Original Article

What Do Professors Do? Posthumous Letter of Love to Ma

Mohamed Seedat[1] (iD)

Abstract
Assuming an autoethnographic orientation and a shifting performative lettering style, I write posthumously to my mother in response to her question, what do professors do? The letter is a reflexive contribution to contemporary decolonial debates about unrelenting forms of colonizing knowledge, ways of overturning exclusionary credentialing systems, and liberatory modes of knowledge creation. Engaging with the epistemology of the heart, I write to Ma about the fecundity of silence and being a stranger; the (re)making of critical compassionate space in academia; the tenuous movements between different epistemologies; the slipperiness of language and the ambiguities inherent to connecting diverse socio-epistemic worlds; as well as her legacy of socio-epistemic agency. Perhaps communities of insurgent scholars and activists and those who hold humanizing imaginaries in their bosoms may read my letter as an invitation to embrace the heart as the catalytic organ of, and for discernment, comprehension, contemplation, radical agency, and epistemic love.

Keywords
autoethnography, decolonial knowledge, silence, strangeness, heart, discernment, epistemic love

Silence

I

What do professors do?

Ma, I return to this question you asked in your quiet yet poignant tone when I shared news of my promotion to the position of full professorship. This resonated with, when do you really start working? The question you asked one night, 36 years ago, when I was wading through a mountain of books to familiarize myself with the scope and aims of my first research-related project. On both occasions, your brilliant dark eyes, illuminated by a profound indescribable knowing, held my gaze momentarily in silence.

Your silence—as always—an intricate weave of wisdom.

II

Ma, your words

interludes

From silence

III

Ma, true to our shared faith teachings you lived in silence through your heart as the catalytic organ of discernment, perception, and knowing (Mohamed, 1995). You lived in, by and with silence. You always started your days and nights with your heart as the pulsating center for comprehending the world and living in relationality with the Divine, Nature, self, and others.

Ma,

Your life, an embodiment of onto-epistemology of the heart

Your Heart, suspicious of the power of kings, presidents, and chancellors

Discerned the Divine as the Compassionate Progenitor.

IV

Ma, as you will undoubtedly silently discern from your abode in the Other World, the answer to your questions is inextricably connected to the story of the Institute for Social and Health Sciences (ISHS) and its predecessor, the Health Psychology Unit (HPU), that I have been associated with for 36 years. As part of my reply, I want to describe the ways in which colleagues, various communities of significance, and I have collectively labored in the space of the Institute to farm and harvest epistemic freedom, "the right

[1]University of South Africa, Lenasia, South Africa

Corresponding Author:
Mohamed Seedat, Institute for Social and Health Sciences, University of South Africa, P.O. Box 1087, Lenasia 1827, South Africa.
Email: seedama@unisa.ac.za

to think, theorize, interpret the world, develop own methodologies, and write from where one is located unencumbered by Eurocentrism" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018, p. 3).

Ma, even though many of the details I provide may be somewhat tangential to the questions you asked, I want you to know that your professor son's diverse social justice-oriented work has evoked joy and happiness. Sometimes the work has been fraught with structurally induced tensions, ambiguities, and tiresome encounters.

In my reply I want to think about how, through my association with the Institute, I have moved in and out of normative and transgressive ways of understanding reality and studying complex phenomenon such as violence, peace, and safety.

My intention is to tell the stories of how my companions and I struggled to limit the ongoing influences of the Institute's formative conventional empirical-positivist and liberal democratic moorings, and guard against (in)advertent slippages into unreflexive modes of intellectual production and hegemonic forms of institutional management.

Ma, shifting between description, analysis, and reflection, I also write to you about the might of silence and always remaining a stranger; building critical compassionate spaces for rebellious scholarship; the subtleties of language; and the precarious turns and opacities underlying the work of connecting seemingly disparate socio-epistemic worlds. Perhaps I will succeed in telling you about how the different socio-epistemic worlds that I move between and through sometimes collide.

I wish to honor successive waves of engaged scholar activists who made and continue to make the Institute home.

I choose to name my companions, associates, intellectual ancestors, and communities of significance even though readers may not identify with anyone of them.

Ma, I want to memorialize the profound influences of your socio-epistemic legacy on my work as professor.

V

Ma, socialized and inspired by your modes of knowing and being in the world, I want to write my posthumous reply from my heart to your heart.

Yet the language of the heart eludes me.

Ma, I know that through the generosity of your heart you will overlook the jargon I rely on and that I will undoubtedly repeatedly slip into. Even though I am reluctant about speaking in tongues, espousing abstract thoughts and ideas that break bonds and attachments, I am entangled in, and by the languages of my university education. I aspire to follow Ronald Pelias (2004) in his methodology of the heart and write unfettered by academic conventions that normalize emotional indifference, detachment, and neutrality in the name of objectivity and precision.

VI

Ma, I ponder on your questions at this moment of my imminent retirement from my post as institutional policies prescribe.

VII

Ma

Your questions

Refusal (of)

Bookishness

Formulaic methods

Hollow loquaciousness.

VIII

I am filled with ambivalence as I consider my career and professional life trajectory. I feel a sense of relief and anticipation that I will have an opportunity to create another life of fecundity and thrive outside the labyrinth of unfathomable rules and baffling protocols that are constitutive of our neo-liberal, corporatized, and marketized higher institutions of learning (Feldman & Sandoval, 2018; Gruber, 2014). Yet, I feel a deep sadness knowing that I will be vacating a space located at the institutional margins and co-created by a community of companions: peers, mentors, post-graduate students, dear friends, and activists working for a humanizing world.

IX

Ma, as you know, after I completed my master's studies, I began working in the HPU that was started by erstwhile psychologist, friend, and advisor, Victor Nell (September 1935–April 2007), in the mid-1980s. Victor Nell, swayed by liberal democratic values and social justice ideals, and his own nascent academic interests in neuropsychology, initially seemed to have conceived the HPU as an entity of a university psychology department. He may have thought about the Unit as a professional association of individuals trained in different sub-disciplines of psychology and the health sciences, and supposedly bound together by the shared aim of animating the social welfare ideals of psychology and cognate disciplines. Digby Ormond-Brown, Johan Kruger, Alex Butchart, Bukelwa Selema, Nonhlanhla Radebe, Lerato Seseli, Lana Kirkby, Jacquie Sesel, and Karen Johnson and I were among the first group of emerging researchers and interventionists recruited by Victor as part of his formative visioning of the Unit.

Having mobilized funding support from a corporate foundation and national science council, Victor structured the Unit's initial applied research agenda around the epidemiology and consequences of traumatic brain injury (TBI); the development and application of culturally appropriate neuropsychological assessment tests for vulnerable populations; building an empirical case for the introduction of neuropsychological services for survivors of TBI in tertiary health facilities as well psychological services in primary health care; and collaborative studies on the neuropsychological consequences of farm workers' exposure to organic solvents and organophosphate pesticides in the agricultural sector (see Butchart et al., 1991; London et al., 1998; Nell & Brown, 1991 ; Seedat & Nell, 1991).

I would be remiss if I did not mention even though Victor had initially focused primarily on facilitating professional and cordial working relationships to connect members of the embryonic team around research projects, over the course of his tenure as director he, reflective of his liberal humanistic predispositions, encouraged friendships that opposed the professional-personal binary. My own complicated and affectionate professional relationship and friendship with Victor were shaped by the dynamics of 'race,' class, ideology, intellectual location, and our respective interpersonal dispositions through successive periods of social turmoil and emancipatory imaginaries. We formed an enduring friendship and professional association through fiery debates and disputes about Whiteness, Zionism, Black modes of being, Islamophobia, and academic appropriation (see Grosfoguel, 2013; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018) during long working hours, home visits, and shared sumptuous meals and pots of tea brewed by Victor.[1]

X

The entry of successive cohorts of young Black activist-psychologists and community development workers in the late 1980s and early 1990s, forming an insurrectionist presence, pushed back against the founding impulse that assumed the Unit as a mere instrumentally oriented organizational artifact. The first wave of transgressive associates, Zubeida Dangor, Thandeka Mgoduso, Edcent Williams, and Kedibone Letlaka-Rennert, embodied multiple collective and individual biographies and legacies of resistance, and emancipatory ideals. This insurgent cohort raised questions about how we in the Unit may organize ourselves as a democratizing community of social actors whose substantive multiple subjectivities and contributions may be (re)created and (re)claimed through mutually regarding forms of relationality at a time of the intensifying (inter)national anti-apartheid struggle.

As Black women, Zubeida, Thandeka, and Kedibone highlighted the patriarchy-racism nexus in knowledge production and representation. Their contestations signified a decisive introduction of radical thinking about the management and processes of knowledge-making in the social and health sciences, as well as the gendered dynamics of institutionalized organizational formations (Dangor, 1992; Dangor & Bernard, 1993). I experienced Zubeida's, Thandeka's, and Kedibone's contributions as critical consciousness raising interventions that problematized the ways in which routine gendered practices are buttressed and normalized by institutional rules and scripts (see McCarthy & Moon, 2018). Their interpositions unsettled the marks of the gender establishment and patriarchal power evident in the leadership and managerial practices of the Unit. In that contested inter-subjective moment, when the critical work of epistemic listening was threatened and weakened by rupturing and rigidifying organizational dynamics, and masculinized anxieties, the epistemology of the heart eluded me.

Ma, I remember Zubeida, Thandeka, and Kedibone for their tenacious claims to epistemic agency and for highlighting the intersections between 'race,' gender, and class as well as the multiple forms of overlapping oppressions, resonant with the thoughts of Crenshaw (1989). Their work heralded radical feminist voices and intersectional thinking despite the epistemic deafness that momentarily appeared to undermine intellectual prolificacy and emerging companionship in the Unit.

Zubeida's and my own entry also prefigured a creative shift in the Unit's thinking about the underlying dynamics, structure, contents, and focus of intervention practices and community engagement (Dangor & Seedat, 1992). Zubeida, spurred by her commitment to eradicate gender violence, together with Victor and those I name hereunder, co-initiated the establishment of a large-scale community-based violence prevention program called the Centre for Peace Action (CPA) in a catchment community reserved for those classified "Colored" by apartheid segregationist logics. The CPA was noteworthy in two inter-related respects. First, overturning colonial scripts of community engagement and academic labor as well as apartheid racialized formations, the CPA was envisioned as democratizing organizational arrangements and as the making of non-racial, non-hierarchical, and anti-sexist interpersonal relationships. In the context of emergent transformational possibilities, Oom Joe Moabi, Martin Terre Blanche, Gerald Williamson, Vijay Jaggan, Royal Lekoba, Pakiso Molema, Pakiso Mphuthi, Lerato Seseli, Ruwayda Halim, Derrick Smith, Granville Alexander, and Anisa Mills, among the first activist community workers in the CPA, sculpted a democratic ethos into the internal organization of the Centre and a grassroots orientation to violence prevention and peace promotion programming. Second, moving beyond a narrow focus on the containment and prevention of direct incidents of violence, the CPA was constructed as a complex set of inter-related initiatives that addressed structural and epistemic

violence alongside direct violence (see Galtung, 1969; Teo, 2010). Whereas behavioral and psychological-oriented interventions were pointed at preventing the direct forms of interpersonal violence, initiatives concentrated on enabling non-militarized forms of community policing, food security, livelihoods, and survivalist entrepreneurship targeted structural violence; and a social history project called "Bekgeskiedenis" authoring marginalized communities as knowledge and meaning makers, resisted epistemic violence. Led by Zubeida and animated by this early wave of insurrectionary community workers, we questioned and challenged the imperial academic tendency that imposed solutions on marginalized communities and disregarded communities' knowledge traditions and socio-cultural and political histories (see Butchart & Seedat, 1993; Seedat, 2012; Seedat et al., 1992; Teo, 2010; Terre Blanche & Seseli, 1992).

Building on the grassroots community engagement[2] ethos inscribed into the Unit's DNA and considering the Unit's empirical-positivist traditions critically, the second wave of rebel colleagues and friends, Abdulsamed Bulbulia, Ashley van Niekerk, Gail Wyngard, Garth Stevens, Norman Duncan, Brett Bowman, and others, along with a school of interns and post-graduate students, grappled with ways of democratizing, deracializing, and depatriarchizing the routes and outcomes of community-centered research, academic representation and writing, and post-graduate training, evocative of ideas and concepts germane to contemporary decolonial thought (see Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015, 2018). The second wave of social actors continued the work of (re)shaping the space as one that moved between agitation, resistance, and strategic co-operation with normative knowledge-making and administrative conventions at a time when South Africa had entered its first democratic dispensation. This second wave of insurgent scholars entered the Unit in the mid-1990s after it was institutionally formalized as the ISHS. As the name signifies, the Institute concentrates on pressing challenges of our time that overlap with the social and health sciences (www.ishs.org.za). During the early stages of the second wave, through a partnership with the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC), the Institute assumed co-responsibility for the directorship of the Presidential Lead Programme on Crime, Violence, and Injury (CVI) established in 2001. The CVI, which was institutionally mandated to focus on the magnitude, causation, and prevention of crime, violence, and injury, incorporated the emerging public health expertise of Anesh Sukhai, Megan Prinsloo, Hilton Donson, Sandra Marias, and Richard Matzopoulos, and the critical methodological and community-centered research capabilities developed through the work of the CPA. The CVI was established at a time when the second and third democratic government administrations had invested significant financial and intellectual resources toward the development of

egalitarian forms of legislation and policies and when different categories of social and health scientists turned their contributions toward the health, social, and educational policy terrain.[3] The CVI was renamed several times when we (re)considered our epistemological orientation and social mandate against shifts in the institutional terrain; the vagaries of funding; and fluctuating intellectual interests in the Institute. In the mid-2000s, assuming a promotive orientation and considering violence to be a phenomenon that intersects with the sciences of health, safety, and peace we named the program, the Safety and Peace Promotion Research Unit (SAPPRU). Following a subsequent strategic institutional re-alignment at the SAMRC, the Unit was called the Violence, Injury and Peace Research Unit (VIPRU) to accommodate a promotive and preventive focus. In its current iteration, the SAMRC-funded unit is known as the Masculinities and Health Research Unit (MaHRU). Ma, these name changes signaled shifts in our enactments and comprehensions of social justice.[4]

The third and fourth waves, represented by Sandy Lazarus, Shahnaaz Suffla, Kopano Ratele, Naiema Taliep, Ghouwa Ismail, and Nick Malherbe, and post-graduate students Rebecca Helman, Sarah Day, Josephine Cornell, Sipho Dlamini, Refiloe Makama, and others, emboldened by multiple liberatory scholarship and activist traditions, deepened the contributions of the preceding waves of associates. My contemporary colleagues, including Hugo Canham and the cohort of post-graduate and emergent researchers, Nomagugu Ngwenya, Bongani Mavundla, and Daniel Radebe have contributed to (re)defining and (re)situating the Institute within the epistemologies of the South. Epistemologies of the South are understood as "the production and validation of knowledges anchored in the experiences of (marginality) and resistance" (de Sousa Santos, 2018, p. 1).

Embodying the contributions of successive waves of activist scholars, as well as the past and present orthodox empirical work of Lu-Anne Swart, David Kimemia and the CVI, the Institute in its current iteration is animated by a humanizing vision and the goal of enacting liberatory compassionate scholarship and activism in the service of human development. Through the shifting courses of contest, conflict, and co-operation, my contemporary cohort of peers—who form the Institute—think about our space as a site for liberatory work focused on positioning Africa as an epistemic center; building (inter)national solidarities; and enacting collaborative enquiry, and compassionate and non-extractive social engagements (see www.ishs.org.za).

XI

Ma, the Institute's trajectory, founding impulse rooted in the HPU, orientation, and focus have been influenced by the shifting zeitgeist, dominant institutional scripts, vagaries of donor funding, partnership arrangements, cyclical changes

in liberatory, intellectual and political thoughts, and the positionalities of many social actors that have created a home and taken refuge in this space.

As a delegated professor, I have had the privilege to serve as the director and head of the Institute for close on two and half decades following the retirement of Victor Nell. Together with colleagues, I have attempted to (re)catalyze the Institute as a convivial, compassionate, and critical space. I have endeavored to facilitate a collective visioning and decision-making ethos in the Institute through periods of tensions, consensus, and contradictions inherent to the labor of marshalling institutional political and financial support for subversive research and scholarship on one hand and pushing back on the other hand against bureaucratized intrusions from a class of managers who are obsessed with neo-liberal regimes of excessive regulation and compliance (Jovanovic, 2017). The labor of resisting ad hoc administrative demands, problematic global ranking systems, and rating orders that (re)produce hierarchies of distinction, recognition, and status in the name of excellence and relevance (Feldman & Sandoval, 2018; Gruber, 2014), and building institutional support for emancipatory scholarship[5] and engaged research has been both exhilarating and tiring; alternating between uncertainty and doubt; creativity and originality; rebellion and rejection; anguish and frustration; and affirmation and collective self-recognition.

This labor has meant that I lead collectively on building conditions that allow us to flourish in a situation of "in-betweenness . . . not trying to be what the institution desires, but rather, to be the one to make the space for the dream" (Lechuga, 2021, p. 9). Ma, perhaps we may think about this work as the continuous and dynamic (re)making of transgressive "political communities" (Chipkin, 2007), constituted of critical and caring relations of solidarity and companionship as well as adept forms of administrative accompaniment. Gail Barton, Bapsy Mathebula, Linah Mautjana, Giemie Morat, Victor Peteke, Annelise Krige, Madeleine Breda, Antony Phaahlamohlake, Moitsoadi Binase, Tumelo Mashaba, Zoliswa Ntsaka, Lyndsey Lourie, Emmanuel Kasala, Sandra Gertze, and Mildred Dreyer are among the many who have enacted both conventional and critical accompaniment through the labyrinths of institutional administrative and compliance regimes, especially during my own lapses and gaffes in leadership, and through periods when we faced severe censure. In the current era of techno-rationality, when universities are faltering on their "public good" mandate (Fataar et al., 2022), critical administrative accompaniment has receded, raising questions about how the Institute may need to reimagine itself and reinvent spaces of in-betweenity in continuance of its activist scholarship concentrated on refusal of colonial knowledge systems and the retrieval, (re)interpretation and (re)

centring of knowledges borne out of struggle for social justice across the global South (see de Sousa Santos, 2018).

XII

Ma, through the orthodox work of knowledge brokerage, I have supported and contributed to research collectives generating empirical data to inform prevention and safety promotion policies, financing decisions, and programming choices (Swart et al., 2000, 2002; Van Niekerk et al., 2000). I have participated in research on promising and best practices for prevention and safety promotion (Bender et al., 2002). In iterative practices of this work, we have assumed a critical turn to think about the politics underlying the science–policy nexus and the development of dignifying forms of community-based interventions (Malherbe et al., 2022; Seedat & Suffla, 2017 ; Stevens et al., 2003; Taliep et al., 2022).

Within the labor of critical intellectualism (Ally & Ally, 2008), the attention has been on mobilizing heterodox methodologies in knowledge making and de-centring the ivory tower as the primary and exclusive site for research and scholarship. This transgressive work represents a considered engagement with multiple and everyday sites of knowledge-creation and non-institutional social actors as knowledge agents (Lau & Seedat, 2013, 2015; Suffla & Seedat, 2021). As part of the collective rebellion, colleagues, post-graduate students, and I have committed substantial intellectual and emotional energies toward supporting bodies of work focused on the complicity of the health and social sciences in apartheid-colonialism, and the (re)production of material and discursive inequalities, as well as racism, patriarchy, euro-ethnocentrism, and classism in hegemonic systems of knowledge-creation, in continuance of the ideas introduced by my companions of the late 1980s and early 1990s (see Duncan, 2003; Stevens, 2003; Stevens et al., 2006; Terre Blanche & Seedat, 2001; Van Niekerk & Schefer, 2001). Such insurrectionist work in part raises questions about how and where we make knowledge; what constitutes knowledge; the intersections between power and systems of knowledge-creation; and who may be considered as authentic producers of knowledge.[6] This work is underpinned by claiming the Global South as dynamic epistemic sites (de Sousa Santos, 2018; Suffla & Seedat, 2021).

XIII

Ma, I do not think that I should profess to any definite expertise or niche specializations. My movements in and out of these different ways of doing socially conscious intellectual work have been loaded with confusion, paradoxes, and occasional convergences.

I do however profess that I—along with my companion social actors and communities of meaning-making—have

tried to comprehend the import of the messiness and ambiguities and disentangle myself from the strange languages of academia. Colleagues and I have engaged with both the dominating and liberatory potentials and qualities of language. Language has been used to trigger dislocation, dismemberment, and death, as well as kill the languages of subjugated peoples, a phenomenon referred to as linguicide (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1992). We continue the long journey of collectively disentangling our words from the languages of domination, detachment, and displacement. Languages may also be innovated to connect, celebrate, and create solidarities and tell stories about our heritages of struggle and accomplishments (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1992). Ma, we remain on the course of creating healing languages that are woven through and by the heart; languages of the heart that propel caring relationalities, reciprocal connections with Nature, compassionate understandings of our multiple realities, and humanizing actions.

XIV

When I began my post-graduate training, I experienced the language and content of the master's program in clinical psychology as disconnected from our everyday realities shaped by apartheid-capitalist social, political, economic, and geographical segregation and struggles for epistemic and political independence (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Ma, apartheid logics, perpetuated through the academic training, produced fissures and fragmentations that incessantly threatened to alienate and displace me from you and my communities of significance. Moving between the ivory tower and the realities of our segregated township, I moved between disconnected worlds, always imagining linkages.

I lived through and continue to live through years of elusive connections.

Ma, you will however recall that one evening when my various worlds came together in the space of the ivory tower to mark my inauguration as professor. My paternal uncles, siblings, cousin brothers and sisters, life mentors, and interlocutors occupied the unfamiliar space of the ivory tower as stranger witnesses.

That evening was a transient moment when dearest and lifelong friends, denied opportunities for tertiary education, came to remind those who may listen; they quietly presented their aspirations of a better life at a time when we began noticing how the ruling and corporate elite were (re) slipping into denialism and forgetfulness. It was a time when we began worrying about the devouring impulses of an avaricious class in our society.

It was a moment when Alicia, my knowing heart, curious and incisive reader, bosom friend, and healing companion, beheld her family-oriented partner in a strange space.

It was the night when my gentle-hearted children, Aziz Ahmad Yahyaa and Zaheer Aliyy, wondered about what we do at universities.

It was a rare instant when people from the margins, representing the communities of Eldorado Park, Slovo Park, Vlakfontein, and Thembelihle, entered the space of the learned professors as a silent act of disruption and subversion.

That night, just for a few tenuous hours, different worlds connected, and imagined possibilities of a caring pluriversal humanizing planet.

I have lived as a stranger in and with this world of the ivory tower.

XV

In this ivory tower

Comprehension is evasive,

Belonging elusive.

Ma, as silent insurgent witness

You recognized my estrangement and

dreams in that moment of celebration.

XVI

Ma, perhaps as a stranger it may be truthful not to want to claim or profess achievement by contemporary universities' orthodox standards of productivity that narowly determines accomplishments by volume and quality of publications, citation counts, research grant mobilization, and the public and policy impacts of intellectual work (Gruber, 2014).

Irrespective, I want to declare that as a stranger in the ivory tower I have continuously returned to my formative Epistemic Home and embraced your silence as layered intentional onto-epistemology of the heart; I have followed your silence as an enactment of the multi-generational customs, principles, and methodologies for making knowledges (see Elgin, 2013).

In search for clarity in and outside the pages of the ivory tower, I remain in wonderment of your "epistemic sensibility" (see Tollefsen, 2004). I am in awe of your knack and endowments for perceiving and making sense of your generation's complex realities and acting thoughtfully and compassionately in the world, notwithstanding your and your generation's vulnerabilities and oversights.

In and through your silence you embodied and socialized spiritualized ways of knowing and making a humanizing world of manifold subjectivities, histories, and legacies.

XVII

Ma,

Your

Silence

Spiritualized

Socialized

Intuition

Comprehension

Struggle

Agency

XVIII

Ma, I want to honor you as distinguished in the knowledges of the heart.

Your name, Ma Amina Seedat, will not be referenced, or cited in the pages of the ivory tower.

I am unsure about how to signify and symbolize you and multi-generations of (grand)mothers—the communities of significance who form and epitomize the enduring foundational home of my "epistemic socialization" (Fricker, 2003, p. 161).

I want to chronicle and appreciate Charlianne Vincenti Levy, Luxmiben Bawa, Khayroonisa Suffla, Ayesha Bulbulia, Tahira Karriem, Ayesha Seedat, Audrey Shirley Williamson,[7] Amina Mohamed Asvat, Ayesha Bibi Hoosian Mia Ulday, Khatija Seedat, Aisha Bibi Sayed, Fatima-Mangera-Seedat, Zainub Hassim Latib, Ayesha Bibi Ahmed Bham, Hajira Seedat, Amina Kathrada, Mariam Halday, Sheila van Niekerk, and you Ma for being among the family of (grand)mothers who bequeath a critical compassionate "cognitive-affective disposition" (Fricker, 2003, p. 161) to me and my intellectual siblings who have being gracious on my journey of the strange.

I want readers to know that throughout the course of laboring as a professor and attempting to make sense of what professors do, I have summoned the substance of my epistemic socialization. Together, my companions and I have relied on enacting considered openness when we heard criticism; compassion when we experienced misunderstanding; silence when we faced vitriolic noise; care in circumstances of hurt; and courage and persistence wherever we confronted hostility, dominance, and injustice.

XIX

Ma, I am ambivalent about including your photograph in these pages. Perhaps a photograph may embody your presence and unmatched knowledges of the heart. I know that this ivory tower of pages is not your world; it is not where you would have wanted to seek acknowledgment, and presence. You lived far away from this strange world of pages. Yet, perhaps as a testimony to your critical openness (Fricker, 2003) and your unassuming visions of creating a humanizing universe of multiple worlds—traversing both the secular and spiritual and the corporeal and analytical—you bore unfathomable hardships to assure me a university education. You and all the other (grand)mothers I recall here, ensconced in vibrant spiritualities, orally transmitted philosophical legacies and traditions of everyday struggle, suffered complex dislocations wrought by enslavement, colonial-apartheid and extractive economies to enable your familiar children enter the world of the strange.

XX

Ma, in your honor and in tribute of the (grand)mothers of my first epistemic home, I name the interpretive-affective disposition you bequeath to us through your lives of struggle *epistemic love*.

Perhaps those who may decide to follow in the tradition of epistemic love may inaugurate subversive ways of referencing and calling your name along with the names of our (grand)mothers inside and outside the world of the strange.

XXI

Ma, I turn to silence in contemplative communion with your heart that lives in my heart always.

Silence

ORCID iD

Mohamed Seedat https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9018-3370

Notes

1. Victor first started the habit of brewing tea during one of our early disputes about the insidious influences of colonial epistemology on community intervention practices in the South. The argument had morphed into a hurtful exchange between us. Apprehensive about the liberal establishment's

resistance to recognizing the power–knowledge nexus and de-imperializing knowledge making (see de Sousa Santos, 2018; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018), I experienced Victor's offer of brewed tea as banal and paternalistic. Despite my sense of indignation, following Ma's silent ways of discerning complexity, I also understood the symbolism that stirred Victor's brewed tea. Never fully relinquishing his paternalistic desires, Victor continued to serve tea whenever our conversations overflowed with agitation, as a cup of intelligibility when we experienced conceptual fuzziness, and as a soothing drink when we felt wounded. Ma's onto-epistemology of the heart prevailed to illuminate the finery of paradoxes.

2. Through the work of the Centre for Peace Action (CPA), we learnt that social justice-oriented community engagement is dynamically shaped by rival and competing situational, social actor, and ideological currents. In the process of intervening against the multiple forms of violence, we moved between enacting community engagement as liberal democracy, as critical intellectualism, and as praxis. As liberal democracy our engagement, assuming instrumentalist undertones, meant procuring community consent, testimonials, and support for the Centre's inauguration, vision, and programmatic aims. As critical intellectualism, we approached community engagement as contestation around the catchment community's rightful demands for self-definition, intellectual independence, and sovereignty. In community engagement as praxis, we adopted reflexivity, vision-making, and action iteratively through periods of contestation, consensus, and uneasy cooperation (see Seedat, 2012).

3. Following its founding institutional mandate to align the work of science with the national imperatives of democratizing public health policy, intervention programming and financing decisions, we in the CVI enacted modes of intellectual labor that inadvertently idealized normative public health empiricist traditions, reproduced the research-theory binary, and conferred a narrow instrumentalist logic to knowledge creation. The institutionally mandated scope of work, enabling the CVI to manufacture academic, scientific, and social relevance, placed the accent on what Gordon and Shipman (1988) refer to as the distributive equality dimensions of social justice: activities redressing the legacies of apartheid demographic and social exclusions. We peripheralized the labor of criticality, epistemic justice, and decolonizing the implementation sciences that was started earlier in the CPA. We tended to neglect distributive sufficiency, the other dimension of social justice, as well as epistemic justice that entails retrieving subjugated knowledges and critiquing the power–knowledge nexus, and the knowledge claims underlying hegemonic theories and methodologies as well as the over-determining influences of ideological and monopolistic financial interests on policy making and safety promotion programming even in democratic contexts (see Foster, 2008; Gordon & Shipman, 1988; Seedat, 2010).

4. The assumption of the name Safety and Peace Promotion Research Unit (SAPPRU) signaled a (re)assertion of an earlier trans-disciplinary, liberatory, and community-centered orientation and a (re)conceptualization that located violence and injury at the intersection of the safety, peace, and health promotion sciences. The (re)conceptualization comprehended militarized cultures, toxic masculinities, social inequality, and occurrences of crime, violence, and injuries as structurally induced threats to safety, peace, and health. Moving between the practices of strategic co-operation and disruption (Burman, 2003; Cornwall, 2002; Miraftab, 2006), SAPPRU implemented a suite of projects and produced theoretical, analytical, and technical resources in support of both democratic forms of health policy development and marginalized communities demands for peace and safe promotion. SAPPRUs and Ashley van Nikerk's lead role in the development of a national Framework and Implementation Plan for the Prevention of Unintentional and Intentional Injury in South Africa and implementation of community-based safety promotion demonstration programs exemplified its critical engagements with both state and non-state actors and a break from the preceding relevance-criticality binary (see Seedat, 2010; VIPRU and SAMRC, 2012).

5. A formative project, led by my erudite colleague Shahnaaz Suffla and organized as rebellion against coloniality (see Maldonado-Torres, 2017), summons historiographic accounts of Africa (e.g., Mazrui, 2005; Mudimbe, 1988; Zeleza, 2007) to retrieve African knowledge archives. The project, a retrieval of Africa's diverse archives and associated classical knowledge traditions, claims that critical trans-archival dialogues may produce conceptual resources for the continuing work of decolonizing the social sciences including community psychology. I have the privilege of partnering with Shahnaaz to explore the ways in which Black Consciousness philosophy, defined and enacted as a resistance political movement by Steve Bantu Biko (1979), and his compatriots within a particular socio-political context in South Africa, may be emblematic of Africa's knowledge archives and their attendant decolonizing epistemological and methodological resources. Our critical dialogues with Africa's multiple archives denote onto-epistemic rupture, and a delinking from hegemonic Eurocentric traditions that continue to structure and universalize knowledge making practices and assumptions about humanity around the world (see Suffla & Seedat, 2021).

6. In 2014, African youth gathered in Pretoria, South Africa to participate in the University of South Africa's (Unisa's) Research and Innovation Week, an annual event aimed at profiling the university's research programs, encouraging scholarly debates, and promoting public intellectualism. The youth were participants of a multi-African country photovoice project started by colleagues and me. During that Week the youth, exemplifying their agentic capacities, launched their photobook, titled *My Voice in Pictures: African Children's Vision of Safety* (Suffla et al., 2014), hosted a photographic exhibition of their photo stories at the university's Art Gallery, and convened a conference on African youths' imaginaries of safety. The conference was inaugurated by Unisa's Principal and Vice-Chancellor. The youths' activities, defined as epistemic disruption, foregrounded subaltern voices in a hegemonic tertiary educational zone, and were directed at unsettling the university's orthodox adult-dominated reign of knowledge-creation. However, the youths' retrospective

reflections highlighted a paradox. The youth spoke about how they moved between feelings of estrangement and uncertainty within an adult-centric academic space and a sense of accomplishment and confidence after presenting to an audience of learned professors. They alluded to the ways in which power asymmetries may operate to undermine the social and epistemic justice ideals of photovoice especially when adults continue to be the sole facilitators of access to exclusionary spaces and affirmation of talents. On one hand, we witnessed a form of dynamic interruption when the youth placed the responsibility on adults to consider young people as epistemic agents in a context where knowledge-making is construed as the preserve of the university and the adult thinker. On the other hand, we noticed how adult academics and institutional leaders continued to be the affirming knowledge authorities and references of gratitude in the adult–youth interactions. This project raises the salience of ambiguities underlying adult accompaniment on social justice work (see Malherbe et al., 2017).

7. Ma Odie, I pay tribute to you for gifting your son Gerald to the CPA (1992–1998). Gerald, who was present when you bid us farewell to start your journey to the Other World of our spiritual and intellectual ancestors, taught us the art of calm dialogue with allies and adversaries, creating a third way when intransigence and toxic interests threatened social justice, and catalyzing social activism when hope seem elusive. In your honor, I plan to tell and document the story of Gerald's contributions in the next iteration of letters to my ancestors.

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Author Biography

Mohamed Seedat writes about psycho-politics of transformation, the social anatomy of public protests, decolonial peace and safety promotion, and the archeology of insurgent knowledges and non-institutionalized epistemic communities. He is the current head of the Institute for Social and Health Sciences at the University of South Africa.