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CHAPTER 11

‘Wild wayward free gifts’:[1] a gendered view on agroecology and agricultural transitions

Vanessa Farr

Introduction

> I acknowledge that the land from which I write is the ancestral territory of the San and Khoe peoples, who helped bring forth human life on Earth 77,000 years ago. The descendants of these people continue to live and work here today.
>
> I acknowledge that the great standard of living enjoyed by many in this area, me included, is directly related to their resources and friendship, and that their contemporary existence is made precarious by their ongoing exclusion from that which brings and safeguards a good life.
>
> I recognize and share their continued struggles for justice, and for life, waters, and lands.

By beginning this chapter with a Land Acknowledgement, a practice that I am grateful to have learnt from Indigenous teachers of Turtle Island (the Indigenous name for North America), I position my dissenting feminist self, descendant of colonial settlers in South Africa on my mother’s side, in a respectful, responsible, reverent, and reciprocal relationship (Wall Kimmerer, 2013; Xiiem et al., 2019) with the land, water, struggles, stories, and knowledge practices of generations of peoples of Africa and other continents, whose theories of land and place deeply shape this writing.

As I write, I overlook Zeekoevlei, the largest of Cape Town’s abundant shallow lakes, part of the city’s extensive system of wetlands. In the past few months, after the city’s release from the drought of 2017–2019 that threatened to turn it into the first city in the world to run out of water, this freshwater body has been repeatedly assaulted by flows of effluent that stream into it through two concrete channels built, in the style of colonial efforts to dominate and reshape nature, to ‘manage’ the flows of the Lotus River some time back in the apartheid era. Alongside it, both under and above the ground, runs the ongoing brutality of ‘apartheid in the pipes’,[2] an ageing infrastructure initially created to carry waste from dominant-class communities to a wastewater treatment plant south of here, built to make use of the natural abundance of water in this area – the ‘ecosystem services’, as neoliberal politics calls them – of the confluence of rivers, lakes, and groundwater; and beyond them, False Bay.

After a decade of local struggle to recognize its vital importance for migrating water birds, Zeekoevlei was declared a Ramsar site in 2015.[3] By the end of 2021 it had become the latest of the city’s water bodies to be so fouled by sewage that it was closed – permanently, it seems – to recreational use. The *vlei* is sick. In the period following the COVID-19 pandemic, the whole of this postcard-perfect tourist destination at the southern tip of Africa – which is also one of the world’s most violent urban settlements – is sick.

Citizens of this city are reeling with the unfolding impacts of the novel coronavirus, and with the pre-existing and intergenerational trauma that is produced by, and reproduces, pandemics of violence, hunger, and poverty. Each day, desperate newcomers, many of them climate refugees from the bone-dry Eastern Cape province, set up flimsy structures among thousands of others like them. To the south of the *vlei*, one informal settlement is home to around a thousand people, who share two drip-flow taps between them.[4] In the communities to the east, some abutting the concrete canals that were once the banks of a river flowing through seasonal wetlands, extreme hunger and thirst, gun violence, rape and assault, and alcohol and drug use take their daily toll. These are the violent legacies of slavery and Indigenous subjugation, originated when colonial settlers forcibly resettled, on the sandy soils of the Cape Flats, both the people who used to farm, hunt, and fish in this area, and the dissenters relocated here from other Dutch colonies.

Fearful people. Fouled waters. Failed systems. This is what has come of centuries of efforts initiated by European men to physically and psychically dominate, de-Africanize, and ‘civilize’ this area and the life it sustains; to impose scarcity while extracting immeasurable wealth for themselves; and to control both the science and the institutions that produce acceptable knowledge about this place, and the stories that can be told about the actions of these men (Mellet, 2020). As I gaze over the *vlei*, it strikes me how ironic it is that the first legal effort of the men sent here to subdue this land and exert control over this environment was to issue an edict, ‘Placcaat 12 of 1655’ (Green, 2020: 44), banning activities that would foul the fresh waters that had first drawn them into setting up a waystation at this halfway house for moving the spoils of Dutch colonial plunder back to Europe.

It is not explained, in the conversations my neighbours have as we try to make sense of the sickness of the wetlands, how the waters, birds, geckos, chameleons, and spiders of this land became, like the humans that inhabit it, so separated from each other that they can barely function, let alone flourish. The elephant in the metaphorical room of our community WhatsApp exchanges is our white privilege, which has protected us, in the past, from the reality of the filth that comes with political negligence. Yet I find it difficult to talk in new ways about this fouled water, in the face of continued political propaganda that tells us how privileged we are to live in this, ‘the best-run city in the land'. We are angry at being let down, but we are ill-prepared to face the reality that the 'city has made its own Anthropocene' and cannot offer any conditions of liveability without 'a paradigm shift in … water management' or a profound commitment 'to finding and forming an ecopolitics that gives life' to all (Green, 2020: 59, 231).

This is the contemporary disaster that has come from old Europe's belief that it can remake the world in its own image by containing and controlling all that it encounters, dividing nature and city, women and men, dominated and superior; and by attempting to halt and redirect 'flows of rock, water, and life' (Green, 2020: 59). Colonial intrusions do not work in favour of life; but here on the *vlei*, we struggle to decry the imported technologies and engineering that generations of white male settlers have imposed in their efforts to drain, tame, and tax these wetlands (Scott, 2017). We cannot believe that we are being exposed to the sight and smell of this failed hiding of human excrement, so repulsive to Victorian minds, that can no longer be kept from us in water-borne sewage systems carried in pipes buried out of sight in the ground. Like everyone else in the city, we are facing the reality of our own shit.

Stress and addiction expert Gabor Maté would say that the fragmentation of ourselves and our systems is a manifestation of our as yet unexamined collective trauma, and that we will remain frozen in toxicity, expressed as rage but also inaction and nostalgia (Maté, 2009), until we are ready to tell different stories about who we are – to one another and to this land and water. For now, in the face of all the evidence that this system cannot work, we want to keep living in the 'sanctioned ignorance' (Spivak, 1988: 86; Morris, 2010) in which we grew up, as transmitted to us through the stories of brave white men in the history books we studied at school.

It is not explained

What has this story got to do with women and food and farming systems on the African continent? I tell it because, like several other authors in this volume, I am concerned with countering the well-oiled machinery of forgetting, exclusion, and epistemicide (De Sousa Santos, 2010) designed to highlight and authenticate a singular vision of the past and present, and therefore to dictate an imagined future of sameness, of continuity in patterns of exclusion and dominance, whose intentions and pathways are also imagined as continuing forever, unquestioned, and along known lines. In telling it, I hope to bring into the light the contemporary suppressions and distortions necessary to maintain the 'traditions of domination' (Eisler and Fry, 2019), and the trauma, required by settler-colonial patriarchy and enforced by its primary tools, racism and capitalism, which I will explore in this chapter as the foundational causes of African women's distress as the food and farming crises forced onto this continent escalate. The counter-narrative I assemble draws on decades of feminist efforts to unearth women's experiences of the world and (re-)assert their 'role as eternal guardians of lands, waters, and stories' (Xiiem et al., 2019: 11).

Following the meaning-making process proposed by Jo-ann Archibald Q'um Q'um Xiiem, I draw on 'Indigenous storywork' to guide my thoughts.

First, I turn to Wangari Maathai, who remains, a decade after her death in September 2011, the best-known African ecofeminist, to learn how she came to be such an outspoken protector of women's rights to their ancestral waters and lands. Maathai begins her autobiography (Maathai, 2007) with a story, a brief account of the cosmology of her people, the Kikuyu of Kenya. 'God created the primordial parents, Gikuyu and Mumbi,' who had 10 daughters together but no sons. When the girls reached maturity, a divine intervention sent suitable men to Earth to pair with them, and in this way, the 10 matrilineal clans of the Kikuyu, all tracing themselves back to the original daughters, came about. Since then, however, 'many privileges, such as inheritance and ownership of land, livestock, and perennial crops, were gradually transferred to men'. While the Kikuyu still tell this origin story, celebrate their direct descent via their mothers from the primordial mother, Mumbi, and retain some aspects of their original matrilinear practices, Kikuyu culture has become patrilinear. Maathai wryly observes: 'It is not explained how women lost their rights and privileges' over time (Maathai, 2007: 4–5).

Her observation frames an account of loss that is familiar to other feminists who have asked and tried to find answers to questions like hers for decades. How is it that African women, despite their ongoing and crucial association with and knowledge of farming and food systems, have been made so dispossessed and marginal? Ariel Sallah asks succinctly: 'Could there be a connection between the growth of violent, undemocratically imposed, unjust and unfair economic policies and the intensification in brutality of crimes against women?' (Mies and Shiva, 2014: xiv). In the 1950s, feminist economist Ester Boserup proposed that, while European settler-colonial expansion impoverished everyone in the subjugated land, as a patriarchal project reliant on gendered economic and political logics and hierarchies, it affected Indigenous women both more deliberately and more severely than men. One reason for this skewed impact is the gendered assumptions made by early settler-colonialists who could not see or give credence to expressions of women's knowledge, authority, and autonomy, or admit the value of their multiple contributions to social, spiritual, cultural, and material sustenance (Turner and Fischer-Kowalski, 2010).

In her research on pre-contact social and economic systems, anthropologist Jean Comaroff (1985) follows a similar pathway. Turning a feminist eye on archival evidence of 19th-century British military-settler-colonial encounters with the Tswana of Southern Africa, she finds that at the time the first male explorers set out to survey and describe the continent, they encountered societies in which issues such as control over seeds and agriculture were centrally bound up with gendered divisions of labour. That much, at least, was familiar to them from Europe's own rigidly hierarchized labour practices (Schreiner, 1911). Yet it is what they made of these gendered spaces that counts. Such divisions, as Riane Eisler's work has explored for decades, do not necessarily imply 'domination-leaning' societies (Eisler and Fry, 2019); and indeed, there are multiple archival testimonies, in Africa and elsewhere, indicating that pre-contact social formations were based on what Eisler characterizes as partnership, with great equality in the sharing of resources between female and male, young and old. Perhaps the most powerful of these accounts simply acknowledge how healthy, well-nourished, and strong communities were at first contact (Comaroff, 1985; Maathai, 2007; Green, 2020).

It is this sight that clearly startled and disoriented European men, accustomed as they were to the filthy, unsanitary conditions of near famine on the continent they had left behind, where peasants had endured centuries of immiseration from war, famine, pogroms, forced displacement, enclosure, and other deprivations. They had come from a world dependent on division, whose 'whole motley fabric [was] kept together by fear and blood' (Thompson, cited in Taylor, 1984: ix).[5]

So began a long process of gendered sense-making of the spaces and societies these male soldiers and settlers encountered. The archives show how these outsider observers, whose worldview over-associated masculinity with the power, knowledge, and practices that counted, began to paint a socio-economic and cultural picture through which it was possible to reorganize the scenes they were viewing into patterns they could understand. Part of this process required unpacking a physical puzzle, because the labour and domains of Indigenous men were centred on cattle and the *kraal* (cattle-holding pen), which was at the heart of the community. In their own embodied experience in Europe, it was men who lived at the edges of settlements and made dangerous journeys to engage with the wilderness, while women were protected in the home-hearth-heart configuration at the centre.[6] Encountering an inversion of the settlement practices with which they were familiar, and which they considered natural, the settlers were both challenged and disquieted in their patriarchal beliefs about what constituted male vitality and force; and they would make use of this strangeness in two ways as they established their dominion over lands and bodies. Firstly, by reading the *kraal* as a male space in which all important decision-making took place, they would give it primacy by associating with it all events of public, political, and economic importance and, as settler wars began to proliferate, by breaching it as if it were a fortified castle. An important part of justifying their violent, militarized domination of African men would be to devise narratives in which the fierce warriors they encountered were redrawn as effeminate because of where they had physically located their labour (Comaroff, 1985; Green, 2020; Mellet, 2020).

Having solved the problem of men, cattle, and *kraals* in their efforts to neatly rank and categorize the lives and work habits of the people they encountered, Europeans then had to work out what to do with the strength and physical freedom of Indigenous women, who were the very antithesis of the 'parasitic' and effete 'kept' woman simultaneously idealized and despised in the Victorian gender order (Schreiner, 1911). In their farming and food-gathering practices, these women also moved antithetically to the

European gaze, conducting their business away from the settled heart of the community, in what looked to Europeans like the periphery, the fields and the bush, close to the dangers of the wild. This meant wildness, too, had to be gendered as it was tamed, a process achieved through the invocation of tropes equating women and nature, with which settler-colonials would have been familiar from birth. Over time, Southern African women, too, were likened to wildness and, especially, to wild plants: wayward beings beyond the limits of settlements, having nutritional or medicinal properties and therefore being of the body, and unpredictable in their effects on humans when ingested. Defining them as unruly, in turn, helped justify their forced domestication and control by male soldiers and settlers (Schreiner, 1911; Comaroff, 1985).[7]

From its first imposition on African societies, the hierarchical and extractive logic of European domination required women's contributions, especially in the reproductive economy, to be viewed as marginal; a perspective that remains crucial in rendering the broad range of women's caregiving, agricultural, and other food-gathering practices unimportant and unmeasurable. With the proud certainty of their confirmation bias in place, settler-colonial administrations would go on to create the elaborate legal and economic structures that made their interpretation of the worlds they encountered 'true'.

Yet a close reading, especially of the footnotes of the work of a dissenting proto-feminist like Olive Schreiner, indicates that the male perspectives frozen in the archives are wildly off the mark. Male settlers relied not on what they saw, but on what they already knew. They misread and underestimated the relative value and importance to Indigenous communities of crops and cattle, and of work done by women and men, because they could not allow themselves to grasp simple facts, including, for instance, that the shape of the settlements was practical, not ideological, and was an effective means of safeguarding cattle by tucking them away in a *kraal* – not an ontological claim about cattle and men being at the centre of the world. Over time, this initial misreading would undermine entire food systems and create ruinous ecological imbalances. It set in motion a series of '[e]xpulsions and extinctions' (Green, 2020: 113) by imposing imported values on tame and wild animals, and on agricultural food production systems. It motivated further settler-colonial expansion enabled by land enclosure and the forced relocation of communities to inferior soils. Eventually, its logic resulted in today's mass production of commodities that are moved into 'a global food system to feed workers forced into towns' (Green, 2020: 119).

Moreover, the earliest settler-colonial proto-capitalist policies of land privatization for cash crops were explicitly focused on managing Europe's surplus male population, a project crucial to advancing established and normative white male hierarchies. Following established European practice, their imposition required subterfuges including deluding dispossessed young men into going to the colonies to make their fortune, and then wasting them in continuous warfare (Schreiner, [1897] 2019, 1911).

The establishment of white-male-bodied supremacy also relied on the forced movement of 'inferior' Indigenous men into emerging urban centres to serve as labourers. While such men had little choice but to comply, the price of their coercion was offset through the introduction of a gendered legal system by means of which to recruit Indigenous men into European patriarchy. African men were redefined as the 'owners' of lands that had historically been cared for communally, while land and labour mechanisms for leaving women behind, which were already well-practised in Europe, were imposed (Taylor, 1984; Comaroff, 1985; Millar et al., 1996; Criado Perez, 2019). Women's relationship with the land was fundamentally altered when the conditions were created for them to become temporary cultivators of fields over which they had no security of tenure, and from which they were not expected to accrue the benefits of their inputs, either as workers or as interlocutors of the soils they worked (Millar et al., 1996). So powerful were the intersectional mechanisms of exploitation established in the earliest phases of European 'industrial settler campaigns' (Whyte 2017: 208) – the emphasis on the military nature of this conquest is important – that they make African women and soils vulnerable to this day, continuing to burden both with the many-layered effects of 'socially constructed scarcity' (Yapa, 1995: 321), as discussed by Swanby in Chapter 15 of this volume.

As if women mattered

Wangari Maathai's musings are also interesting because, beyond exposing the specificity of women's losses as the new world order took hold, she highlights what happened when Indigenous cosmologies that recognized women's uniqueness and power as progenitors were overwhelmed with the arrival of Western patriarchal coloniality. Does her comment, then, also raise the question of why contemporary Kikuyu appear uncurious about why coloniality methodically dispossessed women and normalized their subordinate, and landless, status? As its proponents moved around the world, inventing racism (Grosfoguel, 2013) and reinforcing classism, proto-capitalist European patriarchy positioned both the repression of women and their children, and the enclosure of land and water, as shared tasks with rewards that reciprocally recognized and encouraged male collusion (Eisler and Fry, 2019). Perhaps, then, Maathai is asking why some Indigenous men chose to comply.

For Ramón Grosfoguel (2013), this patriarchal colonial-settler work of subordinating women's productive and reproductive labour succeeded because it had already been practised for several hundred years in Europe (see also Taylor, 1984). While the conquest of the Americas created 'a new racial imaginary and new racial hierarchy' (Grosfoguel, 2013: 80), Indigenous women were subjected to a misogynistic derision of their epistemologies that forms a continuum with, or extrapolates from, the epistemicide of Indo-European women's knowledge from the 15th to the 18th centuries, achieved by burning alive those marked as witches. Following Silvia Federici

(2004), Grosfoguel characterizes this campaign of violence as ‘a strategy to consolidate Christian-centric patriarchy and to destroy autonomous communal forms of land ownership’ in Europe long before these methods of control were exported around the world (Grosfoguel, 2013: 85–86). He concludes that when men arrogated to themselves the right to burn women alive they were intentionally destroying a multigenerational tradition of oral knowledge transmission about food systems, land, and farming practices, a violence as weighty in its impact on narrowing knowledge as the burning of the ancient texts that were immolated at around the same time.[8] Many of this volume’s contributors would agree, observing that localized knowledge systems are routinely sacrificed as a homogeneous agricultural world order is imposed.

These violent physical erasures of women and their knowledge resulted, by the 20th century, in the global subsumption of women and the totalitarian dominance of ‘the ideologically constructed category of western technological man as the uniform measure of the worth of classes, cultures and genders’ (Shiva, 1988: 4). The reality produced within this male-fixated worldview makes women disappear, so that planning, policymaking, economies, public infrastructure and institutions, and legal systems accommodate, understand, respond to, and advance the narrowed interests of men. As Caroline Criado Perez examines in *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men* (2019), the ‘gender data gap’ resulting from the generalization of women’s experiences has, even in ‘a world increasingly reliant on and in thrall to data’, led to a loss of accuracy and analytical acuity, with extreme implications for women. When ‘men confuse their own point of view with the absolute truth’ (Criado Perez, 2019: xii–xiii), women experience a further deepening of patriarchal colonial erasure, being extinguished from African agricultural landscapes as they are reshaped through ‘the alignment of Science, politics, and economics’ of corporatism and industrialization (See chapter 12).

‘Agriculture (from tools to scientific research, to development initiatives) has been designed around the needs of men’ (Criado Perez, 2019: 41); and in a continuum with settler-colonialism, decisions are made today between corporates, paid-for science, governments, and international entities designed by, and to serve, Western men. They create ever-deepening cycles of inter-related and incremental loss (Shiva, 1988), denying women equal access to credit, despite their smaller share of cash resources, and overwhelming them with top-down technological transfer. Women are traumatized, losing confidence, autonomy, and control over decision-making when their small-scale, subsistence, and sustainable farming and food processing practices are undermined and replaced with technologized agribusiness, which compromises their long-term productivity and health, and that of the land itself (Millar et al., 1996).

Toxin- and input-reliant monocropping sacrifices women and soil, impacting differently on men’s and women’s sexual and reproductive health, producing lasting and intergenerational suffering (Nixon, 2011; Tobi et al., 2018).

Broken food systems increase unpaid work, taking a toll on women's mental health that is rarely either measured or mentioned. Following Grosfoguel, I would name this, the ongoing devastation of the intelligence of women's and soils' networks of care, the fifth epistemicide.

The systematic inhibition of 'antipatriarchal thinking and profeminist activism' (Enloe, 2013: 121) enables large corporations to infiltrate governments and regional entities, coercively introducing biotechnological regimes, including genetically modified crops and their accompanying planting and harvesting systems. Male-centred techno-science requires not only that other ways of knowing, but the knowers themselves, be assimilated. In this way, Indigenous people have been perpetually marginalized from formal decision-making since colonial engulfment began, using tactics – familiar to feminists – that permit the subordination and relegation of 'anything associated with femininity' to the realm of that which does not matter, and can therefore be overlooked as inconsequential (Enloe, 2013: 11, 136). Refusing to collect, or accurately analyse, sex-disaggregated data, especially that which could make inequities visible and lead to more effective, life-sustaining interventions for all, allows patriarchy to subordinate and capture the generative power of both women and soils (Millar et al., 1996; Mies and Shiva, 2014).

Same old, same old ...

Haidee Swanby (Chapter 15 of this volume) recalls how Norman Borlaug, the 'father' of the Green Revolution, raged against Rachel Carson, dismissing as 'hysterical' her analysis in *Silent Spring* (1962) of the implications of unleashing into agricultural systems the toxic additives and mechanisms of control devised initially as tools of 'cold-war America's military-industrial complex' (Nixon, 2011: xi). Borlaug's contempt invokes a well-worn trope invented by male European doctors in the 19th century to provide '"evidence" of ... the instability of the female mind' (Devereux, 2014: 20) and pathologize women's resistance to patriarchal control. Detractors used it with alacrity against Carson, who was neither a conventional nor a conformist woman. And it was an effective means of undermining her and her argument – although the prescience of her analysis has only deepened with time (Nixon, 2011: 311).

Nixon's discussion of this dissenting outsider, suspicious about and resistant to male scientism, lays bare the partiality of patriarchal agricultural scientific work, and exposes the falsity of this brotherhood's belief that their singular perspective is a sign of expertise, disinterest, and neutrality. Carson was right and those who opposed her were wrong, but misogyny quashed her dissent and led directly to the toxicity of the world's soils, waters, and air today.

'Same old, same old: so much is reproduced by the requirement to follow,' Sara Ahmed might shrug; 'such and such white man becomes an originator of a concept, an idea as becoming seminal, by removing traces of those who were there before' (Ahmed, 2017). Before she was recognized with the Nobel Peace Prize, Maathai, too, was belittled, blocked, and attacked for her efforts to free Kenyan women from the patriarchal ecocide brought about by the impositions of the technological men of Western science and their local enablers, who call on and seemingly endlessly expand the vast wealth and influence available to them through their financial and institutional networks.[9] At the same time they subject women, who represent 60 per cent of the agricultural labour force, to poorly designed, inappropriate agricultural policies, aggressive agrotechnologies that are neither designed for nor affordable to women, a lack of access to credit or other material support, and inaccessible markets – not to mention armed, everyday, and intimate-partner violence, illness, and overwork as labourers and carers. Their successive policy documents and budgetary decisions fail women and make them vulnerable, while accelerating 'a specific vision of industrial agricultural development' (see chapter 12).

'The enclosure of life is taking place everywhere; the privileged center is increasingly narrow,' writes the feminist Colectiva XXK (2021: 10). Similarly, Grosfoguel notes that what is recognized as authoritative insight 'is based on the knowledge produced by a few men from five countries … [and on their] socio-historical experience and world views'. While presented as such, the influence of these men is not evidence of the superiority, universal 'applicability' or 'transferability' of their ideas and arguments, but a sign of their 'provincialism' (Grosfoguel, 2013: 74).[10] What Africa invites is a broadly inclusive approach to food and farming, not a singular, white-Western, masculinist 'scientific rationalism' that justifies endless extraction and privatized profit (see chapter 12). The deployment of gendered tropes and stereotypes silences African women's dissent, with very real consequences for their right to health and well-being, and that of their children to a good life and future.

Seriously?!

I have drawn attention to shrillness and rage as the predominant affective tools used in patriarchal systems to control women who dissent against dominant men's efforts to unilaterally impose their worldview. Yet there are, as I acknowledge by citing them, men who reject this, recognizing that women's knowledge of Indigenous foodways is essential to maintain and renew nature's abundance and gifts of continuing life. This is the spirit of the interview Mvuselelo Ngcoya conducted with Fakazile Mthethwa, fondly known as Gogo Qho (Box A), shortly before her death. It is an astonishing, hopeful, uncompromising exchange with a woman who lived with full dedication to freedom. By eating foods she had grown herself, Gogo Qho politically dissented not only from settler-colonial patriarchy, but from the agrotechnological food system that tried to subsume and pollute the soils and waters, and the human and non-human bodies, of her ancestral lands.

Looked at not only as an experience of reclaiming farming and food practices, but as a testimony of facing and overcoming colonial trauma, the power of her testimony lies in Gogo Qho's embeddedness in interconnections, especially those she makes between struggling for a good life and self-healing. Experts in the healing of ancestral trauma (Duran and Duran, 1995; Duran, 2006) would celebrate her somatic reintegration, her regaining of gut health as well as gut knowledge. Gogo Qho's life journey ended only when she had come to terms with her ancestors, herself, and her community, overcoming fragmentation and refusing the colonially imposed disassociation of intellect from soul and soil.[11] I was struck by her insight into how seeds of every kind travel in two dimensions and directions, in both women and plants – forwards from their mothers and backwards to their grandmothers. Such phenomena embody quantum social change, through which '[a]wakening to our innate mattering brings us back to life', making 'way for the flourishing of all life and future lives to come' (Christina Bethell, in O'Brien, 2021: xi). The emerging science of epigenetics, which is unravelling the causes of the crippling burden of metabolic disorders in the world today, offers further scientific corroboration of her insight. While Gogo Qho's own grandmother passed on to her a legacy of well-being from rain-fed food grown in healthy soils, both the earliest colonial settlers and the shrill contemporary proponents of Big Agro are the descendants of women in Europe who experienced not only the devastation of their ancestral knowledge, but waves of severe malnourishment as a result of that continent's endless wars. Their offspring are unusually prone to inflammatory diseases like diabetes, exacerbated by eating and drinking the chemically treated food Gogo Qho despised and avoided (Van der Kolk, 2015; Tzika et al., 2018). Made ill themselves by the toxins of enclosure and violence, Europeans have, over centuries, relentlessly colluded with, subsidized, and advanced the global agrotech industry behind the poisoned cabbages and packaged *imbuya* Gogo Qho observes robbing those around her of both their rightful health and the political promise of freedom her grandmother's generation struggled to advance. Settler-colonialism *is* slow violence, to borrow Rob Nixon's useful term, and it was achieved through the – often forced – movement of sick and traumatized bodies around the globe. By contrast, Gogo Qho's life-force runs strongly from her grandmother to her, following a pathway and 'a tradition that is rooted in a female mythology', a healing line that draws from 'direct experience of the world, spirit, and psyche' (Duran, 2012: 6; Tzika et al., 2018). I take courage from her recounting of how she rediscovered and returned to ancient agroecological practices, reclaimed her ancestral land, relearned sacred secrets, defied the social, economic, and gendered expectations of her community, and healed herself from the toxic effects of colonized life. Gogo Qho reclaimed her agency by recovering women's ancient status as seed improvers and custodians, preservers and gift-givers, commoners, traders, and interpreters of the land's will, and reaffirmed these knowledges as central components of the privilege and responsibility attached to women's social, economic, and political activities today.

'One day my grandmother comes to me in a dream,' said Gogo Qho, and 'showed me that my health and life was in the soil.' I have been dreaming her dream with her ever since I read those words. They connect me directly to the founding cosmology of the first peoples of Turtle Island and to Indigenous psychologist Eduardo Duran's writing on the healing power of dreams, because once an individual 'has become aware/conscious of earth via the thinking and feeling function, the opportunity arises for a more transcendent understanding' from which renewal can flow (Duran, 2012: 14).

'My dear ones, the work is about to begin'[12]

Before this Earth begins, Skywoman, pregnant with her only child, a daughter, plunges towards a watery world through a hole made when the celestial tree in the land from which she falls is uprooted. Her fall sets in motion many world-building events, none of which would be possible if she had not established, as she fell, the first agreement of mutual care between humans and the natural world: geese, seeing that she cannot fly, help her descend safely to a new land mass made for her, because she cannot swim, by the back of a turtle who rises from the ocean to meet her. Her landing is softened by soil brought from the bottom of the sea by a muskrat, a tiny animal, but one capable of very deep diving. It is on this new land that Skywoman's daughter is born and matures, is impregnated by the wind, and dies, giving birth to twin sons who will go on to build the features of the natural world including, eventually, humans, who appear because 'the common intersections of the female, animals, the spirit world, and the mineral and plant world' make our lives possible (Watts, 2013: 21).

Watering them with her tears, Skywoman plants in her daughter's body the fistful of World Tree seeds caught in her outstretched hand as she tumbled earthwards, rebirthing her as Mother Earth and making possible the emergence of what '[s]cientists refer to … as ecosystems or habitats', but Indigenous people think of as complex societies in which humans have to make choices about 'how they reside, interact and develop relationships with other non-humans' who are equally active (Watts, 2013: 23). Thus set in motion, the human and non-human worlds continue to interact in a continuous cycle of observation, communication, and social organization until colonization disrupts their primal relationship, replacing Indigenous knowledge systems with narrow, hegemonic scientific ideas, diminishing Indigenous people's agency, and instituting separation and a 'hierarchy of beings' centred particularly on degrading the feminine. Women are no longer regarded as sacred protectors of a thinking, living natural world, but become 'synonymous with disappointment and stupidity' (Watts, 2013: 25). By this process, both women and land are made available for violation, exploitation, 'acquisition and destruction' (Watts, 2013: 31) in an emerging capitalist system that will eventually achieve an almost totalitarian control over an increasingly monolithic global food system in which the Earth is virtually stripped of its (bio)diversity.

In ways unimaginable to the coalition of 'scientists, technocrats, business-people, and lawyers, who have all played roles in engineering a specific lens through which to see the world and define what is acceptable in it' (see chapter 12), and whose interests dominate and attempt to control both Africa's agricultural and its cultural landscapes, this account of how seeds came to Earth along with femaleness celebrates one of the oldest human relationships, and ontologies, in the world: that imagining women, seeds, fertility, and soil as coequals conjoined by life, thoughtfulness, intentionality, and activity; a recognition of the land itself as 'full of thought, desire, contemplation and will' (Watts, 2013: 21, 23).

In her rendition of this story, Robin Wall Kimmerer, ecofeminist botanist from the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, says that Skywoman is a reminder 'not just of where we came from, but also of how we can go forward' (Wall Kimmerer, 2013: 5). I think of this as I look over the *vlei*. I think of Skywoman and her daughter, and of Gogo Qho, and of all they gave to the world.

At the water's edge, a red-knobbed coot carries short stems from one thicket of reeds to another, drawing from the ancient knowledge of her ancestors, building this year's nest for this year's chicks. She herself hatched on these waters only a year or two ago, and the simple beauty of her work fills me with hope.

Notes

1. Bessie Head, in a letter to Randolph Vigne, cited by Victoria Margree (2004).
2. This term is used by activists in the African Water Commons Collective.
3. It is the 22nd such site in South Africa, and the most urban (Zeekoevlei, 2015).
4. The City of Cape Town controls the water use of poor people using devices that regulate its flow. Countering this inhumane policy is a major focus of the African Water Commons Collective.
5. From a letter written in 1825 by the Irish social reformer William Thompson to the women's rights activist Anna Wheeler.
6. Olive Schreiner's allegorical tale *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* ([1897] 2019) focuses on the gendered psychological trauma experienced by the 'surplus' unemployed young men forced to leave the comforts of home behind when they were sent to the colonial killing fields. Also see Schreiner's *Woman and Labour* (1911).
7. Several of Olive Schreiner's works deal with aspects of this process of 'taming' Southern African women through various violent means, including rape.
8. Grosfoguel traces four epistemicides practised simultaneously by male Europeans throughout 'the long 16th century': against the Muslims in Andalusia, which included the burning, between the 13th and 16th centuries, of about 750,000 irreplaceable written texts in ancient

libraries; in the Americas, with the burning of Indigenous knowledge-recording processes and systems (*códices*); against enslaved Africans, by the destruction, through dispersal, of their knowledges; and of women's study of nature, as discussed above.

9. Attacks on dissenters are, of course, not confined to women, as was seen after the release of the report criticizing the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's intervention, the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) (Wise, 2020a). However, while AGRA's response questioned the research credentials of Timothy A. Wise, who led the report team, he was not subjected to attacks about his mental health in the ways women are. See Mkindi et al. (2020) and Wise (2020b).
10. Four of these five countries are in Western Europe: Italy, France, Germany, and the UK; the USA is the fifth. Criado Perez also points out that the world has become more dangerous for women because white male Americans are so over-represented as creators and designers of everyday items that often simply do not fit women, or provide safety for them.
11. The power of overcoming ancestral trauma through bodily integration was a key theme of the 2021 Collective Trauma summit, hosted online by Thomas Hübl, and informs my analysis in this section (Inner Science, 2021)
12. These words, as recounted by Jo-ann Archibald Q'um Q'um Xiiem of the Salish/Stó:lō, begin both stories and world-changing political work (Xiiem et al., 2019: 1).

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Box F My grandmother's farm: a story by Mugove Walter Nyika

The wild fruit trees which were my boyhood playground are not there any more. There is no shade in which to shelter, no sweet fruit to eat. What remains is just row after row of hybrid maize in neat lines. The soil beneath my feet is hard as cement. This is my grandmother's farm where I grew up – but it was different then.

My grandmother farmed in south-central Zimbabwe in the 1960s. She was a smallholder farmer using local seeds that she saved from each harvest, and traditional methods both to protect the seeds from pests and to grow the crops. She used manure from the cattle pen, termite mound soil, and leaf and crop residue litter to maintain the fertility of her soils. She intercropped legumes with her other crops. I remember watching her select the best seed from her harvest every year, and the many ways she had to keep it safe from pests. She would hang some of the seed above the fireplace and keep the rest in her sealed granary under a layer of *rapoko* grains.

I remember when the government extension officer came. 'You can now become Master Farmers,' he said. In order to achieve this status, farmers had to remove all trees from their arable land and plough it uniformly. Then they needed to plant maize in straight lines with uniform spacing and no other crops in between. They were encouraged to buy ox-drawn cultivators to clear the weeds in between those neat rows.

By the 1980s my grandmother had become a modern farmer. She was buying and using hybrid seeds, chemical fertilizers, and chemical pesticides. She was practising monoculture, growing mostly just maize. But with this transformation came massive deforestation, soil erosion, siltation, loss of soil fertility, soil compaction, dependency on external inputs, and malnutrition, especially among the children. Far from this Green Revolution solving Africa's problems, as we were taught it would, things seemed only to get worse.

Today Mugove Walter Nyika is a permaculturalist and proponent of ecovillages, running a regional NGO, ReSCOPE, transforming schoolyards into verdant food forests and teaching children that one can grow food without money and that we are what we eat and grow. He is also returning to his roots, the rural home where his grandmother farmed, to turn around the damage of the Green Revolution and has committed himself to building resilience in his community and across landscapes. Walter is part of a growing network of people around the continent who are committed to changing the mindsets and agricultural practices that created millions of farms like his grandmother's.

Source: SKI, Seed sovereignty writeshop, September 2016, unpublished.