'Begging to be Black' - Liminality and Critique in Post-Apartheid South Africa

Stewart Motha

> Each generation must discover
> its mission, fulfill it or betray it,
> in relative opacity.
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> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), 145

Abstract

This essay explores the distinction between anticolonial longing and postcolonial becoming through a commentary of Antjie Krog's *Begging to be Black* (2009). The epistemology and ontology of postcolonial becoming is the central concern. *Begging to be Black* is a mytho-poetic narrative in which a world is imagined where King Moshoeshoe, missionaries from the 19th century, Antjie Krog and her friends and colleagues, ANC cadre, the Deleuzian philosopher Paul Patton, Nelson Mandela, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and the ANC Youth League, are placed in the same narrative space where they might intermingle. And this is done to respond to a crisis of the present – the difficulties South Africans face in grappling with the legacies of colonialism and Apartheid, and the fact that there is a process of un-homing and re-homing that Krog feels white South Africans in particular need to think more deeply about. The essay compares Krog's approach to decolonization with the leading South African philosopher of ubuntu, Magobe Ramose. Both Krog and Ramose offer the epistemological and ontological resources for grappling with the relationship between past, present, and future in a decolonizing setting. The essay examines how postcolonial critique may take place through liminal figures. Liminality is characterized as central to postcolonial becoming.

Keywords: postcolonial, critique, liminality, ubuntu, sovereignty, post-Apartheid, Antjie Krog, Magobe Ramose.

Fanon wrote these lines as a wave of anti-colonial revolution and transformation swept aside the erstwhile imperial orders in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and the Middle East. The opacity he speaks of conveys a quieter and more contemplative message than that of the fervent Fanon whose call to revolutionary violence was embraced by those engaged in anti-colonial struggle.[1] In the face of a totalizing, brutal, violent, racist colonial order, Fanon's aim was to authorize every anti-colonial revolt including the claim to nation (Fanon, 1961:146). Engaging with the psychic and affective life of colonizer and colonized, he gave particular attention to how a fragile and anxious colonized consciousness could assert and arrive at national liberation. Throwing out the old order through national liberation usually resulted in a transfer of sovereignty. But postcolonial sovereignty often replaced imperial sovereignty

with a suppression of minorities, ethno-national chauvinism, new racisms, and the rise of 'private indirect rule' (Mbembe, 2001). My objective here is not to add yet another nail to the coffin of colonial sovereignty or to claim that postcolonial imperatives have not yet been met because the anticolonial revolution failed or is yet to happen. Instead, it is to signal the need to move beyond 'anticolonial longing' towards postcolonial becoming as the condition for grappling with the challenges of divided polities still emerging from colonial violence, and social and economic inequalities that remain the stubborn legacies of colonialism (Scott, 2004: 7).[2]

The move from anticolonial longing to postcolonial becoming is one that I locate among liminal beings and the spaces they occupy. In this article my focus will be on the 'new' South Africa that emerged following the juridical and political transition from Apartheid in 1994 (Madlingozi, 2007).[3] What mode of becoming, I ask, might secure a postcolonial future? The liminal figure I focus most attention on here is South African poet and writer Antjie Krog, and her recent book *Begging to be Black* (2009). This might immediately rile some readers of this essay. Why focus on a white Afrikaner woman who has written a book about becoming black in a country where the vast majority of the black population are living in conditions of violence and inequality that hardly provide much opportunity for becoming otherwise? Such a question does not do much justice to the multiple forms of black becoming. What Krog is attempting is an epistemic move towards another ontology of being. She is seeking to de-centre herself and a colonizer's way of seeing, knowing, and being. She does not seek to deny or hypostatize difference. Her approach has risks and contradictions. My objective is to discuss some of these.

Why should anyone outside South Africa care about this discussion? Becoming otherwise is not only a challenge for South Africans attempting to deal with 350 years of colonialism, and 50 years of Apartheid.[4] South Africa is not a place for Europeans and North Americans to sharpen their good consciences. Apartheid, despite its singularity, was a metonymic violence through which to decipher so many different kinds of violence going on in the world (Derrida, 1994: xv). The inequality between white and black people in South Africa reflects a global crisis of wealth disparity and the failures of radical political transformation. Inequality in South Africa is embedded in every urban and rural landscape, and the lives of its people and is thus palpable. The global North is connected to these inequalities in ways that are less apparent but no less heinous. There is also a problem of potential political horizons that South Africans share with people from other parts of the world. When Chris Hani, leader of the South African Communist Party and chief of staff of *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, the armed wing of the ANC, was assassinated in Boksburg on 10th April 1993, and quite possibly well before that, a paradigm of communism and socialist nationalism was being lost not only to South Africa, but also to the world.[5] Democracy, human rights, rule of law, capitalism and de-regulation of markets are a global institutional consensus implemented in South Africa and many other countries. They form a structural limit on deeper political and socio-economic transformation. While anti-capitalist rebellion and revolt is urgently needed, so many alternatives hinge on forms of nationalist sovereignty that carry

their own disasters. At least one modest task, therefore, is to chart some of the modes of becoming for living here and now, in this world and not in a utopian future.

To return to Fanon, then, what is the postcolonial injunction or mission for becoming otherwise in South Africa today? How will it be discovered, fulfilled or betrayed? Taking my cue from Fanon I want to suggest that the South African poet and writer, Anjie Krog, might be finding a way to dwell in the opacity of the present in ways that open, however tentatively, some pathways of postcolonial becoming. The epistemology and ontology of postcolonial becoming is the crux of my concern here. I thus compare Krog's approach with the leading South African philosopher of ubuntu, Magobe Ramose (Ramose, 2002; 2006; 2007). Both Krog and Ramose give us the epistemological and ontological resources for grappling with the relationship between past, present, and future. But there are important differences between the two thinkers. The key difference is between anticolonial longing (Ramose's project) and postcolonial becoming (Krog's project). Although I favor Krog's approach, I do so with the hope that the onto-epistemology for its fulfillment might be found in Ramose's philosophical writings. Whether Krog succeeds or fails may quite aptly, as Fanon suggests, remain opaque.

The more general concern of the article is with what questions and approaches will animate postcolonial becoming? The tension here is between a past that resists correction (the problem of justice), and a future that demands adjustment (the problem of invention). To put it another way, will the future be driven by an adjustment of the past (recovering sovereignty for instance), or by the creation of new missions directed at new problems and questions? What is needed is a turning towards a future but always with the spectres that disrupt the linear unfolding of time. The narratives of past, present, and future are the spaces where movement is possible. But what mission, what horizon, drives the narratives and work of becoming?

I am not a South African. I was born in Sri Lanka in 1970. I became a Tamil on 25th July 1983 when my family and home were attacked in the pogroms unleashed on Tamils in Colombo, and throughout the country. A discussion of that forced becoming is for another time and place. But it is an experience that radicalized me against any essential conception of being. The enforcement of identification that struck my otherwise multiply constituted and situated body in July 1983 conditioned my close interest in non-sovereign forms of becoming. South Africa has been an exemplary setting for thinking the problem of becoming in the face of colonial violence and sharply divided communities. Although I am now an Australian citizen living and working in the UK, I have found myself regularly returning to South Africa after my first visit in 2003. Unlike Sri Lanka with its now triumphant Sinhalese majority, or Australia with its belated apologies for genocidal acts and tightly circumscribed native title rights, South Africa is driven to confront a stark reality. The descendants of the waves of colonial settlers remain a minority. And despite their relative affluence preserved in the political compromise that ended Apartheid in 1994, there is a strong sense that more radical transformation is urgently needed. In this article I

explore some of the more imaginative and inventive approaches to becoming postcolonial emerging in South Africa.

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Antjie Krog is a celebrated South African poet who was born in Kroonstad and grew up on a farm in the Free State. While her poetry has been translated into many languages, she gained significant international prominence among critical theorists following her work with a team that covered the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings for SABC Radio in 1995. She later brought her formidable literary skills to bear on transmitting the power of the testimonies at the TRC to a wider international audience through her book *The Country of my Skull* (1998). She conveyed something of peoples' trauma in that book, but importantly also the limits of addressing this through testimonies before commissions, strained apologies, or seemingly cathartic spectacles of forgiveness. This was followed by *A Change of Tongue* (2003) which combined fact and fiction to explore how South Africans were living with the legacies of Apartheid, its traumas, but also the beauty and anxiety in what has slowly emerged over time – the Afrikaans language, food, dramatic landscapes with layers of agriculture, and mixed and divided communities. The challenge of becoming different after Apartheid is captured in the title *A Change of Tongue*. Language is one contested and complex site of becoming. The Constitution guarantees eleven languages, but English is in the ascendance. In some cases the rise of English only serves to sustain white enclaves, crowding out members of the coloured community who speak Afrikaans as their first language. The rise of English over Afrikaans, partly a result of globalization, is also due to the fact that few South Africans have bothered to learn Sepedi, Sesotho, Set-swana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, IsiNdebele, IsiXhosa, or IsiZulu, across the boundaries of their respective communities. Beyond language, what Krog has been concerned with is the question of what it means to become different across racialized lines of community when continued co-existence demands transformation? Addressing that question is at the heart of Krog's latest book, *Begging to be Black* (2009).

It is of course significant that the title to Krog's book about 'becoming black' carries the somewhat shocking title of 'Begging to be Black'. Again, one can imagine the reactions: a white person can never know what it means to be black; how can this privileged white woman pretend to cast herself in such a 'needy' light by using 'begging' in her title; is she appropriating an experience of oppression that white people can never know about; or is it a willed submission from a place of plenty, or 'identity suicide'? I read the title more generously as invoking a passivity and necessity that moves away from a strong sense of subjectivity or judgment. 'Begging' opens a relation of gifting. But as I suggest below, it is not an identity that is being sought. Rather it is an attempt to share an onto-epistemology of becoming. *Begging to be Black* explores the possibility of white people becoming otherwise in post-apartheid South Africa. The project of 'becoming black' eschews any essentialist meaning to being 'black/white', colonial/postcolonial. Those who hold to a notion of race as a substance with presence in the world will tend to misunderstand this book. This is not to deny

that racial logics produce real and actual consequences in the lived reality of those with racialized bodies. Nor is there a suggestion that a movement towards black can be (or ought to be) replicated with a move away from black. We should by now be well past the time when race is treated as having such a substantial essence. This is not an easy thing for liberals who have built their careers in Identity Inc.

Begging to be Black is a work of literary non-fiction. Krog weaves several narrative strands together: the murder of a gang leader shot by ANC cadre in 1992, her own involvement in the case after the killers hid incriminating evidence and the weapon in her home; an account of the Boer and English land grabs of the 19th century in what is now Lesotho told through the encounter between the Besotho King Moshoeshoe and French missionaries; Krog's visit to the *Wissenschaftskolleg* in Berlin; more intimate reflections contained in letters to her mother while in Berlin; and Krog's visit to Lesotho. Each of these strands is placed in conversation with the other. Krog is experimenting with the genre of literary non-fiction where past and present, inner thoughts and outer events are folded into each other. While each strand of the book might be treated individually as the recounting of actual events, their being placed beside each other constitutes a mytho-poetic narrative. The reader is drawn into that powerful imaginary space where characters and events across time and space speak to each other. *Begging to be Black* is a mytho-poetic narrative because a world is imagined where King Moshoeshoe, missionaries from the 19th century, Antjie Krog and her friends and colleagues, ANC cadre, the Deleuzian philosopher Paul Patton, Krog's husband J., Nelson Mandela, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and the ANC Youth League, are placed in the same narrative space where they might intermingle. And this is done to respond to a crisis of the present – the difficulties South Africans face in grappling with the legacies of colonialism and Apartheid, and the fact that there is a process of un-homing and re-homing that Krog feels white South Africans in particular need to think more deeply about. Although facts are recounted, the form of the text produces a powerful *as if*. The wisdom of this illusion, this *as if*, is that it composes a conversation across time and space (Part One of the book is 'The Long Conversation: First Perceptions and Un-Hearings'), and then creates the conditions for drawing out insights and examining errors and failures of perception (Part Two: 'Understandings, Assumed Understandings, and Non-Understandings'). In the final Part ('The Long Conversation: Whose Context') she returns to key moral and political dilemmas raised in the narrative to find that her own line of thinking needs to be altered in order to face up to a philosophical and existential un-homing. Each character, each position and perspective, is put into question in their inter-mingling with others. This approach to history takes seriously the fact that it is *narrative* that constitutes the relation between past, present, and future (Scott, 2005: 7).

Begging to be Black begins with the killing of Wheetie, leader of the Three Million Gang, by ANC cadre in the Town of Kroonstad on 25th February 1992. Two possible reasons for killing Wheetie emerge. Wheetie had set up an Inkatha branch in a township with the support of the police and was spreading violence in Kroonstad. He was thus eliminated by his political enemies. However, one of

the members of the ANC youth group involved in the killing, the Young Lions, had also been caught in bed with Wheetie's wife. Wheetie had threatened revenge. So was his killing personal or political? When Krog is drawn into assisting the killers to escape, and later finds that the pistol and balaclava used in the killing was hidden in her garden, and a T-shirt worn by one of the accused is left in her possession, she faces a number of moral and political dilemmas. Here the context of the killing becomes relevant. In what way, and to what extent, should it have a bearing on whether she will report the matter to the police, or give evidence for the State in the prosecution of the killers?

By the time of Wheetie's killing Nelsen Mandela had been released from prison and the ANC had been unbanned. F.W. de Klerk was negotiating with the ANC and Mandela. However, the Apartheid state and the security police were fermenting and orchestrating violence in the townships by exploiting rivalries, setting Inkatha members against the ANC. As Krog puts it within her narrative: 'The TRC also heard that more South Africans were killed between 1990 and 1994 than in the twenty years of Total Onslaught before'. 'Is this possible?', Krog wonders, and phones one of the TRC lawyers to find out: 'It's true', she says. 'Remember that the majority of amnesty applicants are black and many many of them formed part of these roped-in groups, especially through Inkatha'. (Krog, 2009: 257)

Krog's initial dilemma about what to do when she finds out that she is going to be implicated in assisting Wheetie's killers to escape is set within a paradigm of the struggle against Apartheid. If the killing is part of the struggle then is what Krog did in taking the incriminating evidence to the police justified? Is the killing about sex, revenge, or politics? What difference should each of these possibilities make to the dilemmas of a white woman at a time when South Africa was in the throws of a violent transition to democratic rule? Krog was not given much of a choice when she was unwittingly drawn into driving the killers to Maokeng. She is a white woman, a member of the ANC, working in solidarity with the black and coloured communities to bring down the Apartheid state. In that context what she has to offer the struggle are her middle class advantages – a car, a fax machine, her profile as a celebrated poet. For Krog '[i]t's a moral decision, but the thing is, to what extent can you make a moral decision within an immoral context' (Krog, 2009, 13).

In one sense the killing of Wheetie involved the murder of a murderer. She believes murder is wrong – respect for life should be a basic principle. Is she frightened, the police ask her, as they search her home soon after the killing? She refutes this vehemently: 'If I look frightened to you, it is because I'm upset that you and the politicians have made sure that an honourable position is no longer possible for an ordinary person in this country' (Krog, 2009: 39). Krog grapples with the conundrum of respect for life in a society that has never formed 'a coherent enough whole' to decide on which principles it agrees on (2009: 46). But can this be the basis for deciding if a death, a killing, is legitimate? Would the killing be any more legitimate if there was a communal consensus about it? This is the well-worn decision on the political – the decision between friend and foe that Carl Schmitt wrote about (Schmitt, 1996). Is loyalty to the cause, supporting

the struggle, enough reason to support a killing or killers? Does this simply shift the moral responsibilities of the individual? Put differently, Krog is fighting for a moral space in conditions where most of the population, including herself, don't live within a common, stable moral environment. She seems to conclude that a 'honourable position' is not possible where death-dealing and violence is justified in the name of the 'struggle'. Will such instrumental reasoning only prepare the ground for a sacrificial union – a Republic of friends and enemies?

Krog was ultimately drawn into the case as a State's witness in the prosecution of the killers. She took the red T-Shirt that implicated the killers to the police. This was by no means the end of the violence in Kroonstad. The accused are convicted and receive prison sentences but later receive amnesty through the TRC. She has faced a terrible choice – risk becoming an accessory to murder by trying to cover up a murder that went against all the principles of valuing life that she believed the ANC was fighting for, or work with the police who were fermenting and facilitating the violence between Inkatha and the ANC. But the question remains - is the murder of a murderer any less a murder because the killers get amnesty? Krog made her decision as a middle class white woman who believed murder was wrong – though the decision is not specific to her class, race, or gender. Whether murderers remain 'murderers' after being granted amnesty is a question that continues to haunt South Africa.[6]   It is from this setting, with these dilemmas, that she turns to consider how to understand her choices as the majority of South Africans might do.

Krog poses difficult questions. Is morality or ethics relative to one's conditions of existence? Is there a distinction between black and white morality in South Africa given the very different conditions in which people live? How can white people even think this when Krog knows that during Apartheid other white mothers like her were making torture bags on their sewing machines for use by the police (2009: 69)? She yearns to be in another ethos or life, 'unpoluted by human' (2009: 69). To be human, then, is precisely to confront these moral and ethical dilemmas in the face of what humans unleash on other humans in the name of humanity. Having told herself that she would not draw lines (not make ethical judgments), that white people should live 300 years under other people's terms, she draws a line: 'I can't exist in a space where certain things don't count, old fashioned things like respect for life, respect for each other as human beings, honesty and something that perhaps I'll call beauty … something uncontaminated by people – like trees, grass, birds' (2009: 69). There is a yearning here for 'truth' in conditions where colonialism and apartheid have destroyed the conditions for an ethical consensus. There is also a powerful ethic of putting the 'world' as conceived by 'humans' into question. There is a distrust of human values, human ethics, and human truths - a search for something uncontaminated by people. It is a going beyond human that conditions the onto-epistemic transformation I believe she would like all South Africans to undergo, especially white South Africans. It is a going beyond human that sets the scene for the 'becoming minor' that she develops later in the book. My sense is that in this moment of marking the need to go beyond human she is putting herself in a *liminal* space from which to think postcolonial alternatives.

The liminal space between a colonial order and a postcolonial future can only be grasped through the beings that occupy it. It cannot be opened by legislation, or inaugurated in a spectacular declaration, even though law and its origins might be born of this liminality. Liminality is a lived condition which presents itself in the everyday existence of ordinary and extraordinary people. Krog occupies this space herself when she confronts tough choices, dwelling in the in-between space of dishonorable safety (reporting to the police) and dangerous possibility (going beyond the humanism that has previously authorized critical judgment). But more importantly, she draws out this liminality through two other central figures who populate her book – King Moshoeshoe of the Besotho, and Petrus, a character in J.M Coetzee's novel *Disgrace* (1999). Moshoeshoe's story is drawn from the past to circulate in the present, while Petrus is here now (albeit in literature), but his story and the conditions for its telling are yet to come (I return to discuss Petrus below).

Moshoeshoe was a Bosotho King who united numerous tribes to withstand the onslaught of Boer and English settlement, as well as the killing sprees of Shaka, Manthatise, and Mzilikazi. He enters the records of western history in June 1833 when Eugène Casalis, a young missionary of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society, arrives in his kingdom. The diplomatic strategies and techniques of government Moshoeshoe developed to unite his people, and to grapple with Boer and English land grabs disclose flexibility and openness. Moshoeshoe's struggle was to understand and inhabit the terrain of shifting sovereignties – to remain true to his own ancestral spirits and customs while preparing himself and his people for the colonial onslaught. Moshoeshoe occupied and negotiated a liminal space.

By juxtaposing the stories of Moshoeshoe's encounter with the missionaries and colonizers with her own encounter with post-apartheid transition, Krog confronts the dilemma of finding a new sense of being in a place that never was home. This is a relatively unique approach where the descendant of the erstwhile colonizer un-homes herself in the new dispensation rather than retreating to the safety and security of the European metropolis, or disavowing the morality, ethics, and abilities of the new rulers. Canadian, U.S, and Australian settler-descendants can experience and learn much from this enterprise of being un-homed, of becoming-minority. As Krog puts it:

> 'I want to be part of the country I was born in. I need to know whether it is possible for somebody like me to become like the majority, to become "blacker?" and live as a full and at-ease component of the South African psyche' (Krog, 2009: 93).

The conditions for this need not be a choice between African or Western philosophy. Krog sees it rather as a mingling or entanglement of roots (2009: 95). However, philosophies are not so easily deployed or readily set aside. It is in the register of stories recovered, recounted, and imagined that the challenge of making a shift is enunciated. It is a strategy of writing and living that will disturb those who live and work in the shade and shadow of weighty traditions such as historiography, philosophy, and law. Such readers will want to dismiss Krog as nostalgic and moralizing, but hopefully with the niggling suspicion that their

regular authorities are hardly up to the task of the challenges posed in a postcolonial setting.

Krog moves between the story of Moshoeshoe, whose conversion to Christianity was the much sought-after prize of successive missionaries in the 19th century, and her own personal dilemma of being un-homed in South Africa. Though she does not explicitly make the connection, Moshoeshoe and his people, and Krog and her people, confront the dilemma of living with an Other in power. Though Moshoeshoe never converted to Christianity, he encouraged his people to do so, and took advantage of the education about Western values and practices that the missionaries brought with them. Krog folds the story of Moshoeshoe with that of her own ambivalent support for ANC cadre in troubled and violent times. How is one to understand and figure the postcolonial present when one wants to appreciate both Wagner and Moshoeshoe, the freedoms of the Berlin academy, and the mountains of Lesotho? Becoming minority, in a Deleuzian sense, is marked in both Moshoeshoe's and Krog's individual fates. Christianity, colonialism, liberalism, and ubuntu – each secures the limits of what one might become. But they also constitute the ground from which Krog is becoming otherwise. I shall turn, then, to the problem of becoming-minority, becoming black, as the possibility of the emergence of a critical being capable of challenging both African and Western philosophical and political paradigms.

Being-becoming is an epistemic and ontological problem at the heart of decolonization and transformative politics. Krog has responded to the urgent need to transform ways of being beyond the juridical and institutional transformations by elaborating what it would mean for an Afrikaner woman such as herself to 'become black' in multiple senses. Although she makes much of 'interconnectedness' in *Begging to be Black*, there are very few explicit references to ubuntu. And despite her disavowal of European philosophy, and being conscious of having a white, male philosopher as her primary philosophical interlocutor in the book, she relies very heavily on a Deleuzian theory of becoming. It is thus apt to provide some suggestions on ways of directly engaging ubuntu philosophy, and the implications of this for anticolonial struggle and postcolonial thinking.

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In *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (2004), David Scott focuses on the narrative form in histories of anticolonial struggle – especially C.L.R. James's treatment of the Haitian Revolution of 1791-1804 in his magisterial work, *The Black Jacobins* (1938). Scott makes many incisive observations – a key one being that narratives of the past are often told with the discontent of the present in mind (Scott, 2004: 22). James's account of Toussaint L'Ouverture's heroic and ultimately tragic struggle against French imperialism and slavery was told with mid-twentieth century decolonization, and anti-imperial nationalism, as the near horizon. *The Black Jacobins* was thus a work of anticolonial longing. Scott's point of departure is that we should move away

from anticolonial longing and examine the relationship between past, present, and future, as historical conjunctures constituted by different "problem spaces" (Scott: 2004: 4). The conceptual-ideological problem space of the anticolonial struggle is one that is concerned with sovereignty and national liberation. I would like to tentatively read Ramose's philosophy of ubuntu as caught between this anticolonial longing for sovereignty (as his conceptual-ideological problem space), and a postcolonial potential that his own account of the philosophy of ubuntu conveys. It is this liminal space between anticolonial longing for the recovery of sovereignty, and a postcolonial longing for becoming otherwise that critique opens. Critique is this opening of a liminal space – a 'conceptual-ideological problem space' that both Krog and Ramose occupy but in very different ways.

Magobe Ramose begins his essay 'In Memoriam: Sovereignty in the "New" South Africa' with a prayer (Ramose, 2007). For Ramose, speaking of sovereignty in South Africa is a requiem mass – a gesture that marks a death. He asserts the need to resurrect a sovereignty that has been buried, displaced, and mis-recognised. Ramose refuses to allow the 'lost sovereignty' of all peoples conquered in the 'unjust wars of colonialism' to remain a memory. Recovery and restoration are claimed as the twin exigencies of justice and as the 'necessary means to the construction of peace in South Africa' (2007: 311). The process of de-colonisation, in Ramose's view, is not yet concluded, and certainly was not achieved through the elimination of Apartheid and the guarantee of civil rights since April 1994 (2007, 319). While those who pushed a compromise in the early 1990s argued that they were averting a civil war, Ramose's claim is that since colonization South Africa has been 'practically in a state of war' (2007: 320). In his view it was gullible and misleading to think that apartheid was the fundamental problem. This is why freedom was reduced to the guarantee of fundamental rights (2007: 320). The morality and political legitimacy of the colonial 'right of conquest' was left untouched by the post-1994 dispensation. Ramose thus challenges the reasoning that asserted, from the Freedom Charter onwards, that 'South Africa belonged to all who lived in it'. We might then conclude that for Ramose decolonisation involves 'becoming sovereign' or a longing for true national liberation.

A post-conquest South Africa, Ramose argues, must attend to the failure to recognise that the sovereignty of indigenous communities has been deprived through an illegitimate war and usurpation. Abiding by community in African culture – the 'interconnectedness' that Krog refers to - requires that the three dimensions of the living, the living dead, and the yet to be born are taken to be the critical ethical concern. Thus the survival of customary kingship, and the memory of the heroes and heroines who fought against colonialism requires that parity – *horizontality* - be restored between the 'indigenous conquered peoples' and that of the successors in title to the questionable 'right of conquest'. For Ramose, the 'reaffirmation' of such 'horizontal reasoning' is a necessary condition for a genuinely autochthonous constitution (2007: 326). Here the challenge to Krog's approach to becoming black is a stark one. It says: 'if you want to establish genuine parity between yourself as colonizer and the indigenous population, then return sovereignty to the colonized'. The

institutional expression of this would be Parliamentary sovereignty rather than the constitutional supremacy that South Africa adopted in 1994.

For Ramose the denial of parity and 'authentic liberation' took at least two forms: the subordinate status accorded to Indigenous, Bantu, or customary law in the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* 1996, and the racial ideology that converted parliamentary supremacy to constitutional supremacy in the transition to a post-apartheid legal order. For Ramose:

> Ubuntu … represents the epistemological paradigm that informs the cultural practices, including the law, of the Bantu-speaking peoples. Excluding it from the constitution is tantamount to denying the Bantu-speaking peoples a place in the constitutional dispensation of the country. The current Constitution is, therefore not the mirror of the legal ideas and institutions of the indigenous conquered peoples of South Africa. It follows then that a truly South African Constitution is yet to be born. On this reasoning, Act 108 of 1996 [the Constitution], has, perhaps inadvertently, set the stage for the struggle for a new constitutional order in South Africa. (Ramose, 2006, 366)

Examining the move to constitutional supremacy ushered in by the new Constitution of 1996, Ramose asks why the turn to 'colour-blind' majority rule engendered fear of a black constituency. The reason behind the conversion from parliamentary to constitutional supremacy, despite the principle of anti-racism in the constitution, is 'racialist thinking': 'The fact that the conqueror considered the black majority as a race, coming into the constitutional process, was itself racialist thinking' (Ramose, 2006, 367). There was a fear that the putative 'black race' would have unanimity on all matters and thus threaten all 'other' interests if they were granted legislative or Parliamentary supremacy.   Rather than signaling the return of sovereignty to the colonised population, the terms of the transition from apartheid to post-apartheid is viewed by Ramose as yet another inscription of a colonial racial logic.   Parliamentary sovereignty – and the consequent threat of majoritarianism – was dealt with by the introduction of constitutional supremacy. Equality and civil rights would be guaranteed by the constitution – as would the ill-gotten gains of several centuries of colonial violence and usurpation. For some this compromises opened a sacrificial logic that marks the new constitutional dispensation.

The case that epitomizes the post-apartheid order of sacrifice is *Azapo v The President* where the families of victims of the Apartheid state's violence, including the family of Steve Biko, challenged the constitutionality of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's capacity to grant amnesty for political crimes.[7] Sacrifice was at the heart of the court's denial of the families' challenge, and a key feature of democratic transition. Why should the state avoid responsibility from delictual claims for the actions of its agents as the applicants in *AZAPO* claimed? According to the court the state can either compensate the families of those killed, and the victims of torture and other violations of human rights, or state-funds can be directed towards the social and economic well-being of the living, and of future generations. According to the Constitutional Court in *AZAPO*, the negotiators who brought into being the Constitution:

> could have chosen to saddle the state with liability for claims made by insurance companies which had compensated institutions for delictual acts performed by the servants of the state and to that extent again divert funds otherwise desperately needed to provide food for the hungry, roofs for the homeless and black boards and desks for those struggling to obtain admission to desperately overcrowded schools. They were entitled to permit the claims of such school children and the poor and the homeless to be preferred (AZAPO: para 44).

The new democratic order, according to the Epilogue to the interim Constitution, would be a 'reconciliation between the people of South Africa and the reconstruction of society'. It is worth paying attention to this account of reconciliation. This is not a reconciliation between previously conflicted polities, colonizer and colonized, or between the beneficiaries of apartheid and the disenfranchised of that system. It is not reconciliation of a fractured society coming together to form a unified whole. It is not a restoration of a lost sovereignty. It is precisely a *sacrificial reconciliation* – a case of becoming reconciled to what will be forgone when amnesty is granted for political crimes, when property rights are guaranteed despite the unjust conditions of accumulation, when redistribution will be balanced with social and economic stability. And so reconciliation must be understood through its verb – to *become reconciled* to a particular liberal constitutional project. It is not a reconciliation of the law of the conqueror and conquered, or of their respective and multiple philosophical traditions. Indeed, the status of ubuntu philosophy is such that it might even be said, as Ramose has argued, that the 'struggle for reason' in Africa remains. If reconciliation is to be the restoration of sociality, then we must still ask, what is being restored? What is this sociality?

Krog's intervention in *Begging to be Black* must be read in this contested setting where embracing 'interconnectedness', ubuntu, or being-becoming black is articulated in terms of recovering sovereignty as a mode of establishing political and epistemic parity. There is an anticolonial longing in Ramose's thinking that is tied to concrete demands about democracy, customary law, and parliamentary sovereignty. Here the distinction that Scott draws between anticolonial longing and postcolonial becoming is a useful one. I want to suggest that becoming postcolonial cannot hinge on the recovery of a 'lost sovereignty' Nor can it be achieved by replacing imperial sovereignty with indigenous sovereignty. I am interested in the fragmentation of the sovereign 'I' or unity. The sovereign being (imperial, national, corporate, or indigenous) whose command, sanction, and legitimacy asserts a global presence needs urgent undoing wherever it is found. My sense is that both Ramose's and Krog's thinking contain the resources for postcolonial becoming. In the following section I elaborate this.

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

What does it mean to 'become black' in a terrain where an 'original sovereignty', as Ramose claims, is still in contention? In Krog's work 'becoming black' is a mode of contending with being colonial, being white, being Afrikaner. It adopts the Deleuzian orientation of 'lines of flight' where a discrete subjective

agent is undone by a being whose becoming is minoritarian. This process of becoming is signified by 'becoming minor' – and by extension here, 'becoming black'.

The discussion of Deleuzian lines of flight takes place between Krog and the Australian philosopher, Paul Patton, while both are visiting at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Berlin. Patton is a translator of some of Deleuze's major works, and has also written an essay on Coetzee's *Disgrace* where he discusses the arc of transformation of characters like David Lurie in Deleuzian terms as becoming-animal or becoming-woman (Patton, 2006). Krog sees writing as a process of 'becoming towards' what she is trying to understand, and Patton explains that this is akin to what Deleuze means by a 'line of flight' (Krog, 2009, 92). In a line of flight:

> [o]ne moves from an established known identity by transforming oneself. But transformation always moves in a particular direction and writing is often the best way to trace these directions. Expressed in different words: the aim of good writing is to carry life to the state of non-personal power' (2009: 92).

Liminality, exposure at the margins, being in-between – all these terms explain the kind of understanding that Krog is trying to reach by exploring the possibility of 'becoming black'. She is clear that she is neither seeking an essential identity nor a difference. What she seeks is a framework of understanding - acknowledging what she perceives as a shift from western and European frameworks after the end of Apartheid. Examples she offers to characterize this shift is the fact that Robert Mugabe is 'read' differently by the South African government and Zimbabweans themselves when compared with western reactions (2009: 93).

Krog might be too hasty in even claiming that such a shift of frameworks of understanding has taken place. That of course is Ramose's point. The Constitution and many of South Africa's institutions continue to be informed by liberal values and ideologies. And Robert Mugabe is hardly far from framing his own actions with direct reference to the West and its leaders as the erstwhile masters with whom he is engaged in a 'heroic' dialectical struggle; a struggle for which his 'people' are paying the highest price. But the example of reactions to Mugabe might be obsolete for other reasons. The process of becoming world-wide, of globalization or what Jean-Luc Nancy has called 'mondialisation', undermines the possibility of a discreet or delimited 'sense' of the world (Nancy, 1997; 2007). When systems of economic valuing and exchange are world-wide, what scope is there for ethical and political values to maintain a discreet, localized quality? Krog is attempting to open an understanding of what resists these processes of globalization.

Is it the case that Krog is seeking a sort of communal completeness to be shared with all South Africans that is distinct from Euro-American conceptions? Or is it another instance of the colonizer being convinced that the colonized are utterly different, and thus subtly keeping ingrained racism alive? She responds to this latter provocation by Patton with the following: 'I want to be part of the country I was born in. I need to know whether it is possible for somebody like

me to become like the majority, to become "blacker"? and live as a full and at-ease component of the South African psyche' (Krog, 2009: 93) Krog wants to move towards 'blackness' as black South Africans understand it (2009: 94). She is seeking to understand and live within an African paradigm, and is not necessarily interested in 'African philosophy versus western philosophy'. She is not seeking an 'entanglement' or 'mingling' but a 'synapse' – inquiring into *how* 'one root can become or link to another' (2009: 95).

Deleuzean philosophy forms the context of Krog and Patton's discussions of these questions – and so it is worth quoting the gist of Deleuze's idea of becoming as it is reproduced by Krog:

> 'plants and animals, inside and outside, and even organic and inorganic, cannot really be told apart. All these things are themselves, *yet* on another level they are transforming towards one another. Things continue to become the other, while continuing to be what they are ...' (2009: 99, original emphasis).

Transformation, becoming, multiplicity – each expresses a process of 'becoming-other', becoming-minor in terms of 'becoming-child, becoming-animal, becoming-woman, becoming-black' (2009: 99). Krog wants to take up the opportunity to do what South African writer Njabulo Ndebele had called for – to move away from the 'international sanctity of the white body and share the vulnerability of the black body' (2009: 100).

The question is whether the 'sanctity of whiteness' or its philosophical extensions can be undone at the level of the 'understanding'? And can the vulnerability of the 'black body' ever be understood? Such an *understanding*, if it were possible, would be very distinct from *living* that vulnerability. In their discussions Patton explains to Krog that what she seeks might be achieved through the capacities of an affective being. Krog might become an 'inter-individual assembly or assemblage' that has the capacity to affect and be affected by the 'other side of the pact' (2009: 101) Listening to stories is the device that Krog suggests for moving towards such a pact:

> Stories have different characters and threads and plots; they leave space for variety. Stories are boundary crossings, making it possible to move, justifying different kinds of behaviour and also behaviour that is not necessarily justified – no single line holds things together, because the spaces contain contradictions in which one variety is as valid as the other (2009: 101)

In listening to stories in order to become Krog opens a liminal space. Liminality is the space of a movement, contact with an outside, un-homing and re-homing at the same time. The liminal space is hazardous, the site of risk, exposure – but also opening the possibility of sharing, being-with, refusing the safety of clear positions and certain outcomes. Stories, the mytho-poetic, seem to enable this liminality. But in what language will these stories be heard and told?

Krog reminds us of those powerful words from Coetzee's *Disgrace* where David Lurie remarks that Petrus's story cannot be told in English. Perhaps the deepest opacity of the South African condition is revealed in the story that is not yet told – Petrus's story. I am left with the sense in reading Krog's book that the

key to postcolonial becoming is for the space to be created for Petrus's story to be told. Krog's book is dedicated to Petrus, it seems to be oriented towards him - but it is still about Krog's becoming rather than his. This is, then, the most opaque of liminal moments, a vanishing point at which Krog's text deconstructs itself. Krog does not have the language to tell Petrus's story. He must tell it, and in his language. And then the difficulty will be that the community that must share in this telling will be circumscribed by the politics of language in South Africa. How will stories told by black people enable access to becoming-minor, generate the affective feelings across assemblages, if English dominates and becomes the medium for truth in South Africa? Despite these distortions, what Krog is starting to hear is the communal ethics that guides the actions of black South Africans. So there is not only a postcolonial voice, but also a postcolonial *listening* in Krog's book. I will return below to the notion of 'interconnectedness' that Krog deploys as the black paradigm or framework of understanding that white South Africans need to move towards. First let's consider the telling of stories in another register.

Towards the end of her conversation with Patton in Berlin Krog is asked whether she is writing a novel. She insists that she is not. Why so, Patton asks, when she could explore the inner psyche of characters - imagine being black, for instance? Krog responds that she does not want to give up on the 'strangeness' that can be preserved in non-fiction. It is a strangeness that is not invented: 'the strangeness is real, and the fact that I cannot ever really enter the psyche of somebody else, somebody black. The terror and loneliness of that inability is what I don't want to give up on' (2009: 267). She goes onto state that at this stage, for her, 'imagination is overrated' (2009: 268) Krog then says that 'to imagine black at this stage is to insult black. That is why I stay with non-fiction, listening, engaging, observing, translating, until one can begin to sense a thinning of skin, negotiate possible small openings at places where imaginings can begin to begin' (2009: 268).

In exploring the interconnectedness that underpins the actions of black people in Southern Africa, Krog dismisses the suggestion that this is also present in many western philosophies. There is an exceptionalism in her treatment of Bantu philosophy – and she has no truck with Patton's suggestion that Spinoza, Feuerbach, Levinas, Freud, and indeed Jewish, and many other cultures, are characterized by this interconnectedness (2009: 155-6). But there is also merit in eschewing the sense that Europe has always already thought it (interconnectedness, and everything else), and can encompass everything within its philosophical frameworks. Instead Krog sees the interconnectedness at the heart of black leaders like Mandela or Tutu as one inherited from the First Peoples of Southern Africa, the San and Khoi (2009: 184).

Krog's objective is to draw on the onto-epistemes of Bantu, and Western philosophies, as well as oral and literary traditions. Rejecting the option of 'white flight' – the 'take the money and run' attitude that some white South Africans have adopted - she has used the genre of literary non-fiction to pose and respond to the question of what it would mean for white South Africans to undergo epistemic and ontological decolonization as a condition of being-

becoming other-wise. In a philosophical register, her inquiry is into ways of constituting a decolonizing 'sense of being'. The verb 'decolonizing' rather than 'decolonized' is significant here. It accords with the verbal character of ubuntu which operates as a *gerund*, a noun that functions as a verb (see discussion of Magobe Ramose's philosophy of ubuntu below). 'Decolonizing' also signals the ongoing, and possibly endless task of undoing colonial legacies.

It is at this juncture that it is useful to read Ramose's account of ubuntu against his anticolonial longing for a recovered sovereignty. It is clear from Ramose's account of ubuntu that 'wholeness' of society should not be read as stasis or fixity.[8] If anything what is clear about the concept of be-ing in ubuntu, is that 'Ubu-' is 'marked by uncertainty' because it is 'by definition motion involving the possibility of infinite unfoldment and concrete manifestation into a multiplicity of forms and organisms' (Ramose, 2002, 50). This resonates quite strongly with Deleuzian accounts of being as an 'inter-individual assemblage'. 'Ubu-' expresses the notion of 'be-ing in general', the widest generality of be-ing (Ramose, 2002, 41). 'Umu-' shares a similar ontology, but is more specific. 'Umu-', joined with '-ntu', *umuntu*, marks the emergence of *homo loquens* and in 'common parlance means the human be-ing: the marker of politics religion and law' (2002: 41). The inquiry into being, experience, knowledge and truth is conducted by umuntu – but this is 'an ongoing process', an 'activity rather than an act' (2002: 41). Hence 'ubu-' is regarded as 'be-ing becoming' (2002: 41). It implies a notion of be-ing as incessant motion (2002: 41). Umu-ntu/ubu-ntu in incessant motion can then be expressed with the emphasis on the 'verbal' rather than the verb '–ntu'. Ubuntu is then a 'verbal noun' – that is to say, in grammatical terms, it is a 'gerund' ('a form of verb functioning as a noun' – in English ending in *-ing* and used with a verb - OED) (2002: 41-2, 82). This is a disruption of the regular western opposition between being and becoming. 'Be-ing becoming' places the emphasis on *motion*, and is thus against the fragmentation of being (2002: 42-3). The association of 'being' with order and 'becoming' with chaos is broken by the 'flow' (the Greek verb, *rheo*) of 'be-ing becoming'. The general view is that the 'apparent structure of language determines the sequence of thought' (2002: 43). As language breaks the silence of be-ing, 'be-ing becoming' must be understood in and through the 'rheomode' language (2002: 45). This has implications for how the legal subject is conceptualised, and can be explained at that more concrete level.

The logic of ubu-ntu follows that of a rheomode language. A rheomode language places emphasis on the gerund, and opposes the 'subject-verb-object' linguistic structure (2002: 46). Of course this linguistic structure which privileges the name/noun as the acting moving subject has been undone by many philosophers, including by Jacques Derrida in his work on the 'trace' which marks and exceeds the appearance of all signification, as well as in his deconstruction of the metaphysics of 'presence'. These insights are incorporated by Ramose (2002: 101). The 'subject-verb-object' structure asserts an ontology where subject/object are distinct entities and the verb acts as mediator. It is in this way that what Ramose terms the 'fragmentation of be-ing' takes place. It is through this ontological structure that western legal thought attributes rights and duties to the 'nounized legal subject' (2002: 82).

The whole-ness that the philosophy of ubuntu is supposed to inspire is thus not the absolute of community-as-law or communitarianism. Rather whole-ness through ubuntu is the recognition that be-ing is not fragmented as the subject/noun 'be!' as it is in (some) western ontologies (2002: 46-7). African law:

> is law without a centre since the legal subject here is an active but transient participant in the be-ing, that is, the musical flow of law … . *Ubuntu* law is not only the ontology of the do-ing subject. It is contemporaneously the epistemology of the dicern-ing subject continuously harmonising the music of the universe. In this sense, *ubuntu* philosophy of law is a dynamology. Law here is thus dynamic because it is in the first place rheomodic (2002: 92).

The subject is then not obliged to live 'within the law' as with the western legal subject, but to 'live the law' (2002: 93). The object of law inspired by ubuntu is to maintain equilibrium (2002: 93-4).

Ubuntu thus provides a mode of becoming otherwise that will not guarantee individual freedoms at all times as some western liberal philosophers demand. According to Krog ubuntu promotes a mode of interconnectedness which is at the heart of the great deeds of men like Mandela and Tutu. But it also goes wrong when the interconnectedness is conflated with race – when identifying with being black and against the 'west' leads to defining community without interrogating what this community is or should be. Krog suggests that this explains the mistaken support for Mugabe – a sense of black community and interconnectedness that has gone wrong. She contrasts this with Mandela and Tutu who always use interconnectedness to redefine their religious and political communities (Krog, 2009, 236-37).

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The history and politics that conditions living beside and with Petrus is at the heart of *Begging to be Black*. Indeed the book is dedicated to Petrus – the character in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*. Here the fictive inaugurates an ethical moment and political event. *Begging to be Black* is not a work of fiction. Krog insists that she will not write fiction. Instead, literary imagination, the creation of worlds, listening to stories, is folded into history, philosophy, transformative politics and the juridical order. Krog thus inaugurates a *critical event* through her book. It is an inauguration (an event) because it is at once the creation of a world in text – but also the recovery of 19th century colonial history, and an engagement with the pressing social and political problems of the present. *Begging to be Black* is a critical event in that it responds to a crisis of identity, belonging, violence, home, and colonial epistemicide. True to the double demand of critique it identifies the crisis or limit, and suggests a restorative way forward. Being-critical, being–with, restoring a sense of the world – Krog shows how these are not only post-Heideggerian attitudes to philosophy and politics. They are the urgent demands of decolonization – and Krog finds the resources in Western and Bantu philosophy for addressing them. Through this work of

literary history a newness enters the world. It is a newness always already conditioned by a colonial history. Becoming black might be the *as if* that opens and sustains a new political dispensation in post-apartheid South Africa.

The space of postcolonial becoming opened by Krog is a liminal space. *Liminality* is the space of a traversal, a point of contact between past and future. Liminality works more subtly and does not carry the temporal weight of 'post' (in postcolonial or post-Apartheid). Liminality invokes a fragility. It refers to beings, bodies, or events that are the site of exposure to a new accommodation that eschews a sovereign mode of being. Liminality is opaque. Liminality is thus quite centrally tied to the task of critique. Postcolonial becoming through liminal beings is one of the important sites where the work of critique takes place. The 'vanishing point' is another way of expressing the liminal, the threshold momentarily occupied by a new subjectivity in the face of a crisis of law and society. The liminal subject of critique opens a new accommodation, refusing the state and its rights, and thus disassociating sovereignty from a new ethics and politics.

ENDNOTES

[1] See Homi K. Bhabha's Forward to *The Wretched of the Earth* for an evocative discussion of this opacity, p. xli.

[2] This move away from 'anticolonial longing' is influenced by Scott (2004: 7).

[3] See Madlingozi (2007) for a critique of the terms of transition, and a problematisation of the 'new' in post-apartheid discourse.

[4] For an excellent history of colonial expropriation in South Africa, see Terreblanche (2003).

[5] See Jacques Derrida's discussion of Chris Hani's assassination in his lecture 'Whither Marxism?', later published as *Spectres of Marx* (1994) – a book dedicated to Chris Hani.

[6] On the 30th of September, 2010 the Constitutional Court of South Africa will hear the appeal in *The Citizen (1978) (Pty) Ltd and Others v McBride* (CCT23/10) concerning whether a newspaper's reference to a person as a 'murderer' after he was granted amnesty by the TRC constitutes defamation. Does the recognition of the 'political' nature of a killing mean that it ceases to be a 'murder'? Can newspapers or relatives of the victim refer to the perpetrator as a murderer?

[7] (1996) CCT 17/96.

[8] See Drucilla Cornell, 'The Significance of the Living Customary Law For an Understanding of Law: Does Custom Allow for a Woman to be Chief' (unpublished, copy with author). Here Cornell discusses the recent case of *Shilubana v Nwamitwa* (CCT 03/07) [2008] ZACC 9; 2008 (9) BCLR 914 (CC); 2009 2 SA 66 (CC) concerning the manner in which custom and customary law develops over time, and the distinction between that and changes in the common law.

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Stewart Motha is Senior Lecturer in Law at Kent Law School, University of Kent, Canterbury, UK. Since 2008 he has been a Fellow of Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study (STIAS), Wallenberg Research Centre at Stellenbosch University, Marais Street Stellenbosch 7600 South Africa. He gratefully acknowledges the support of STIAS for providing a unique space for thought, reflection, and writing. He is widely published, including 'Liberal Cults, Suicide Bombers, and other Theological Dilemmas' (2009) in the Journal of *Law, Culture, and Humanities*, and 'Veiled Women and the *Affect* of Religion in Democracy' (2007) in the *Journal of Law and Society*. He is a member of the editorial committee of the journal *Law and Critique*. [E-mail: s.motha@kent.ac.uk]