produce ever-expanding violence.

The early 2000s saw mass resistance to neoliberalism in the form of social movements (for example, the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF), and the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign (WCAEC)). These were soon characterised as "ultra-left" (Forrest, 2003). No sooner had these social movements arrested privatisation and evictions from council housing, than the organisations were ripped apart by internal conflicts, which included attempts to impose hierarchy vs. attempts to build consensus organisations, conflict about the role of women in the organisations where most of the leaders were men, and in the case of the WCAEC, conflict between black and 'coloured' comrades (Pointer, 2004; McKinley, 2016).

Disillusionment has taken hold.

As Guattari (2005: 41) explains, our relationship with the socius, the psyche, and 'nature' is deteriorating, which results from "a certain incomprehension and fatalistic passivity towards these issues as a whole, among both individuals and governments".

Theoretical framework: Becoming octopus

In the face of all this pain and disillusionment, we recognised that there is no going back. We saw the need for new knowledge, knowledge that could heal, knowledge that respected African realities, and knowledge that centred on new forms of leadership. In this endeavour and through our concept of becoming octopus, we drew on the *A Thousand Plateaus* theory of becoming (and other works by the same authors), in which the inter-connection between things/beings (in our case octopus and human) "form relays in a circulation of intensities" exploding into a "line of flight" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004: 10). It was a line of flight away from

> the imposing imperial architecture imitating the pillars of Greek pantheons; the modernist square buildings where support staff beaver (or while) away their time; the quarantined laboratory spaces where shadowy lab-coated figures mystically glide around. (Miller, Mkhize, Pointer & Magoqwana, 2019: 261).

Instead, we headed to farms, beaches, eco-villages and invited octopus sensibilities, activists, unionists, students, spiritual practitioners, musicians, artists, and government officials into a new kind of 'classroom'.

Since capitalism and colonialism have extended their influence "over the whole social, economic and cultural life of the planet" and infiltrated "the most unconscious subjective strata", we needed to confront these social structures/systems not just from outside, in the form of traditional politics, but also in the "mental ecology in everyday life" (Guattari, 2005: 50). We hoped to forge new solidarities, which involve "a new gentleness, together with a new aesthetic and new analytical practices" (Guattari, 2005: 51). Or "learning how to craft a poetic/political unity" (Haraway, 1991: 155). At the same time, we did not want to rely too heavily on Western philosophers; we sought to bring African indigenous and endogenous knowledge to bear on our ways of thinking - most of the lecturers and facilitators were black African. Therefore, we recognized that our 'new' solidarities needed to invoke notions such as Ubuntu – 'I am because we are', the idea that individuals are embedded in a socius and exist because of a socius, and actively shape the socius (Le Grange, 2005: 42).

Around the same time that we set off on our Green Leadership School octopus experiment, Haraway (2014a) began to talk of the 'Chthulucene', in which she conjured up new human embodiments of octopuses and spiders. It seems we were thinking alike, that embodying ourselves as something other could bring about an expanding awareness. Following the line of Deleuze and Guattari's (2004) becoming-animal, we struck on the idea of the school as a creature – a many-armed creature, each arm with its own brain, performing many actions at once. This choice of the octopus as the symbol for the school was inspired by the old South African Domestic Workers' Union logo, with a woman performing many tasks and having multiple arms. But this octopus was more enchanted than the overworked domestic worker, for it could use its sensitive arms to find and squeeze its way out of capture, it could move away from danger, indeed it could escape. Unlike the overused body of the domestic worker, the octopus image inspired beauty, enchantment, and flow, like belly-dancers, and the images depicted in the recent documentary, *My Octopus Teacher* (Ehrlich & Reed, 2020).

In invoking the octopus, we saw our Green Leadership School programme as becoming-with; humans are not the most important creatures in the ecosphere, and humans are not separate from the environment. Instead, by invoking the octopus, we conceptualised what Haraway (2016: 55) argues is "the order reknitted", in which "human beings are with and of the earth, and the biotic and abiotic power of this earth are the main story". In this process, we intended to transform South Africa's 'brown' political spaces into something 'green' – the octopus with its green blood – something loving and caring – the octopus with its three hearts. Haraway (2016: 57) argues that:

> The unfinished Chthulucene must collect up the trash of the Anthropocene, the
> exterminism of the Capitalocene, and chipping and shredding and layering like a mad

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> gardener, make a much hotter compost pile for still possible pasts, presents, and futures.

Again, alike in our thinking, this project of becoming-octopus, gardening (the Chthulucene) is a central concept. But for us, this was not only figurative gardening; it was an essential, practical part of the curriculum - those who entered the classroom also planted vegetable gardens – becoming gardeners, becoming octopuses, becoming chthulu.

As Ntuli (2002) explains, African values and knowledge emphasise that survival depends on an inter-connected reality in which human beings, plants, animals, and the universe are one interconnected whole. African knowledge systems recognise that "animals communicate essential messages or convey blessings to humans by performing certain movements or through encounter" (Mokuku, 2012: 161–162). When we are ensconced in the global colonising Eurocentric worldview, the specificity of local knowledge and local ecologies becomes invisible (Maila & Loubser, 2003). In our project, by becoming octopus, we saw ourselves moving closer to animals – performing movements – to convey messages. As such, in bringing African indigenous imaginaries into the schools, we sought to decolonise knowledge, i.e., make it less dependent on the rational, Cartesian ways of thinking that have "impacted on our sense of what it means to be human (and who is fully human)" (Miller & Pointer, 2020: 22).

Instead, we sought to create wonder and awe at the vastness of life through spiritual imbrications which aligned with African philosophies of "care, empathy, life giving and collectivism … central to re-imagining the university beyond individualising, competitive, masculine and neoliberal cultures" (Magoqwana, 2018: 113). Becoming-octopus was an experiment. We, the organisers, had broken away from our Marxist/ Freirean (1970) roots – the pedagogies of the oppressed. We did not view our project as "consciousness raising", but as healing and creative. We sought to break away from traditional university education; as for Deleuze and Guattari's (2004) approach to pedagogy, we wanted to move away from an education which was merely about acquiring information and reciting subject matter (Carlin & Wallin, 2014).

Like Buchanan (2014), who talks to Deleuze and Guattari, we recognised the limits of Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, in that people do not simply rise up when they see the true nature of their situation. People do not rise up for many reasons; we are oppressed simply by trying to meet our daily needs or we are tied to the products of capitalism, such as cars, malls, and elaborate goods. We do not feel there is anything we can do, and we are dispirited and disillusioned. Instead of prescribing a particular consciousness, we sought to encourage ourselves and others to see the

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potential for transformation, by building an assemblage that took us from where we were to somewhere different. We saw it as "the call for a new earth and a new people … an affirmation of and invitation to the people in the here and now to be creative in thinking and practices … so that they can become-other" (Hroch, 2014: 54). We saw it as a call for the "re-enchantment of everyday life" (T. Moore, 1997).

In becoming octopus, we pushed participants to think differently, which is both a pedagogical and political activity, to bring about a breakaway from our usual individual ways of thinking, to seeing ourselves connected to "other human and non-human, living and non-living others" (Hroch, 2014: 55–56). Alongside gardening, which was briefly mentioned above, we sought affective, moving, and sensate experiences. As we moved, to become octopus, we increased the bodies' power to act. In discussing Spinoza, Deleuze (1978) refers to how positive affect increases the energy available to act; we sought to generate this positive affect in our workshop participants, by getting their bodies moving, yoga, dancing, digging, painting: a "sensational pedagogy taking into consideration the materiality of the body's becoming – the body as a sensing and moving interface" (Springgay, 2011: 67). In this becoming, we wanted to see new directions emerging for green action, new lines of flights, which come from the "novelty and creativity … implicit in the learning process" (Semetsky, 2010: 484).

In generating new lines of flights, we made assemblages of typical 'classroom learning' alongside African traditions of learning, which can include playing games, cooking, farming, dancing, music, ritual, and critical thinking (Adeyemi & Adeyinka, 2003). These assemblages, also like African styles of learning, took place in many different spaces – classrooms, gardens, by the sea, ritual spaces, by the fireside. In so doing, we not only created our own endogenous spaces of learning, but also honoured ancient histories and traditions, which are part of who we are, and part of our social forms.

The "classroom"

To begin with, our classroom was about 'deterritorialising' the university space into places closer to nature – moving from the 'brown spaces' of colonial architecture to farms or the sea. However, we will not go into the spatial aspect of our Green Leadership School in this paper – it is covered elsewhere (c.f. Miller *et al*., 2019). We also do not detail the lectures which merged the intellectual with other forms of knowing. Instead, we discuss some of the activities undertaken to highlight

aspects of the pedagogical exercise and highlight activities that were especially transformative, but this is not a sequential narrative; it moves and flows, like the octopus, on the move with its tentacles. We also do not cover all the activities that were undertaken, mainly because they were just too numerous to include in one paper. Instead, we focus on the theme of becoming, which by necessity points to affective experiences that can only be evoked, but not pinned down.

All in all, there were four schools, which all operated uniquely (with some stable elements), and the schools were influenced by the nature of the participants; each school was a different assemblage, in which the specific individuals and their affects shifted the dynamics. Across all four schools and inside each school the activities were "the great dance of assemblages" (Forbes, 2021: 290), with each group of participants, facilitators, and activities creating an interconnected flow of creativity, ideas, minds, emotions, affects, spirits, and bodies, forming a rhizomatic network.

Ritual and other spiritual practices: Creating new openings with old practices

The third Green Leadership School, held in Coffee Bay in the Eastern Cape, was attended predominantly by trade union activists with a strong Marxist or Socialist ethos. Mostly men, they were urban creatures, who had moved away from traditional cultures into the milieu of industrialisation. They had come to the Green Leadership School with the mindset of undertaking intellectual and political activities to think through ways that unions and government could be involved in promoting a 'green economy', and how this could benefit workers. Others that attended came from the Eastern Cape provincial government and were looking at ways to tackle poverty using green projects. As such, they were looking for us to inculcate 'green consciousness'.

Prior to leaving for the school, one of the paper's authors – Rebecca Pointer, a white 'twasa' (trainee sangoma), had felt summoned to take along her twasa clothes and other ritual items and use them at the workshop. In the next section, she uses first person language to describe what transpired.

> So, at the start of the workshop, I wore these clothes and carried my spear, and greeted participants in the traditional way, as done by sangomas: "*Camagu*." ('I am/we are/ honoured/ thank you/let it be so'). This greeting process was soon followed by an unplanned performance by the singer Mthwakazi and musician Luyolo Lenga who performed *Xopera* – a cross-over between Xhosa traditional singing and gospel and Western opera accompanied by the *Uhadi* (traditional bow and string instrument). My colleague and co-author, Darlene Miller, flowed into the singing by performing a belly dance in rhythm to the music. In this space of improvisation, the singing and dancing led into another (Xhosa) facilitator (also a twasa) asking participants to come forward, kneel and greet their ancestors, asking for blessings on the school and learning process (this

happened in the multiple languages of the participants). All the participants took this process seriously and involved themselves deeply in the ritual. The mood was reverent.

We were as much surprised by the ritual as the participants were as it was not thoroughly planned but chunks of the ritual arose spontaneously. As such, this was not a traditional ritual – performed in the exact way a sangoma would conduct a ritual – but part of the way we created and participated in a space of becoming; a series of liminal moments. We invoked the past (by calling ancestors), acted with our bodies in the present, and looked to the future with the affective sensations that had been stirred. In this process, was a "slowing down and temporary abeyance of the dimension of the ordinary flow" (Kapferer, 2011: 48). The ritual created a structuration of perception in which people experienced different aspects of human potential (Kapferer, 2011), and saw themselves as part of a wider whole.

In conducting this ritual, we made clear to participants and ourselves that they were now in a totally different milieu to the union education workshops and government meetings to which they were accustomed. However, all the participants felt actively drawn in by this novel experience. This generated an immanence in which new possibilities suddenly emerged – as participants were transported to a new world, away from their ordinary lives. As Urbasch (2002: 11) explains, "ritual has a political integrative function, often serving as a vehicle for solidarity in the face of heightening social and public conflict". Through this ritual, participants communed together, and connections grew. In drawing on and adapting traditional African rituals – combined with the North African belly dancing traditions, we sought to connect people and remove the social distance between them; this social distance we regarded as part of the violence of our society – a psychic wounding. But as Guattari (2005) discusses in *The Three Ecologies*, the violence of society is not a natural phenomenon; it is reproduced through the functioning of our society.

Urbasch (2002) also explains that in African religion an individual's illness is part of illness in the social field, and ritual is part of the traditional healing process which connects people to their communities, whereas the European Enlightenment intended to "liberate the world from magic" (Delpech-Ramey, 2010: 8). Apart from the effect this had on Europe, it also had powerful implications for the colonised worlds, whose beliefs were viewed as superstitious and barbaric (Federici, 2004). However, we viewed the conjuring of rituals as healing, recovering what was destroyed through colonialism, focusing on many knowledges – not just that of 'science' and reason. Like Deleuze and Guattari (2004) in *A Thousand Plateaus*, we find that magic brings about a possibility of traversing a terrain through a building of intensity, such that we are "capable of powers and affects outside the normal range" (Delpech-Ramey, 2010: 11).

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Yoga and African indigeneity/endogeneity

From the ritual, we moved into a more planned part of the programme, with a yoga teacher inviting connection between the altered state we were in and the body. At first the men were joking and behaving as though yoga was a 'soft' form of exercise that would not do much for their macho bodies. But they were soon groaning and sweating, little giggles that had occasionally erupted went silent, and the mood was quieter and calmer than during the preceding ritual. From the yoga, we moved into a guided meditation. None of the participants had previously practiced meditation, but they were relaxed and curious about moving into this activity. After the meditation was over, we 'awoke' into a new, refreshed world, with our perspectives having subtly shifted and with a new awareness of enchantment.

We then moved into a lecture, in which the yoga teacher discussed the purpose of yoga in the transformative project. One of the repeated questions we have been asked when discussing the schools with others has been "But why yoga?" One of the reasons is simply that the Green Leadership School founder Darlene Miller practises yoga herself and has found it helpful in developing her green thinking and decolonial thinking by connecting body and breath to the environment, to thinking. She describes in first person her relationship to yoga and recovering her relationship with her ancestors:

> Like many outsiders to South Asia, I came to yoga for exercise. I was fortunate to connect with a branch of yoga that offered a system of knowledge for internal transformation: Kundalini yoga. Kundalini requires a high level of discipline and commitment, alongside a serious internal reflection if one is committed to the practice. One activity that we were taught was to pray to our ancestors, and to choose a specific bodily position when we did these prayers. I have South Asian ancestry, and I chose to prostrate my body on the floor when remembering this lineage. In Mauritius, an island with strong connections to Indian slaves and indentured labour, I adopted this posture in the sea, and it opened up a whole new trajectory of knowledge and enquiry. Yoga for me has thus been a journey of self-discovery and healing, and a growing appreciation of the deep epistemic roots of South Asian practices.

In a different kind of cultural prejudice, those who base their bodies' safety on Western science and the pharmaceutical industry defend Westernised health systems and the drugs they offer. For such "objective, rational subjects", science has only one trustworthy geographical origin, and that is the West. But the decolonising impetus requires that we expand our knowledge of South and East Asian systems of knowledge, including the health systems of those regions. Why is it not possible that sophisticated, artful systems of knowledge of the body could be derived elsewhere: in the ancient techniques of Thai massage which attend to our clogged lymphatic systems; in the acupuncture

direct techniques of the Chinese methods of attending to pain; and in the organ-directed, holistic health syllabi of the Kundalini yoga system.

The soil for learning can be hardened by the jaded lives of post-Apartheid citizens. In some small way, the South Asian healing practices offer broken and broken-hearted people the possibility of redemption and renewal. Many university students in South Africa come from these fractured spaces. In some small way, yoga can loosen the soil for the learning endeavour. However, the question "But why yoga?" seems to be based on the assumption that the practice of decolonisation must be perfectly indigenous, without drawing on decolonising practices from elsewhere. This assumption is based on the idea that indigenous knowledges are hermetically sealed and have no place intermingling and is perhaps also attached to concerns about cultural appropriation. But we live in an intermingled world, and our project is about not just connection with local indigenous knowledge, but with the planet as a whole. For those who know more about the history of yoga, and its development "in complicity with imperial configurations", one might ponder how the practice can be used to contest the "specific hierarchical configurations of power" related to the colonial project (Black, 2021: 13). Certainly, Western consumerism surrounds the practice in Western countries with, for example, Nike selling yoga clothing, reaping the benefits of the practice in a way that South Asians in the area where the practice originated cannot.

However, some practitioners – such as the Revolutionary Yoga group in Cape Town – are currently involved in decolonising yoga itself, "seeking to transform Cape Town's disadvantaged communities through yoga" and within this practice, have raised questions about how yoga can "[hold] spaces of peace to those who know only pain and strife" (Revolutionary Yoga, 2017). Given the racial economies in which we are bound, the decolonial project within yoga aims to confront the destruction of indigenous culture brought on by racism and discrimination, examine "how yoga makes meaning for other minorities and indigenous peoples" (Black, 2021: 17), and thereby confront cultural trauma. Thus, yoga has been taken up in anti-racist and decolonial practices in western countries; for example, to support the Black Lives Matter activists, a yoga studio called Sacred has been set up with classes that specifically focus on reducing the impact of racism and "channelling frustration into fuel for positive change" (Wortham, 2016, para. 19).

Yoga practice aims towards transformation of people by focusing on the body and breathing in a way that awakens a new consciousness. When yoga is embedded within political practices, such as the Green Leadership Schools, the ability to identify injury – in the individual body and the body politic –

is enhanced. Thus, yoga practice can lead us to identify with colonised communities across the planet and thereby identify a shared political project.

Digging-land-food

All the schools incorporated vegetable gardening as part of the curriculum. However, we will only describe one particular gardening activity, which reveals the possibilities of becoming. Our fourth school was attended by students involved in the #FeesMustFall movement, which was at the time gaining significant momentum. The participants were angry at the way that white South Africans and the HEIs were treating them. They came to the school angry and suspicious about what would be expected of them. As facilitators, we had our work cut out for us trying to reach through all the tensions, with the participants being incredibly guarded.

On the day our gardening activity was to take place, it was drizzling. The students were reluctant to take part in gardening and all were complaining. However, our lead gardener cajoled them into the activity, pointing out that rain was good for the plants. Students started reluctantly digging to make space for the vegetables and shifting white stones to make an octopus path to walk through the garden.

As the students dug in, the grumbling subsided and laughter started to spread, with the students commenting on how good it was to play in the mud. Soon the students were singing both traditional and struggle songs as they worked. The rain got a little harder, but students continued to work with no more complaints. By connecting with the soil and the vegetables planted, the students had found "a secret unity in nature" (Delpech-Ramey, 2010: 11). They had become of and with the earth. They had become communal, they moved as a pack in their work. In this process, they were like Deleuze and Guattari's (2004) sorcerers in their ability to go beyond their ordinary, psychically damaging environment of the typical South African university and the fact that this farm was land still owned by a white person. Further, through the singing of struggle songs they expressed specific resistance to the 'white space' owned by the white farmer. The revitalised spirits of the exhausted student activists were enhanced when they "handed over" the land with the food garden to the farm employees at the end of the school.

In developing a green school, we did not intend to sit students down in long lectures (although there were lectures); instead, the physical work achieved what lectures could not – connection between

humans and non-humans, body awareness alongside planetary awareness, the ability to cross over into different worlds. For example, the world of the garden was 'green space', not the 'brown space' of universities, it was green in its ability to heal and rejuvenate students, it was not the 'brown space' of violent South African politics.

Like Deleuze and Guattari's (2004) sorcerers, the students, in their daily lives, were at the frontier of where transformation is possible. In the garden they also found themselves transformed into creatures who could laugh as well as fight, alliances were formed between the gardeners, which were also alliances between warriors. Their singing of struggle songs created a "politico-affective space" in which "embodied public performance" linked the participant to "intentional cultural practices" for political intent (Ngwenya, Malherbe & Seedat, 2022: 128). By connecting their political culture and practices with nature, they had sniffed out a line of flight and were angrily and joyfully pursuing it.

The body – octopus and human

At the first school, we knew we needed a banner to mark the place being used as a Green School. At the same time, we wanted to draw on South African activist culture, where banners are made by hand before a protest march and carried by march participants. Therefore, we brought a large white piece of fabric and paint colours we had chosen to denote our school: green and purple. Rebecca Pointer started off by explaining to the participants the reason why we had chosen to become octopuses. She moved her body, swaying her arms around like an octopus, demonstrating how octopuses move to escape through tiny gaps; talking all the while about the green blood, three hearts, and eight 'brains' (one in each leg) of the octopus and how this was relevant to what we wanted to achieve at the school.

We then went into the garden and laid down the piece of white cloth and with purple and green paint started painting the octopus. Everyone had a paint brush and put their own spin on becoming octopus, for example, some painted eyes and a smiling mouth, others painted the green blood, some painted the octopus' three hearts, and one participant painted a high heeled shoe on one of the tentacles, such that the octopus could participate in a drag show.

As for many of the other activities as the Green Leadership Schools, the participants were joyful, laughing, joking, and playing. They joked about being back at preschool making preschool art, they

joked about the drag dancing, they joked with sexual innuendos about the behaviour of tentacles. They connected their lives and their creativity with becoming octopus, some of them stood up and performed octopus dances/movements, the way Rebecca Pointer had done. This activity set the tempo for what would follow at this school and all subsequent schools.

While this becoming animal is theorised by Deleuze and Guattari (2004), the practice goes far back into human history, to the First People. For example, the /Xam and Kalahari San use ritual to blur the lines between human and animal, taking the animal into their minds; it is "at the core of San cosmology … something of a philosophical postulate – and integral to and constitutive of experience" (Guenther, 2017: 3). By playing with the octopus, intermingling the octopus's life with their own, participants experienced a metamorphosis of sorts: like the San rock paintings of becoming animal (Guenther, 2020: 3), becoming octopus transpired through art. Through the activity "a proneness for transformation and ontological inconstancy [was] given play" (4-5) and humans moved to becoming octopus.

Fireside stories

At the first workshop, as the final activity, we also established a tradition of closing the school with fireside storytelling. Sitting around a fire at night and listening to stories, riddles, songs, and proverbs is a key way that elders pass learning on to children (Mukuni & Tlou, 2018). Many of the participants at the workshop grew up in this fireside culture, so the practice was familiar to them. However, in our Green School, the learners (participants) and the teachers (facilitators) reversed position, with the learners telling us their stories about the Green School as they had experienced it, but we imagined that each would say a few sentences building on the previous person's tale to create an overall story.

Ignoring our proposed formula, the participants took control of the storytelling, and they did not stick to the formula we had proposed. Instead, each spoke about their own story in relation to the Green School, especially about their transformation at the Green School. Nevertheless, the tenets of Ubuntu emerged from the stories, as people referred to the interconnectedness between one another and the environment. Among the participants, this connectedness was expressed through "social affiliation structures, cultural norms … [which built] a sense of purpose" (Mukuni & Tlou, 2018: 223).

Some of them cried as they discussed their healing process. For example, several participants discussed how when connecting with their bodies, they had discovered emotional pain in different parts of their bodies and how they released it. Participants also talked about the impact of gardening, their connection to the earth and how they had grown up growing food, but they had got out of the habit and now realised how good it was for their and their children's mental and physical health to return to the garden. For example, one mother said:

> We mostly live on pap. I often don't have the energy to cook anything else when I get home from work. But I'm now determined: we have a big garden, and we are going to start gardening it. We already have some fruit trees, but we now need to plant vegetables.

It is now several years since that workshop, and the activist has indeed set up a vegetable garden and takes produce from it all the time to feed her kids.

Earlier that day we had been to see the eco-village at the Sustainability Institute in Stellenbosch. As we walked around learning about, for example, the water system, the electricity system and the sewage system, groups of three-five participants and facilitators started walking arm-in-arm, feeling a bond uniting us. At the storytelling that night, several participants spoke about that experience and how they could see that being in an eco-village aligned in harmony with nature also created a harmonious, magical feeling between us. This resonates with the concept of Ubuntu that typically emerges from African fireside storytelling traditions, in which learners learn "to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony, and humanity in the interests of building and maintaining community" (Mukuni & Tlou, 2018: 225).

This activity was a fitting end to each school; it formed the participants' evaluation of the workshop and allowed us to draw together key learnings about transformation, participants' experiences of enchantment, and for many, a reconnection with their own cultures that they had mostly left behind when they became urbanites in an industrialised world.

Cultural appropriation or the connection of all life through ritual?

Given the many knowledges from which the Green Leadership Schools drew, including that of a white twasa, challenges about 'cultural appropriation' could be (and were) levelled. Certainly, cultural appropriation is a concern insofar as it links to the power of white, cis gendered people who steal from others (land, knowledge, culture, and so on). This topic was even a topic of discussion at the school attended by #FeesMustFall students, who reacted angrily to a white twasa being among

them. Nevertheless, like Han (2019), we place the term 'cultural appropriation' in conversation with the idea of 'cultural appreciation'. Cultural appropriation denotes an engagement with the culture of others that involves

> cultural offence and cultural misrepresentation … The contextual conditions that can render acts of cultural appropriation more egregious include: the existence of a power imbalance between the cultural appropriator and those from whom the practice or symbol is appropriated; the absence of consent; and the presence of profit that accrues to the appropriator (Lenard & Balint, 2020: 331).

In this paper, with respect to the activities described above, we have emphasised how these connect to African indigenous knowledges; however, they may equally connect to the cultures of non-Africans. Whereas colonialism cut up the planet into cartographies, they left the geography of the supernatural untouched; as such, those involved in similar practices do not feel borders in the same way.

For example, Rebecca Pointer links her own ancestry of 'witches' intersecting with her experience with African culture through the process of becoming a sangoma:

> From the outset, it is important to point out that one cannot become a sangoma without the twasa/apprentice having dreams taking them to a specific teacher and dreams about what the individual is expected to do as part of the process. At the same time, a twasa's teacher cannot take on and teach a twasa without having specific dreams about the twasa that guide what is to be taught.

> A further significant point is that many of my (women) ancestors were 'witches' – traditional practitioners of herbal medicines and scrying in the north of England; for example, my great grandmother would receive 'messages' about people in her community and would go to them to share the news/advice/insights. She was also a gifted tea-leaf reader.

> Prior to the *Green Leadership Schools,* I had experience of training with a sangoma who died during the training process. However, even before she passed, I had been dreaming of another sangoma. I dreamt over and over of travelling from Buffalo City in the Eastern Cape in a direction I had never travelled before, on roads that were not familiar to me. I dreamt of a sangoma with locks, dressed in a yellow t-shirt. I dreamt, that in contrast to African traditions of slaughtering a cow to become a sangoma, I needed to slaughter a black pig (which many African traditions might consider offensive).

> On the way to the Green Leadership School held in Coffee Bay, I started experiencing things as though I was in my dream – I was travelling along the same unfamiliar roads I dreamt about. As we entered Coffee Bay, many black pigs were running around on farms in the area. The day after the ritual as we were gardening the dream-like state deepened, and I felt prompted to ask if there was a sangoma nearby. On finding out there was, that afternoon, we headed to the place where he lived. The sangoma we met had locks and was wearing a yellow t-shirt. Without knowing who I was – I could have been a white person with many types of ancestry – he told us that he had been expecting a twasa to arrive from England (where I was born). And he immediately allocated me with a new name – Matsolo (the point of a spear) – which is apt given my surname is Pointer, but this had not yet been communicated to him.

These overlapping 'supernatural' experiences point to the knowledge of things that the intellect cannot grasp or explain. These are precisely the 'magical', enchanted connections we sought to make through the Green Leadership School. As Federici (2004) points out, alongside the destruction of 'enchanted' culture in the colonies, the inquisitions, torture, and killing of those accused of being witches (mostly women) was taking place. Through this process, just as the knowledge of 'magical' practices was destroyed in the colonies, it was also destroyed in Europe. Therefore, in this paper, we maintain that 're-enchantment' and decolonisation need not be reserved for the colonies but may also heal the scars created by enforced borders and 'rational' cartographies, reconnect people to each other and the planet, and reinvigorate the flows of knowledge that include more than just rational, scientific lessons that only engage the intellect.

Conclusion

To decolonise education is to "seek out increasingly mutable ways of perceiving the world, to experience transformation" (Forbes, 2021: 289). The communal playfulness was a key aspect of the healing and transformative power of the schools. The schools also hosted intellectual lectures rooted in indigenous scientific studies on topics such as pollution in Durban, land grabs in Africa, and endogenous food/diets. But it was the harmonising power of the creative, generative, ritualistic activities that really created transformation, memories, and ideas for taking environmental projects forward.

It is not that we became octopuses – this becoming is always a process without an endpoint, an "emergent whole" (Forbes, 2021: 290). However, we were reinvigorated with our green blood, our three hearts were beating. We could escape disillusionment – not as a final end, but as a continual, ongoing process of being playful, dancing, swirling about, laughing, digging, thinking, meditating, eating, drinking, dirty hands, holding hands, arms, legs, stomach, minds, connecting.
It was not that any individual became octopus. It is the in between one thing and another, flowing from one to the other in symbiosis. Becoming animal always operates in packs (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004) – it is through our rhizomatic links with others at the schools that the magic happened, the sorcery of healing and enchantment. The octopus got its high-heeled shoe, it smiled in delight. Participants felt their green blood flowing, their three hearts beating – together, between them/us and their/our surroundings.

We argue that decolonising HE – and beyond, to the world at large – must involve a connection with knowledges that are not exclusively rational and scientific. This pedagogy and experiment are as relevant today as they were in 2014 when we undertook the Green Leadership School projects. It is relevant because things have still not changed: even as the sciences (including social sciences and humanities) include more indigenous and endogenous African scientific knowledge in their curricula, buildings are renamed, and more black lecturers are employed, universities continue to act in line with the neoliberal ideologies and 'scientificity' which are still destroying the planet and aggravating climate change. It is true to say that academies do not cope well with the idea of these other knowledges because they cannot be quantified, tested, examined, and measured. Nevertheless, when curricula embrace the mind-body-spirit connection, students are better able to connect with one another and lecturers, lowering alienation.

Therefore, transmutations into octopus – or many other creatures – are needed to escape the confines of colonialism. These knowledges embodied by the octopus will continue to perform acts of escape – they will not stay put in the classroom but slither out. They offer tremendous opportunities for healing humans and planet, departing from Anthropocentric ways of being and, in so doing, encouraging new modes of being with many arms all leading in different directions but remaining united. As an octopus, the knowledge acts like a rhizome, a multiplicity, with "no beginning or end" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004: 25) between things, sweeping from one direction to another, not locatable at any point, but becoming.

To decolonise education, to transform the world from the current polluted Capitalocene and Wasteocene, we need to reinvigorate our lives with the magic and joy that connects us to the planet.

Acknowledgements

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