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# Post-conflict Reconciliation, Learning with Egalitarian Peoples: South Africa after Apartheid

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## Abstract

This text deals with post-conflict resolution in post-Apartheid South Africa, and the need to learn with women-centred indigenous peoples about indigenous knowledge and technologies, especially about social and gender egalitarianism, nonviolence and prosperity through sharing. Ultimately only freeing consciousness will liberate actions and peoples, as creativity and poetry provide joy and inspiration during and after struggles.

**Keywords:** Post-conflict resolution, post-apartheid, South Africa, indigenous, gender, egalitarianism, gift paradigm, Colombia,

## Reconciliación del posconflicto, aprendizaje con pueblos igualitarios: Sudáfrica después del apartheid

### Resumen

Este artículo trata sobre la resolución posconflicto en la Sudáfrica pos-apartheid y la necesidad de aprender de los pueblos indígenas de centralidad femenina sobre los saberes y las tecnologías indígenas, especialmente sobre igualdad social y de género, no violencia y prosperidad por medio del compartir. En última instancia, solo la liberación de la conciencia liberará las acciones y los pueblos, en la medida en que la creatividad y la poesía provean alegría e inspiración durante y después de las luchas.

**Palabras clave:** Resolución posconflicto, pos-apartheid, Sudáfrica, indígena, género, igualitarismo, no violencia, colonialismo, apartheid, indianismo, diplomacia, compasión, amor, África, Colombia, poesía

## Reconciliação o pós-conflito, aprendendo com povos igualitários: África do Sul após o apartheid

### Resumo

Este trabalho disserta sobre a resolução pós-conflito na África do Sul após o *apartheid* e quanto à necessidade de aprender com os povos indígenas de estruturas matriarcais quanto aos conhecimentos e tecnologias indígenas, em específico no que tange a igualdade social e de gênero, ambientes não-violentos e nos quais prosperam através de compartilhamento. Por fim, será tratado como a expansão da consciência liberta as ações e os povos, pois a criatividade e a poesia proporcionam alegria e inspiração durante e depois dos tempos difíceis lutas.

**Palavras chave:** Resolução pós-conflito, Pós-Apartheid, África do Sul, Indígenas, Gênero, Igualitário, Não-Violência, Colonialismo, Apartheid, Indianismo, Diplomacia, Compaixão, Amor, África, Colômbia, Poesia.



I was born and choose to live in Cape Town, the southernmost tip of Africa, where the Atlantic and Indian Oceans meet, a special place like Colombia in many ways. I was born on 3 February 1966, the 7<sup>th</sup> of 8 children and youngest daughter to an impoverished working class family of mixed origins, my father from India, my mother *mestiza*, meaning half indigenous, half European. My parents were activists against Apartheid, my six elder siblings fought against apartheid, and so did I, from my first conscious moment, through several imprisonments while still in high school, to fighting the legacies of apartheid today until my dying breath. As you know, Apartheid was a brutal system of oppression of whites against blacks and indigenous peoples in South Africa that lasted 50 years and ended in 1994, when all South Africans voted together for the very first time.

I trace my roots through my mother's uterus, as she did with her mother, and her mother with her mother, to the very beginning of time. My mother is from the matrilineal and egalitarian Khoe San, the first peoples of Southern Africa, and arguably the world. Europeans call/ed us "Bushman", but we will discuss this in greater detail in a moment.

On 2 February 1990 I was walking from university when I noticed an eerie stillness in the air. There were no people in the streets, which is most unusual for us; the streets are always like a bee hive or an ant's nest, bustling with activity. A man without a shirt was working on his car engine on the pavement, his radio loud, but instead of music a speech was being broadcast. I greeted him. He replied, with visible shock, that we will never be the same again: all banned organisations are unbanned, Nelson Mandela (and other activist prisoners) were soon to be released. I walked home in a daze and turned the television on, while preparing for my birthday party that very evening. Later, with a few bohemian friends, we drank too much local wine, and the sunset over Cape Town never quite looked the same again.

After 300 years of colonialism and unimaginably hideous slavery, and after 50 years of apartheid where whites brutally ruled over everyone else, this form of slavery and holocaust is now outlawed by the International Criminal Court's Rome Statute, which appropriately declares apartheid a crime against humanity.

Thus, in 1990, South Africa began a protracted four-year journey of negotiations and compromise, called the Congress of Democratic Alternatives for South

Africa (CODESA), significant because Congress is what all progressive anti-apartheid organisations were called, inside and outside the country. Many of us were giddy with excitement.

Apparently Nelson Mandela and other senior African National Congress (ANC) leaders (mostly men) had been meeting with leading South African businessmen, all white, of course, for several years. It is said that Mandela's first meeting after been released from over 20 years of prison was with a mining magnate, who told Mandela that the mines should never be nationalised or that private capital should not be interfered with in any way, because the country would sink into anarchy, all capital would flee the country, and the people would starve and the country go to hell. During the later 1990s, as civil society vigorously resisted remilitarisation of our newly integrated defence forces, I was personally reminded by senior ANC and hence government leaders of the need for South Africa to avoid a repeat of the 1973 CIA coup of president Allende's democratically elected government in Chile, and the horrors that the coup leader, General Pinochet, unleashed on the country.

In what retired South African Cabinet Minister Ronnie Kasrils describes as a Faustian Pact, President Mandela and most of the other ANC leaders followed the advice of the mining sector. The man who was to become our first Minister of Finance, Trevor Manuel, universally adored by capitalists the world over, and many other cadres, were sent to the IMF and World Bank to learn their economics, not to Cuba or China, where alternative economics to Chicago School neo-classical (capitalist) economics is practiced. Economists and others flocked to South Africa to offer us free courses (in other words, courses paid for by international neo-liberal and neo-conservative donors and governments) on important subjects like "development economics", meaning mainstream (World Bank and IMF) capitalism that has failed the world dismally. It is not even ironic that all the major corporations, especially mining companies built on the hideous exploitation and suffering of millions of black men, immediately listed their companies not on South Africa's Johannesburg Stock Exchange, but in London. Fearing black rule and wealth redistribution, they moved most of their capital abroad, especially to London, our former coloniser. I am not sure if this is bathos or not.



One of the mantras of the past decade in South Africa was that as long as (neo-liberal) macro-economics is stable, the rest will follow suit. Yes, the rest did follow suit: widespread unemployment; declines in service provision, like health, housing, sanitation; widening gulf between the elite and the impoverished masses, *ad nauseam*.

There is no irony that the post-apartheid government, burdened by the accumulating debts of a solidly defeated unsustainable apartheid system, had to pay reparations to thousands of victims of apartheid. As insane as slaves having to buy their own freedom in the not-so distant past, or indigenous peoples our own land in the present tense. Who says imperialists, colonisers and oppressors have no sense of humour.

There is also no irony in the government using the notion of “progressive realisation of rights” to argue that it is unable to provide for the provisions in our founding Constitution: equality, health, housing, sanitation, freedom from violence (especially for women and children), freedom of speech, etc. From a radical liberation movement, the ANC, under the influence of (and in the pockets of) white capital, became a bourgeois party ostensibly only interested in serving its own needs. But I am getting ahead of myself. This paper is not an exercise in post-structuralism, because no post-anything is yet possible until we are done with wrestling with structural violence and the structures that still enslave us. One can only be post-something when one has done grappling with the present, whereafter one can perhaps transcend the status quo. So, post-structuralism, in this sense, in South Africa is only possible if we have thoroughly dealt with the very violent structures that continue to violate us.

So we return to 1990-1993, a period of elation for many of us, a time when we had hope, before we knew the extent of the wholesale sale of our ideals for a few bars of platinum. What was unique about this time?

The African National Congress (ANC) then had a powerful Women’s League (ANCWL), originally designed to serve women’s interests, as its Youth League (ANCYL) supposedly serves youth interests and draws young people into the ANC. Together with progressive forces from around the world, particularly foreign donors from especially Scandinavian countries (some of the ANC’s biggest sponsors under Apartheid), the ANC women successfully lobbied for a minimum of 30% women represented at all levels of negotiation. The other parties followed suit, historically white political parties in particular with great difficulty because many did not have enough women in leadership to represent them, but it forced them to find and nurture women into these powerful positions.

This germinal moment led to a policy of a minimum of 30% women represented on all levels of government, from municipalities to national ministers. In Parliament, where we make our legislation, women across political parties created the Parliamentary Women’s Lobby or Multi-Party





Women's Caucus. Former sworn enemies under Apartheid were now collaborating to promote women's interests in government and society. The call for 50-50 gender representation emerged during the mid-1990s, within government as well as in civil society, but it is still a distance from being realised.

In 1996 our first Constitution was founded, guaranteeing the rights of everyone, even on the grounds of "sexual orientation", a clause that diverse LGBTQI activists, allied with especially Scandinavian donors, successfully fought for. This radical protection of all gender identities and sexualities was hitherto unprecedented in Africa and most other parts of the world. Chapter Two of the Constitution, which is the Bill of Rights, contains the Equality Clause, listing an unprecedented 16 grounds for non-discrimination, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language, and birth. The Constitution further tabulates seven non-derogable or non-negotiable rights, including equality with its 16 areas of non-discrimination, human dignity, life, and freedom from slavery, servitude, and forced labour. Thus equality on the above 16 grounds, along with human dignity, are non-negotiable, irrespective of what people's religions and cultures may preach. The supremacy of the Constitution has time after time been affirmed by the Constitutional Court, whether it be challenges on grounds of tradition or culture, or on grounds of religion. The Constitution is the supreme law of the land, as stated in its Preamble and first chapter.

In 1998 South Africa promulgated the revolutionary Domestic Violence Act (DVA), which goes universes beyond one husband abuses one wife, to broadly and more accurately (given extended African kinship structures) looking at a domestic environment as extended family including grandparents, cousins, et al, along with others like tenants or even temporary guests. Any forms of violence, from economic to psychological to physical, is outlawed, and all forms of relationships irrespective of gender identity or sexuality are included. Many other almost revolutionary pieces of legislation and policy followed, enough to make one's head spin. Some people got land, houses, water, electricity, sanitation, but alas not everyone. What everyone can do, however, is vote in elections, for the first time in my country, ever, since 1994. So as farcical as electoral democracies often are, I still get giddy with excitement at the thought of voting, as we will do again during 2019.

At this stage the world joins us in ululation. Between 30% and 50% of women on all levels of government! Even gays, lesbians, bisexuals, queers and their cousins are all free, and the temple, synagogue, church and mosque can do nothing against it! Homophobia, sexism and racism are illegal! Ululation please! During these early negotiations a young radical black trade unionist, Cyril Ramaphosa, regularly goes flyfishing with a young white apartheid Cabinet Minister, Roelf Meyer. This truly must be President Nelson Mandela's dream Rainbow Nation.



So “the West” imposed not only its hegemonic economic model onto the newly democratising South Africa, it also imposed some of its (other) values.

Sadly, reality bites like a rabid dog, and we are forced to think again. Many women in power: ululation. But what kind of women, we ask? Most of the women in power were patriarchal, serving patriarchal interests along with their own interests, and often less concerned with the lot of other women in general, and poor women in particular. Until recently these same patriarchal women asserted that South Africa is not yet ready for a female President, despite the fact that we have some of the smartest and most courageous women in the world, and despite the fact that both Liberia and Malawi already had a female President, with Malawi’s President Joyce Banda rooting out corruption and offering her people hope, while the former World Bank employee, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, leaving a more complex legacy in her native Liberia, given her former association with one of Liberia’s former leading warlords, and her appointing us neo-conservatives as advisors.

Back to South Africa, the former radical trade unionist, Cyril Ramaphosa, became a plumpish mining magnate and capitalist and later the President of the country, ululation. Alas many ANC leaders were invited to serve on the boards of major local corporations, where they serve the interests of white capital, live in exclusive urban gated security villages, and become increasingly alienated from the impoverished majority of the country. Yet President Ramaphosa inspires the nation with his anti-corruption zeal, his “Call Me” (to serve the country) mantra, and his genuinely humble and jocular accessibility to all. A businessman billionaire married into a billionaire family, with a multi-million rand foundation focused on education of especially young women, can President Ramaphosa stifle if not end gender-based violence and poverty in South Africa? Ramaphoria would have even the most disillusioned among us believe, for once, in a New Dawn for South Africa, free of poverty, illnesses and gender-based violence.

A key and useful lesson for South Africa, that the people in the Balkans and Rwanda used even more effectively, was the minimum 30-50% of women represented in negotiations, and later government. It is the duty of the women’s movements in society to ensure that many of these women representatives are more feminist

than patriarchal, and will serve community women’s interests rather than elite patriarchal interests. To further their transformative agendas, civil society in South Africa and elsewhere drew on powerful allies, like progressive donors and progressive countries that further pressurised conservative political parties to reform.

More powerful lessons could have been learnt if the models were not centred on the status quo (patriarchy and capitalism) and its maintenance, rather than learning *with*, instead of *from*, the ancient indigenous peoples of Southern Africa. Please note the prepositions and please do note the language I use, because, like the German political philosopher, Heide Goettner Abendroth, and like my Colombian *amiga*, Ana María Gómez Vélez, I am a poet, as much as I am an activist and a scholar.

As an aside, the local Cali-Palmira Women’s Association was uncloseted as breeding poets like papaya on Nashira’s trees—abundant, ripe, delicious. These poets, inspired by wine from my native Cape Town, argued that too much activism is centred on “resist-resist-resist”. They suggest, in the words of Elizabeth Ortega from Palmira’s Women in Black (Mujeres de Negro), a more powerful alternative: “re-exist”. Let us briefly pause to reflect on this for a moment...

My indigenous people, the Khoe San, are not very different to the indigenous peoples of Colombia, from what little I know of this beautiful country. Indeed I am told that Cali has the largest African descendant community in Latin America, 40% of the local population. The words Khoe and San each mean “human”. Not “man”, but “human”, that is women *and* men *and* in-betweens, of all origins, inclinations and hues.

For most indigenous peoples gender is a practice brutally enforced through patriarchal colonialism, to aid the *conquistadores* to better control the population. It is always amusing when Euro-formed scholars refer to native societies as, for example, having up to 13 genders, as they attempt to dissect, analyse, euro-form, neatly box and label our ancient practices. The idea of calling people who romantically-sexually love people of the same sex, even in a moment, “two-spirit”, that is that queer people have two spirits in one body, is as farcical. People are people, and will love other people, when they are in a good mood, irrespective of what genitals you are born with, or whether you hunt today and play with home-made dolls the next day. Among my mother’s people, the Khoe San,

we are freer, even under capitalist patriarchy, to play on the pavements of euro-formed identities, whether of linear female-male, or of heteronormativity-homonormativity.

So Khoe San means human of other humans, a person belonging to other people. This central principle of community and compassion is also called Ubuntu by President Nelson Mandela's people. This means a person is a person because of other people, my happiness and welfare is inextricably connected to your and everyone else's wellbeing. I cannot be happy or rich while you are sad or poor. With this concept of Ubuntu, I am less because I think, in a Descartian sense, and more because I care, because I belong.

It is important to remind ourselves that gifting in the indigenous and our feminist sense is not the same as bartering or other forms of exchange (however mutual or not). Gifting is unilateral, that is, one way. I give because you have a need, without any expectation of reciprocity. My satisfaction lies in satisfying your need. My own needs are fulfilled similarly by various other members of society. No one person can satisfy all our needs and vice versa, a note for the followers of canned notions of romantic love that should last forever despite the realities of life and the cosmos. So gifting is one-way, no reciprocity, and everyone gifts everyone else, depending on what one has and what others need. There is no ego in gifting; only compassion and care.

With the one in the many, and the many in the one, does not mean that one gets eclipsed or even destroyed by the many, as the liberals will have us believe. Each, one and many, are important components of the whole and beyond. Like the many colours that flow into a rainbow like water into an ocean, one can see the rainbow, and the individual colours that create the rainbow, inseparable and one, as one can see a drop of water and the infinity of oceans, one and many, in an infinite dance, that defines the essence of humanity, of the world, of the cosmos.

Not entirely unlike nuns who marry Jesus in the Catholic church, I am wed to the feminine divine and the gift paradigm, because I wear a ring gifted to me by Genevieve Vaughan, co-founder of International Feminists for a Gift Economy, with the engraving "gift" in Greek ( $\delta\acute{\omega}\rho\omicron$ ). So I am truly devoted to the goddess and the gift paradigm, because I am married to it.

My Khoe San are matrilineal: we draw our lineage from our mothers, with fathers also playing very important supportive roles. Other African matrilineal peoples, like the Dagara of West Africa, speak of "male mothers", that is the brother of the mother (the uncle) who nurtures the mother's male children especially. The father of children nurtures not his own children, but the children of his sister. So nurturing is not reserved according to sex or gender, but is a generic function of all members of society, of all children of society, whether one directly procreated the children or not. Everyone in society is a mother — female, male or inbetween. To be clearer and less controversial, especially for Eurocentric societies, Genevieve Vaughan germinated a new word, "motherer", to describe people who nurture, irrespective of sex and gender or even sexuality. Vaughan's "motherer" is modelled on indigenous societies where those who identify as male, even in a moment, have tasks to nurture usually male-identified children, for example. In many matrilineal or matricentric societies, it is the maternal line that predominates, so that adults who identify as men have responsibility of e.g. nurturing children in their maternal homestead (the homes of their mother and sister/s), rather than in the home of the woman they procreate/d with. So my brother/s will raise my male-identified children, rather than my husband, and my husband will raise the male-identified children of his sister/s. Here every member of society, irrespective of sex and/or gender, is responsible for social nurturing, are indeed "motherers", or nurturers in a matricentric society.



Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen, a German social scientist, has said that

Mother Earth is intrinsically linked to the bodily nature of the mother. The metaphor Mother Earth is possible only because we all have been born from a mother and because we all are living the experience of mothering. Mother Earth cannot be respected while human mothers and their life giving and life sustaining capacity are not respected.

So Genevieve Vaughan also suggests that mothering needs to be generalized and in a way denatured and seen as structural. In this sense I don't mean it as actually having children, but that we should base our economy and culture on the economy of mothering and being mothered.

Max Dashu states the imperative as "not to replace individual mothers but to expand people's notion of mother-right values, i.e. 'social motherhood.'" What they mean, in essence, is what we call *ubuntu*, or compassion and community. I am because I belong, I am because I care, I am because I nurture, because I am a motherer. Thus, in indigenous societies we are all motherers.

Many times I have been asked, what shall we do when our men abandon us and leave us with the children and without economic support. Breathe. We do what we have always done; we get on with the business of life. We always must resist the urge to victimhood, especially about control of our own bodies and its functions like sexuality and reproduction or not. Instead we should claim as much agency as possible. We must take control of our own lives and

economic, social, cultural empowerment, however challenging, because only we can liberate ourselves. So let us not look to men for our liberation, for love, for anything, but seek what we need within ourselves, among ourselves, and accept the few good men who transcend patriarchy as our willing allies. As the woman elder said in the conference circle yesterday afternoon,

the Amazon River runs through several Latin American countries. We must never forget about the Amazon women, and that we are descendant of these awesomely powerful and inspiring Amazon women. Even if we don't want to oppress men, we are powerful Amazon women.

I was shown Kansatewra or Malagana by a Palmira historian, John Quintero. Malagana<sup>1</sup>, says Quintero, is the pejorative name known to anthropologists the world over, while Kansatewra is the name locals prefer, and hence I too will call it Kansatewra. This was the time of the Zenú culture, when:

1 <http://www.eldoradocolombia.com/guaqueria.html>, and <http://www.banrepcultural.org/#panel2d>, and <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zen%C3%ba>, last accessed 14 May 2019.



women were the symbol of fertility, wisdom and respect. Female characters were frequently portrayed in clay and placed in the graves of the dead as a symbol of human and agricultural fertility. The presence of these statuettes in the grave symbolized conception and rebirth in the underworld, in the same way that seeds germinate and grow. During the funeral ceremony, which was attended by the whole community with music and dance, a mound was built over the grave. On top of the mound a tree was planted, and golden bells were hung in the branches. The golden breastplates that important women and chiefs wore during ceremonies symbolized the pregnancy of women and the virility of men. The roundness of the mound, like the roundness of a breastplate, was an allusion to the place where pregnancy and birth took place. Thus, women possessed great social and political significance. When the Zenú culture was discovered by the Spaniards in the 16th century, the religious center of Finzenú at the river Sinú was led by Toto, a female chief who governed several nearby villages.<sup>2</sup>

At Kansatewra is a powerful circular diorama, which shows a woman giving birth, supported by three other women — one at her head, one at her side, and one between her legs. There are a few other women standing around as if on guard, protecting the birthing process. On the side are a couple of other women cooking over a large pot. The diorama circle is bordered by men, standing guard over the society, and over the birthing process.

In this diorama, a depiction of an actual social practice and expression, gender is perceived, so that the only certain sex is of the woman giving birth, since this is a task only biologically possible for the female sex. However, in indigenous societies that are matricentric, gender is not rigid, and individuals choose the expression of their gender from moment to moment, so that the birth-carers and food cooks may not be sexed female, and the male-guardians may be sexed in a variety of ways. Indeed these diorama actors, imbued with full agency, may be gender fluid in any ways they choose at any time.

This visual drama moved me profoundly because it shows the importance of everyone in a matriarchal or egalitarian society. There is no Freud, and hence no penis envy by women, or uterus envy by men. All work together for the benefit of the whole society, like the pan-African concept of Ubuntu, like the gift paradigm. As the three musketeers say, “all for one, and one for all”, or something like that. A bit of humour is often useful as lubricant or stimulant, especially during long speeches. In fact, indigenous people love nothing more than to laugh at ourselves, which destroys a big head and aids in levelling our egalitarian society.

Like many other indigenous societies, the Khoe San are also egalitarian, meaning that there are no stark economic or social differences between peoples. We do not have monarchs, queens or kings, aside from the ones in drag. We have councils and representatives, across biological sexes. Again, please remember that biological sex can be defined in many ways, whether in terms of chromosomes or hormones or genitalia, for example. All definitions rely on a simple linear comparison: xx could represent ‘pure’ female; while xy could represent ‘pure’ male, whereas in reality we all have xxxxy or xxyy or some such, so that we all have various ‘mixtures’ of chromosomes. So too with hormones: the ‘female’ hormone could embody oestrogen, the ‘male’ hormone testosterone, yet we each possess ‘mixtures’ of each in different concentrations, at different times in our life. For example, during and after menopause a woman gets increasingly less oestrogen and more testosterone, while men have the most testosterone in their youth. Some men, quite many actually, have ‘too much’ oestrogen, and are as susceptible to breast cancer as some women, like the Hollywood actor, Tom Cruise. With genitals, we are aware that children are born with different genitals — some clearly vaginas, some clearly penises, others variously inbetween (called intersex ideally or ‘hermaphrodite’ historically and pejoratively), as perfect as any other human being. So euro-formed female-male, feminine-masculine, is entirely fallacious, no pun intended. We are one and many in an infinite dance, like the egg, and the uterus, perfectly ovoid, where there is no beginning and no end, no lines and boxes, no salutes and genuflection, just perfect respect for the countless diversities of humanness and the infinite cosmos.

2 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zen%C3%ba>, last accessed 14 May 2019



# La verdad emerge

With egalitarianism comes less violence and more peace, attest many male peace researchers. With their separate multi-country studies, Douglas Fry and Graham Kemp respectively link social egalitarianism to nonviolence or peace. What these renowned male scholars miss is the gender aspect, that social egalitarianism in most indigenous societies is deeply connected to gender (and other forms of) egalitarianism. So the Khoe San, like so many other indigenous societies, are socially *and* gender egalitarian.

This social and gender egalitarianism is profoundly connected to the matrilineal aspects of society, to the fact that we all come from a mother, from a uterus, every single human being. Hence women are respected; women, like the uterus, are at the centre of society. Conceptions of divinity are either feminine (as in one or more goddesses) or egalitarian (divines of no gender or divines of female and male genders). So the Khoe San are very like other matriarchal or egalitarian indigenous peoples the world over, from the Dagara of West Africa to the Mosuo of China.

It is perhaps no accident then that anthropologists assert that the origins of all humanity resides in the genes of the Khoe-San, especially in the semi-arid Kalahari desert that straddles six Southern African countries. Mitochondrial (matrilineal) DNA, traced from mother to daughter over thousands of years, show that the Khoe San of Southern Africa are the first peoples of the world. Similarly, New Zealand biologist, Quentin Atkinson<sup>3</sup>, traced the origins of all language to the San in the Kalahari. So the Khoe San in the Kalahari are the uterus of all humankind. Like all things feminine under capitalism, we and our values are in danger of extinction. Yet we have survived these 500 years of colonisation, genocide and slavery, patriarchy and capitalism.

On the other hand, who came first, the chicken or the egg, has never interested me. For me it is always less of “either / or” and more of “both / and”. What can we learn *with*, rather than *from*, each other, as we *co-create*, rather than *construct* or *fashion*, our post-conflict societies.

If South Africa’s leaders learnt *with*, or *even from*, the indigenous peoples of our country, our negotiations and eventual political-social-cultural dispositions would have looked markedly different.

In a groundbreaking essay on indigenous diplomacy<sup>4</sup>, written in May 2013, Leanne Simpson writes that indigenous diplomacy is based on *relationships*, and she emphasises the word “relationships”. Her paper is beautifully descriptively titled “Politics Based on Justice, Diplomacy Based on Love: What Indigenous Diplomatic Traditions Can Teach Us”. Simpson asserts that “political and philosophical traditions emphasize good relationships —with the natural world and with neighbouring nations— as the basis of good governance and a good life.” She affirms that:

Treaties, from this perspective, are alliances with a commitment to continual renewal. Our politics are embedded within our spirituality, making treaties a shared, sacred bond between peoples. They are a commitment to stand with each other, a responsibility to take care of shared lands, and an appreciation of each other’s well-being. They are based on a profound mutual respect, and they are meant to be transformative. They transform conflict into peace by holding parties accountable for past

3 A *New York Times* article ([http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/15/science/15language.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/15/science/15language.html?_r=1)), based on a scientific paper in the journal *Science* (<http://www.sciencemag.org/content/332/6027/346.abstract>)

4 <http://briarpatchmagazine.com/articles/view/politics-based-on-justice-diplomacy-based-on-love> May 2013.



# ge con el tiempo

injustices. They transform hardship into sustenance. They transform abuse of power into balanced relations. Treaties and other Indigenous diplomatic traditions transform differing perspectives into, as the Haudenosaunee say, “one mind.”

Unlike the euro-formed<sup>5</sup> United Nations and euro-formed politics that is talk-talk-talk and less accomplishment, Simpson confirms that “indigenous diplomacy is not so much about dialogue, but about action and embodiment.” In the most poignant ways indigenous poets like Ifi Amadiume communicate, Simpson speaks of peacemaking as “diplomacy based on love —the love of land and the love of our people— and this alone has the power to transform Indigenous-state relations into a relationship based on justice, respect, and responsibility.”

In the 1990s South Africa declared 11 official languages, among others English, as well as the creole Afrikaans, and nine languages of the patriarchal African peoples of which President Nelson Mandela is descendant, people who migrated from East and Central Africa to the south, centuries before Europeans arrived. In its first chapter, the Constitution promulgates a Pan South African Language Board (PANSALB) to “promote and create conditions for the development and use of all official languages, the Khoi, Nama and San languages, and sign language.” As well as to “promote and ensure respect for all languages commonly used by communities in South Africa, including German, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Portuguese, Tamil, Telegu and Urdu, and Arabic, Hebrew, Sanskrit and other languages used for religious purposes in South Africa.” It is regrettable that Khoe and San languages were not immediately recognised as official languages. On the eve of the Constitutional amendment to justly include Sign Language as 12<sup>th</sup> official language, the omission of Khoe and San languages remains glaring. Yet we cannot ignore that the country’s coat of arms and motto are homages to our indigenous Khoe and San: *ke e: xarra ke*, in Xam, meaning “diverse people unite” or “unity in diversity”.

If South Africa had learnt from indigenous peoples, we would have co-created a socially and gender egalitarian society, where it was less elites negotiating in isolation, and more widespread consultation with all members of society, however marginalised. Instead of genuflecting to the neo-liberalism of the IMF and World Bank, we would have practiced Ubuntu and ensured that wealth was less concentrated and more spread throughout society. If only our women in power were less interested in preserving patriarchy, because they mistakenly think that their interests are best served by patriarchy, rather than in advancing the human security of women in general, and hence the welfare of our entire society. We should listen to the wisdoms of the women in our communities, women of all classes, ages and sexualities, because most of our women have given birth and care for society in ways depicted by this old African idiom: teach a man to fish and you have food for a day; teach a woman to fish and the whole society has food forever.

Since I am a *poeta*, I would like to share with you one of my poems, that for me epitomises the love and solidarity of sisterhood, as we grapple with life’s challenges:

5 Here “euro-formed” refers to what Iroquois scholar Barbara Alice Mann writes of as an imperialist, colonizing annihilating narrative and practices. The “Orientalist” “Western” gaze is similar in its imperialist lens of indigenous cultures. Narratives of “the global North” are similar.





English	Italiano	Español	Português
<p><b>Fragile</b></p> <p>In your eyes                      that shift with the anxieties                      of these times                      i see the deepest compassion                      imaginable                      for the perpetrators in all we are                      the survivor-victims we're forced                      to be                      and in your wide open eyes                      i see reflected                      my very own                      soul                      and for your single act of                      kindness                      i offer you                      my fragile heart</p>	<p><b>Fragile</b></p> <p>Nei tuoi occhi                      Che si muovono con le ansie                      Di questi tempi                      Vedo la più profonda compassione                      Immaginabile                      Per gli esecutori presenti in tutti                      noi                      Le superstiti-vittime che siamo                      costretti ad essere                      Vedo riflessa                      La mia stessa                      Anima                      E per un tuo singolo atto di                      gentilezza                      Ti offro                      Il mio fragile cuore</p>	<p><b>Frágil</b></p> <p>En sus ojos                      que se mueven con las ansiedades                      de estos tiempos                      yo veo la más profunda                      compasión                      imaginable                      para los perpetradores presentes                      en todos                      nosotros                      las víctimas sobrevivientes                      que somos obligados a ser                      y en sus ojos bien abiertos                      yo veo reflejada mi propia                      alma                      y por su único acto de                      bondad                      te ofrezco                      mi corazón frágil</p>	<p><b>Frágil</b></p> <p>Em seus olhos                      que se movem com as ansiedades                      destes tempos                      eu vejo a mais profunda                      compaixão                      imaginável                      para os perpetradores presentes                      em todos                      nós                      as vítimas sobreviventes                      que somos forçados a ser                      e em seus olhos bem abertos                      eu vejo refletida minha própria                      alma                      e pelo seu único ato de                      gentileza                      te ofereço                      o meu frágil coração</p>

The Colombian idea of *Indianismo*, or as I would put it, *Indianisma*, which argues that the indigenous peoples have to represent and speak for ourselves, is not unlike our African idea of Black Consciousness, where it is said that the greatest weapon in the hands of the oppressor, is the minds of the oppressed (Steve Biko). And we know the Bob Marley song, “none but ourselves can free our minds...”

As we say in South Africa, and Miriam Makeba sang, *a luta continua, victoria escerta*. And, after hard labour, indigenous people like to celebrate, so let me leave you with our neighbours, the Mozambicans, indigenous beer slogan: *a festa continua*. Long may our poetry and justice thrive.

## Bernedette Muthien

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Over twenty years Bernedette Muthien has held executive and senior management positions in academia, civil society and the public sector in South Africa and abroad. She is an accomplished facilitator, researcher and poet who designs, implements and evaluates projects for diverse institutions locally and internationally.

Until recently she served part-time on South Africa's Constitutional Commission for Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Rights, where she was responsible for Parliamentary Liaison, Research and Policy Development, and Public Education. She was Deputy Director General: Social Transformation and Economic Empowerment in the Presidency, where she served in the high level Economic Cluster.

She has over 200 publications and conference presentations, some of which have been translated from English into at least 16 other languages. She was the first Fulbright-Amy Biehl fellow at Stanford University, and holds postgraduate degrees in Political Science from the University of Cape Town, and Stellenbosch University.

She served on the Executive Council of the International Peace Research Association, is convenor of the Global Political Economy Commission, and was co-founder of the African Peace Research and Education Association. She serves on various international advisory boards, including the international journals *Human Security Studies* and *Journal of Human Security*, as well as the International Institute on Peace Education. She also serves on the Steering Committee of South African Women in Development (SAWID) in the Western Cape, and was just appointed to the Boards of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) and the Pan South African Language Board (PansALB), and to Chair the Council of Robben Island Museum.

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