What if Mahatma Gandhi, Malcolm X, Nelson Mandela and Jurgen Habermas had a conversation on what it means to be a human being? This book synthesizes the depiction of human nature in relation to (anti)capitalisms and (anti)narcissisms in the work of Mahatma Gandhi (Moksha), Malcolm X (Islam), Nelson Mandela (Ubuntu), and Jurgen Habermas (Communicative Action/Critical Theory). Understandings of what it means to be a human being and the purpose of life vary from one philosophy to another, and yet have a bearing on contemporary issues. The reader is invited to assess the philosophies with regard to conceptually and life affirming philosophies of human nature when placed in the context of (anti)narcissisms and (anti)capitalisms. Also examined are the theories of education in the works Mahatma Gandhi, Malcolm X, Nelson Mandela, and Jurgen Habermas. To teach toward a fuller and meaningful humanity requires an analysis and understanding of the many traditions that contribute to humankind, including the non-western. The classroom offers unheralded opportunities for students and educators to be knowledgeable about different cultures, peoples, and ways of being. (Anti)Narcissisms and (Anti)Capitalisms will be of interest to researchers, educators, students, peace activists, philosophers of education, and those working in the humanities.

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(Anti) Narcissisms and (Anti) Capitalisms
(Anti) Narcissisms and (Anti) Capitalisms

*Human Nature and Education in the Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Malcolm X, Nelson Mandela and Jurgen Habermas*

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to Anthony Tafadzwa Chidembo, a brother and a friend, and to Eugenia Chidembo. I also dedicate it to my family, Samuel Vusa, Michael Tashaya and all who struggle to create a world in which the humanity of all is affirmed.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................ ix

Introduction: How I Met Mahatma Gandhi, Malcolm X, Nelson Mandela and Jurgen Habermas ........................................................................................................ xi

1. Mahatma Gandhi: To be Human is to be one with God .......................................... 1

2. Malcolm X: To be Human is to be Free ................................................................. 31

3. To be Human is to be one with the Universe: Human Nature in the Work of Mandela ................................................................. 63

4. To be Human is to be a White Man: Human Nature in Habermas ....................... 97

5. Gandhi, Malcolm X, Mandela, Habermas: On Philosophy, Culture and Education ......................................................................................... 137

6. Delegitimating Legitimated Legitimations ......................................................... 199

References ................................................................................................................ 217

Glossary .................................................................................................................... 229
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As an educator I derive a sense of joy from my interactions with students, many of whom are always willing to question, to explore, and to challenge the many assumptions on what constitutes human nature and the purposes of education. Although most of the students have not witnessed political revolutions, they create and recreate brief utopian moments in a world in which they feel powerless and powerful at one and the same time.

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INTRODUCTION

HOW I MET MAHATMA GANDHI, MALCOLM X, NELSON MANDELA AND JURGEN HABERMAS

My encounter with the above four was partly through an attempt at learning more about what it means to be a human being in an intensely global age and environment. Like most people in the Diaspora, living far from home was an opportunity to see myself in a different light. Modern homelessness, a condition created by capitalism and urbanization, makes it easier to see what it is we call home. My first encounters with Mahatma Gandhi were at a theology class taught by Professor Don Compier at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific, in Berkeley, California. At that time, the impression I got was that Mahatma Gandhi’s doctrine of non-violence had been instrumental to formation of the non-violence espoused by Martin Luther King Jr. during the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. However, the location of Gandhian non-violence was India. It was almost ten years later that I realized Gandhi had spent close to twenty one years in South Africa, and that his experiments with truth began in that part of the world. Indeed, it can be argued that Mahatma Gandhi was South Africa’s gift to India. The Gandhi who returned to India was radically different from the Gandhi who left India for South Africa.

I gladly ascribe my limited knowledge and growing love for Malcolm X to a former student and current University of Zimbabwe professor, Ezra Chitando. When we were graduate students we watched Spike Lee’s Malcolm X together, discussed the movie over countless evenings at Domboshawa House while listening to Michael Jackson’s “Will you be there?” (There was always Mutukudzi and Mapfumo for home music). Western media and forms of entertainment had colonized us, and we participated in its colonizing effect, almost believing it offered possibilities for redemption. On very limited student income, we bought a copy of The Autobiography and read it a number of times. We began seeing Hollywood movies differently after reading The Autobiography: in most movies of that era, the stereotype of an African-American was that of a drug-dealer or criminal. Ezra pointed out that there was something wrong with such a trend: one could tell the villain by racial identification. We wondered what the stereotype of an African was to an average African American. Of course, by the time Spike Lee’s movie was released, Pan-Africanism and the connection between African Americans and Africa had waned for one reason or another, (not least of which was the example of W.E. Du Bois who had been run out of his own country on the pretext that he was a communist, according to James Baldwin). The western world and the United States’ policy of ‘Constructive Engagement’ had guaranteed the survival of apartheid (as a better alternative to communism) when the rest of the nonwestern world had begun to accept the vile nature of racism and apartheid.
When I was at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific, one of the courses I took was on the ‘Theology and Thought of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X,’ offered through the Baptist Seminary. White students generally gravitated towards Martin Luther King Jr. (My choice of white is deliberate, as the appropriate term might be Caucasian). In general, black students (again, deliberate) flocked to Malcolm X, and read more than assigned. I did not, at that time investigate or have any idea why that was the trend, and I have always viewed them (Malcolm X and Martin Luther King) as complimentary of each other. Needless to say, most of my research and conference presentations have been on Malcolm X, rather than Martin Luther King Jr. This does not in any way take away from the revolutionary and humanizing work of the great Martin Luther King Jr. It is also true there is an incredible volume of scholarship dedicated to the work of Martin Luther King Jr., and Malcolm X. Both Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr., are celebrated as insightful human beings, and the attempt to say who is better than the other reeks of the competitive nature of capitalist social relations. Celebrations of black cultural heritage that one encounters in the barbershops and community centers across the United States rarely juxtapose or contrast the two, and on occasion place them in the same frame with Mandela and Obama. In the streets and ordinary communities, Pan Africanism is still alive.

One of capitalism and colonialism’s cruel ironies is the way in which people that work to create a qualitatively better life for the suffering are murdered by the same system, and are then resurrected as saints. Revolutionaries generally become safe and acceptable after their death. That is true of Che Guevara, Malcolm X, Steve Biko, Patrice Lumumba, and, Martin Luther King Jr., among others. So even when Nelson Mandela was still regarded as a terrorist by the Western world and apartheid South Africa, many Black Africans and African Americans knew he was better than what the mainstream media and the apartheid system said (there were also anti-apartheid protest movements in the western world, and many European students expressed solidarity with the victims of apartheid while one university in England elected Mandela as president of its student union). The same is true about most of Latin America and the nonwestern world in general. He was always one of us: a real and potential victim of capitalism and racism, but also a true hero. And like us, or unlike most of us, the values that shaped and formed his worldview were life affirming and humanistic. He was (is) grounded in ubuntu, and it is from ubuntu that one has to understand the Truth and Reconciliation Process as well as the creation of a world not based on violence and crass materialism. Who is Nelson Mandela? In many respects he has come to embody some of the better traits of what humanity can be, especially with regards to forgiveness, peace, and, alternative justice. He is every victim of racism that lovingly seeks to humanize the oppressor and the oppressed. He affirms the humanity of all: he embraced and celebrated Fidel Castro way before the West ever acknowledged the sacrifices that Cuba made on behalf of the poor. Unlike many of us, he has rejected the trappings of power and wealth in favor of an alternative world. So, in writing about Mandela I seek to unearth the best in African traditions and conceptions of the good life. Although he has always been praised by many, Mandela has also been quick to
point out his own shortcomings as a human being so as to dispel any notions of perfection or perfectibility.

During my stay and travels in the West I have come across many who profess to love and like ubuntu: some claim they practice it, but would gladly throw other human beings into a shark-infested ocean for personal gain. I have often wondered whether capitalism and ubuntu can coexist or be reconciled. Or whether capitalists see every form of protest and revolution as an opportunity to make profit? At times I also wonder whether, like many in the belly of the beast, I have become a worm feeding on other worms and therefore in no position to call out the worminess of life or the putrid smells that can be easily mistaken for aromas. Like most things in social relations under capitalism, even knowledge and human beings become commodities.

It is relatively easier for those with access to wage labor to acquiesce to the status quo even under unjust social conditions. But it is also in times like these when Mahatma Gandhi, Malcolm X, and Nelson Mandela remind us of the importance of challenging the inhuman conditions that are created and sustained by capitalism. When indifference and absence of love seem to be the norm, their lives are a reminder of the creative and life affirming revolutionary sacrifice that comes from engaging the world. What becomes of the world after capitalism? Is it possible to dream of another world not modeled on exploitation, greed, and profit? The first three men I write about looked at the abyss that constitutes capitalism, saw its horrors, and dreamed of a different world in which the humanity of all can be affirmed. I also write about them as a way to share how the African worldview contributes to the discussions on how life might be lived on earth. The writings of Habermas act as a reminder of why their voices and the example of their lives matter. Any scholar interested in examining and understanding modern sociology has to understand the significance of the work of Habermas as well as the power that the western episteme holds on the production and dissemination of knowledge.

Living in the Diaspora also creates different loyalties and memories, and often times Diaspora communities appear to be nostalgic for a bygone era born of the realization that capitalism is generally insensitive to the humanity of the non-western world (and its own citizens). However, the memories are not wholly false. The section on Mandela and ubuntu reveals the extent to which African traditional cultures and thought systems have the potential to contribute to the remaking of a different world. My choice of Malcolm X, Nelson Mandela, and Mahatma Gandhi deliberately focuses on the contribution the non-Western world makes to our understanding of human nature. In most circles, Africa remains “this century’s newest and terrible dark stranger,” (Baldwin, 1993, p. 199). However, what the West viewed as The Dark Continent is in reality one of the few places with a deliberately humanizing and life-affirming worldview. I have neither the intention nor the desire to hide Africa’s shortcomings.

My reasons for embarking on this project are many and varied. However, what connects all the four people I write about are the influences of their worldviews, and their attempt to fashion an answer to what it means to be a human being. To a certain extent, the West’s acknowledgement of the influence of Black South Africa on the
work of Mahatma Gandhi coincided with end of apartheid. Yet it is unquestionable that the South African experience had a transformative experience on Gandhi, particularly his total rejection of capitalism and capitalistic social relations and all forms of violence. A significant number of western Gandhian scholars treat the South African years as marginal to his becoming Mahatma, and on the few occasions that they do, most deliberately marginalize the encounters with the South African blacks. It is as if there were no black Africans in the South Africa that Mahatma Gandhi lived and worked in. Yet in reading the autobiography of Nelson Mandela it becomes more than obvious that Mahatma Gandhi inspired the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, a struggle that was for the most part waged by South African blacks with the support of other (Indian/Jewish/European) Africans who saw the immorality of apartheid. Even Gandhi himself wrote of his experiences and encounters with Africans.

I have also spent some time teaching in colleges in the United States, primarily in the field of teacher education. For the most part, in most programs, the understandings of both cognitive and human development have been through western traditions. In spite of many of the universities and their programs claiming to strive to address ‘diverse students,’ the curriculum remains for the most part unchanged. Indeed, it is possible to go through a teacher education program without reading or studying any non-western philosophical works or theories of human and cognitive development. While this might not necessarily bother most Caucasian student-teachers and professors, non-Caucasian students find their worldviews marginalized as they undergo a process of deculturalization. A few practicing teachers know the system is not working, and go to graduate school intending to build on or find more information on non-western theories of human development and on what it means to be human. Such educators recognize that as good as capitalism or western theories of human development might be, there are other legitimate philosophies that make life equally meaningful in a different way. African, Native American, Aboriginal, Asiatic, and Islamic informed theories of what it means to be human are rarely part of the curriculum in most schools of education in the West. The production and nature of scholarship also means even colleges in the nonwestern world adopt western forms of learning. Yet it is possible to argue that Mahatma Gandhi, Malcolm X, and Nelson Mandela succeeded mostly by rejecting assimilation and finding the right balance between western and non-western worlds.

Among the many ironies of the discourse of school reform include the narrative of narrowing the achievement gap between minorities and Caucasian or white students. The implication is that if minorities learn to think like Caucasians, write like Caucasians, and speak like Caucasians they will be closer to being the desired norm. Many theories of human and cognitive development view non-whites as students with a cultural and intellectual deficiency that can be remedied only by assimilating western values and intellectual practices. What goes unsaid is the reality of many white students identifying with the angst that comes from predominantly minority cultural modes of expression or existence, be it in rap music or the need for ‘community.’ While the language of academic achievement measures intelligence only in one dimension, it generally neglects and negates cultures that offer alternative
views of intelligence or what it means to be human. Tied to the purpose of teaching or education is an implicit understanding of what we perceive the purpose of life to be. While the language might have changed over time, the general purpose of education appears to be still that of assimilating into the dominant culture without any regard for social and economic justice. To a great extent, Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, and Malcolm X at one time or another tried assimilating into the dominant cultures of the time. However, they found a sense of purpose in life mostly after rejecting the pressure to conform to the dominant culture. They all valued education, but also set their sights on what it means to be human beyond the narrow confines of the acquisitiveness associated with capitalism. For them, there was more to education than the acquisition of technical skills for an alienating career in the pursuit of commodities.

This project comes at an interesting (for lack of a better word) juncture in human history. There is a general stagnation or near total withdrawal from humanizing and humanistic revolutions, especially in the West. Many are calling for saving the environment, for going green, for animal rights, and other causes that are not immediately directed to the well being of human beings, especially the poor, and particularly those in the Southern hemisphere. The escape from humanity, from the wretched of the earth, seems to be the norm. There is, indeed, a growing skepticism regarding the role of governments and politics, of what constitutes democracy as well on who gets to say what democracy is. While saving the environment is undeniably very important (the destruction of the earth contributes to the destruction of human life and the means to sustain other forms of life), most of the world’s poorest peoples, especially in Africa, South East Asia, and Latin America, can barely afford health, clean water, education, and food. At the same time, their futures are perpetually mortgaged to give wealth and life to the West, especially through World Bank and IMF loans. In such a context, nonwestern philosophies challenge us to ask what it means to be a human being. Smith (2006) observes that in general “that paradigmatics of Western consciousness are completely self-enclosed, blind, and deaf to all voices outside of their own logics of self-understanding,” (p. 66). To a great extent, there is, in Western philosophy, a general tendency to engage in narcissistic monologue. Of course, it is possible to find a counter narrative: the generosity of the West toward victims of natural disasters, including the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, was perhaps unparalleled, although it is also true that most of the money ended up helping the nations that donated fund their personnel. This book is also a contribution as well as an attempt at constructing an intelligible foundation for nonviolent anti-capitalist and anti-narcissistic engagement with the world, an engagement that affirms the humanity of all.

PHILOSOPHY AND LIFE

The courage to do such a project, and the belief that it is viable, I owe to Randall Koetting, my mentor whom I am privileged to also call my friend. A few years ago he encouraged me to explore the use of constellations, a concept developed and used by Walter Benjamin. He also encouraged me to examine the unfamiliar as well
as to experiment with writing in the quest for a qualitatively better life. The general anti-intellectualism and absence of compassion that characterized our milieu he found unbecoming. Each generation, he argued, had to explore its philosophical questions and build a stepping block for the next. Of the many things I took from his courses include the political nature of language, education, and all forms of life. The pretense of neutrality or noninvolvement he deemed a cowardly lie.

But the constellation motif is something I also utilized in my dissertation, later published as, *Out of these ashes: The quest for utopia in critical theory, critical pedagogy, and ubuntu*. It is also from the language and practice of both critical theory and critical pedagogy that I learned to appreciate the place of philosophy and became aware of the marginalization of African philosophy in ‘major’ philosophical works. It was as if Africa did not exist at all in terms of its contributions to world wisdom. The deliberate marginalization and silencing was exacerbated by the absence of African languages in most ‘world languages’ courses and classes in Western universities. Indeed, it not only appeared as if Africa only did not have any philosophies, it had no languages of its own worth preserving and learning. (Consequently, most people’s knowledge of Africa comes from touristic escapades and voyeuristic tales from those who neither speak the language nor understand its culture). Just so it is clear to the reader, Randall Koetting is a university professor (at the time of writing this book), and his family bonds cut across many languages and cultures, and many of the students he has mentored will testify to this.

It is also from Randall Koetting that I began to appreciate the value and place of philosophical thought and its role in systematically unveiling the world. As such, the contradictions between different philosophies are based on the *contradictions* in material conditions between the West and the Rest, and the invisibility or absence of Africana philosophies reflects the marginalization of Africa in general in the age of modern globalization. In examining the thought of Mahatma Gandhi, Malcolm X, Nelson Mandela, and Jurgen Habermas, my intention is to show the many ways their philosophies were attempts at making the world rational from a perspective reflective of the African/Islamic and/or Indian/European worldview.

However, philosophical engagement with the world of ideas is not an easy task and indeed, all of philosophy requires disciplined study, including the study of language qua language. Arabic, Zulu/Xhosa, German and Hindi all have ideas which express self-consciousness about the world in ways that differ from most Western languages. *Satyagraha, ahimsa, amandla, ummah, geistege,* and *ubuntu* contain in them untapped potential for conceptualizing the human condition. However, most people unfamiliar with those words are likely to dismiss them offhand as incomprehensible babble. To do so makes it harder to realize that theories of knowledge, of how life should be lived are not necessarily confined to the Western episteme or languages. It also makes it easier to eradicate from memory and general historical knowledge the contributions of the *other*. I am inclined to agree with Lukacs (1972) that the commodity (in this case the Western episteme and capitalism) “has become universal and its structure has penetrated society in all its aspects and has remolded it in its own image, takes on an autonomy that seems so rational and all embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature, the relation
between people,” (p. 37). For most academics the English language remains the language for describing the world and its peoples, even the non-English world.

Habermas (2003) argues that one of the purposes of philosophy is to “clarify the moral point of view from which we judge norms and actions whenever we must determine what lies in the equal interest of everyone,” (p. 3).

In examining the work of Nelson Mandela, Malcolm X, Jurgen Habermas and Mahatma Gandhi, part of my intention is to unearth what they saw as contributing to the best way life can be lived. Granted that most people in the West believe we live at an age when to speak of the common good is a fallacy, it is relatively easier for philosophy and philosophers to abdicate their roles, and for philosophy to cease its duty of examining the nature of life. At times Habermas appears to have conceded to the view that philosophy has been reduced to an academic discipline with little bearing on life, for he writes that “with regard to the questions that have the greatest relevance for us, philosophy retires to the metalevel and investigates only the formal properties of protest and self understanding without taking a position on the contents themselves,” (p. 4). To a certain extent I agree. However, every philosopher passes a judgment on certain philosophies by choosing what to write on, or what to ignore. No philosophy espouses perpetual indifference or living in limbo. Even Waiting for Goddott expresses the despair of living in an indefinite void. For the people I write about in this book, philosophy was not just an academic or intellectual exercise, but an integral part of their being as individuals, as well as in the communities they intentionally formed. They embodied the knowledge systems and beliefs that informed their worldviews and the worlds they sought to create. As such, I invite the reader to think about the purposes of philosophy, and whether philosophies still have a role to play in the current milieu.

Ultimately, philosophy also concerns itself with an attempt at clarifying and defining what constitutes the best in human nature. In her introduction to Philosophy in a time of terror, Giovanna Borradori (2003) writes that one of the issues philosophy addresses is “what does it mean to be a human being? Most people would assume that it is a self-evident designation: a human being is a member of the human species,” (p. 11). Implied here is a relationship between the individual and the community, in other words, our humanity can only be fulfilled in the context of the others. The identity of the others always has a bearing on the nature of human relations. Borradori goes on to ask “how do we demarcate human behavior? We cannot even begin to approach this question without referring to the notion of human nature, its humanity or inhumanity,” (p. 12). In various historical junctures, as human beings we seek to understand who we are and who we can become. Olivia Sasaki points out the differences between the scientific and cultural definitions of human nature, (personal communication, April 12, 2010). For Habermas (2003) even the introduction of genetic engineering at the beginning of the 21st century was reason enough to pause and debate The future of human nature. Because of the challenges resulting from genetic engineering, Habermas took the view that philosophers could no longer afford to sit by while leaving the issues related to humankind exclusively in the hands of scientists and capitalists. How do we as a human species define ourselves in relation to capitalism?
I view ubuntu and satyagraha as philosophies with practical consequences, as philosophies that are concerned with life and the common good in a way that differs from western philosophy. Habermas (2003) notes that, “Since Kant and Kierkegaard, the modern versions of ethics have ceased to articulate publicly recognized models of exemplary life,” (p. 280). As such, there is a tacit acknowledgement that there is little of substance that capitalism or western philosophy can offer as a guiding principle on how a just life can be lived. However, ubuntu and satyagraha reveal themselves as philosophies with a practical guide with regards to human relations.

One of Habermas’ regrets with regards to western philosophy is that it lacks “a perspective that would imbue its statements with the power to give direction to a people’s lives,” (p. 283). As such, even with the seeming triumph of capitalism, there is still an urgent need to fashion a world in which cultures and peoples can dialogue and coexist peacefully. More often than not, the language and life practices of the west have been that of competition and domination rather than dialogue.

By focusing on ubuntu, satyagraha, critical theory (communicative action), and Islam, the reader might get the impression that I am excluding western philosophy or putting down western philosophy per se. Such a thing is practically impossible: I am writing in a European language, and, as Baldwin (1993) contends, the peoples of the Third World cannot escape the reaches of capitalism or the Western world. Although apartheid and capitalism are designed to marginalize and exclude, those it is designed to marginalize and exclude always find themselves caught in its lifeworld and other mechanisms of control and conquest. In a similar vein, it is possible to view this as a work that confirms the sexism and masculine domination that are typical of the cultures represented here. Nothing could be further and farther from the truth than such an observation. Malcolm X often stated that the measure or quality of any civilization could be ascertained by the way it treated its women, and this view of the relationship between the sexes in Islam is echoed by Abu-Lughod, (1993). Nelson Mandela is among the first to make it clear that African traditional societies are patrilineal not patriarchal, and that patriarchy is a byproduct of the encounter with capitalism and modernity. Mahatma Gandhi saw women as the embodiment of the highest good- ahimsa. All three saw the freedom of women as part of the struggle against capitalism. Habermas frequently offers a different perspective. Indeed, the impression is that Mahatma Gandhi, Malcolm X, and Nelson Mandela had a very inclusive view of humanity and spoke a language of love and peace. Again, Habermas reads differently or gives a unique view of the nature of the human community.

In many respects all four people I write about in this book were/are involved in the production of philosophies and theories of how life could be lived. Each chapter and each philosophy is more than just a simple rendition of the mundane: rather, each is an invitation to enter into a different world, or to participate in the creation of another world. An argument could be easily made that philosophy and theory reflect the extent to which the life of the mind is connected to phenomena, no matter how abstract the language might initially appear to be.

When I studied critical theory and critical pedagogy, a few of my classmates believed that the language was inaccessible, oblique, and elitist. This became an
easy mechanism for disengaging the readings, the excuse being that it was not everyday language. (Randall Koetting always found ways to help us engage the texts and see language as a tool for reading and creating another world). Africana philosophy, Hindi world views, and Islam are not what most people in the dominant group (Western society) talk about in their everyday lives. However, the language of Nelson Mandela, around which I discuss ubuntu, is that of an African peasant (he was also a lawyer), and as such, its richness and simplicity should be within the grasp of many. As most readers might already know, Malcolm X dropped out of high school and educated himself while in prison, (and after prison). When Mahatma Gandhi was searching for words to describe the nature of the movement he was leading in South Africa, he came up with the words satyagraha and ahimsa, words that came from everyday practices in Indian culture. The privileged have an option to ignore such worldviews. However, those without privilege and power have little options in the onslaught of the juggernaut of capitalism and civilization.

Jurgern Habermas, on the other hand, could be arguably one of the most prolific scholars or western philosophers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, at the same time, his language is often regarded as complex.

To better understand the concept of human nature in each of the figures, I invite the reader to think of utilizing the idea of a constellation. The use of constellation makes it possible to examine the similarities and differences in the works of Mahatma Gandhi, Malcolm X, and Nelson Mandela. They came from different parts of the world, were influenced by different religions, and had markedly different experiences. But all three rejected the exploitative and dehumanizing nature of capitalism. Throughout this book I will highlight some of the issues that make it possible to show similarities among the three. Constellations make it possible to see continuities and discontinuities among the four, and for the writer/reader to engage in hermeneutics as they critique and reconfigure both culture and life. The systematic unveiling of each tradition should also allow for a counter-veiling of capitalism and narcissism. In other words, as the reader gets to know more about ubuntu, Islam, and Gandhian non-violence, they will get to know more about the nature of capitalism. My intention is not to compare, to say which is better or worse. Rather, I hope to facilitate a dialogue in which non western philosophies can be part of common intellectual discourse and universe. While there might be no grand narrative at all, what I show is that anti-capitalism and anti-narcissism as they emerge in the work of Mahatma Gandhi, Malcolm X, and Nelson Mandela are “the constituent and constituted reason of practical multiplicities,” (Sartre, 2004, p. 69). As such, there is evidence that capitalism is unique to Western civilizations. In addition to allowing for the interpenetration of opposites, constellations make it possible to “rewrite the problems of a philosophy of history at a level of philosophical abstraction” that is uniquely Marxian, (p. xv).

That I was able to meet Mahatma Gandhi, Malcolm X, and Nelson Mandela, I also owe ultimately to my family in Zimbabwe that sacrificed so much to make it possible for me to attend formal schools. It is from the rural people, landless peasants, and those in the garbage bins of history that I first learned what it means to be a human being, to be part of the human family. Those familiar with ubuntu
INTRODUCTION

will undoubtedly know that the concept of the nuclear family as the definitive embodiment of family is a capitalist illusion and pathology that reifies the atomization of all forms of human life. However, my parents, sisters, brothers, extended family and the villagers all helped with my getting a formal education which, more often than not, was a continuous initiation into an alien culture. They helped me stay grounded and rooted in life affirming traditions that included expressions of both Christianity and African worldviews. It is also from the context of rural Africa that I was able to learn and be fluent in many languages. Most people in sub-Saharan Africa are/were multilingual, and it was more of the norm rather than the exception to switch languages in the middle of conversations. It was also while in Africa that I began reflecting on the many changes that modernity and urbanization brought with them.

To a great extent, it was my upbringing in rural Africa that helped prepare me for a multicultural world. My parents were from different tribes, and their love for each other and our neighbors knew no limits. To my knowledge, they celebrated the humanity of all within their world. They were peasants, but they also shared and gave. We were and still are materially poor, but wealth was not the determining factor in what constituted human nature. Partly because of the example of my parents, my brothers and sisters were able to navigate and appreciate different worlds, religions, and peoples. We knew there are many tribes, but we refused to practice tribalism. In general, I prefer to refer to Africa rather than the many countries that make up Africa. The reasons are ideological and historical: the current boundaries and nation states are largely a byproduct of European conquests and the Berlin Conference’s partitioning of Africa. Bantu cultures and ubuntu cut across national boundaries and reveal more commonalities than an outsider might notice. In addition, others like Armah (1980) have always operated within a Pan-African worldview.

Mandela, Malcolm X, and Mahatma Gandhi wrote autobiographical works. This is significant in many respects, but mostly because their voices are not strongly filtered by cultural interlopers from Western cultures who hardly spoke or understood Indian languages (in the case of Mahatma Gandhi), Zulu/Xhosa (in the case of Nelson Mandela) or the African American experience and Islam (in the case of Malcolm X). My point here is that language is an integral part of understanding both culture and philosophy. For example, even when Gandhi was in South Africa, he had to look for Hindi words to describe nonviolence. Other languages were at his disposal, including English, Afrikaans, Zulu, Xhosa, etc. Likewise, when South Africans had to help the rest of the world understand the Truth and Reconciliation Process they resorted to a word from Bantu languages and came up with ubuntu.

Because of an intimate knowledge of the languages that shape cultural values, the autobiographies capture the essence of the person in a different way than an anthropologist dependent on an interpreter would. More often than not, an anthropologist trained in a western framework looks for what is familiar and conforms to the western mindset. This is more so in the case of Africa were the voice of the indigenous peoples was suppressed or the foreigner took it upon himself/herself to speak for the same people whose voices and languages have been silenced. Bernstein (2002), for example, questions whether South Africa could be anything

xx
more than a willing dumping ground for the West, and whether South African blacks can aspire to anything more than being like African-American gangsters. (She seems to deliberately ignore the poverty that is the norm for the vast majority of black people in the United States, or she is unaware of its existence). For her, none of the traditional African cultures and values can offer, or are willing to offer any resistance to capitalism and globalization. An implied moral superiority of the West over and against African indigenous cultures is also assumed because of “a belief in the ethical bases of Western culture,” (p. 207). Mahatma Gandhi, Malcolm X, and Nelson Mandela all pointed out the moral bankruptcy on which western civilization is built. Indeed, from Conrad (and before) to the Frankfurt School, the myth of the Enlightenment had been shredded and the white man’s burden revealed to be a self-induced grand delusion that had been used to justify the rape and pillaging of the non-western world. Humanism and capitalism were mutually incompatible, and this is the strand that is reflected in Gandhi, Malcolm X, and Nelson Mandela. Their autobiographies make this explicit, as do the philosophies and worldviews they espouse. I am not arguing that Westerners cannot or should not (pretend) to be experts in the non-Western world. After all, Joe Slovo, Ruth First, and countless other South African Jews sacrificed their lives for the freedom of all South Africans, and many Westerners were in solidarity with the anti-apartheid movement. My point is that without dying to whiteness or Eurocentrism, without learning the languages and cultures of non-whites, it is almost impossible to critique the racism and whiteness from which whites benefit so much, and which some nonwhites are trying to become part of. The Eurocentric lens has contributed and continues to contribute to the transformation of the universal moral universe, and the more converts there are from the previously excluded peoples, the more the justification there is for its reproduction and imposition in other parts of the world. A reading of the autobiography of Nelson Mandela, for example, makes it apparent that black (Southern) African societies are patrilineal rather than patriarchal, that tribes have been part of the national fabric but that tribalism is a byproduct of capitalism and colonialism.

Mahatma Gandhi, Malcolm X, and Nelson Mandela share more than a rejection of capitalism. As a temporary and relatively insignificant/significant aside, all spent a significant time in prison but for a variety of reasons. Mahatma Gandhi’s prison experience was in South Africa in the struggle for the rights for South African Indians. For Malcolm X, prison was part of the conditions that capitalism demanded and produced, particularly for African Americans. However, it was also in prison that Malcolm X taught himself to read and write, and converted to Islam. The prison experience did to him what the education system and the Christian church could not. (This is in no way a defense of the criminal industrial prison complex wherever it exists). Nelson Mandela remains one of the world’s most celebrated former prisoners, largely because he was imprisoned for his opposition to apartheid. I am not aware of any prison experience in the life of Jurgen Habermas.

Other than the prison experiences, Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi were lawyers, while Malcolm X’s dreams for being a lawyer were dealt a deathblow by his middle school teacher who told him that the legal profession was not ideal for
INTRODUCTION

a black boy in the United States. Needless to say, Malcolm X never became the legal practitioner he had envisioned. Yet as a judge of the immorality of capitalism and racism, and as an advocate of Pan-Africanism, pan-ethnicity, and global human rights, few people equal Malcolm X. I would argue that initially for Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela, the legal profession was an entry into the best of capitalism, and few would doubt that apartheid is at the apex of capitalism. It was while at the gates of a pimp’s paradise that both realized the perils that come with mortgaging their consciences to capitalism. Mandela took up weapons against apartheid and became commander of the armed wing of the ANC; Mahatma Gandhi began his experiments with truth, and Malcolm X launched a new version of the struggle for the rights of African-Americans, one that was explicitly anti-capitalist and decidedly rooted in an Afrocentric internationalist worldview. Their rejections of capitalism need not be taken to imply they had a limited worldview at all. They all traveled beyond their countries of birth, engaged different religious and political worldviews, read Western, Eastern, and other worlds’ political systems. Habermas, however, largely operated within the orbit and horizon of the West.

In this book I tread a very thin and invisible line between critical theory (Marxism) and ubuntu as philosophical approaches to understanding the subject under discussion. According to Sartre, Marxism (or historical materialism) “is, at one and the same time the only truth of History and a total indetermination of the Truth,” (2004, p. 19). In other words, Marxism or critical theory allows for continuous self-reflexivity without claiming to be the undeniable and sole version of truth. Because it “presents itself to us…as an unveiling of being,” (p. 19) it makes it an ideal philosophical approach for examining the relationship between the individual and public culture, and what motivates individuals to choose to act in certain ways. Ubuntu is primarily about relationships, how people relate to each other, and to the world around them. It closely resembles critical theory by being interdisciplinary and concerned with human emancipation.

CAPITALISM AND RACISM

In one of the most poignant messages in Heart of Darkness the narrator observes that the engine that drives capitalism is the taking away of land from people with slightly flatter noses. As such, it is almost impossible to separate capitalism from racism. In this book I theorize the relationship between the two and argue that a defense of capitalism is also a defense of racism, that pledging to end or fighting racism while keeping capitalism intact is a contradiction. It is also in this context that I try to distinguish between white and Caucasian. My criticism of capitalism is no different from that of the Frankfurt School, Freire, and others who have seen in its singular logic, deception and destruction. In addition, for me the important thing is a peaceful cultural revolution in which the humanity of all is affirmed. Violence, in any of its forms, does not solve any of the problems created by an unjust system. Indeed, other than for the time when he was commander-in-chief of uMkhonto we Sizwe, all the people I write about rejected the use of violence to attain political goals. However, most of my insights on the nature of whiteness in relation to capitalism
come from whiteness studies, Nelson Mandela, Malcolm X, and the discipline of
critical pedagogy including the works of Franz Fanon and Peter McLaren. Habermas’s
works are also very informative with regard to the west’s self-understanding
pertaining to capitalism and racism.

The critique of capitalism and racism is not unique to the four traditions I write
about in this book. Perhaps one of the most scathing critiques of capitalism comes
from the second generation of the Frankfurt School in the discipline of critical
type, particularly in the work of Walter Benjamin, Adorno, and Hebert Marcuse.
Dialectic of Enlightenment, in many respects, chronicles the pathologies of capitalism
and western civilization from its infancy, culminating in the disasters of the Second
World War. In a similar vein, critical pedagogy and ubuntu both view capitalism
and racism as detrimental to the wellbeing of the majority of the world’s peoples,
including those in the West. It is possible to argue that the Islam in the work of
Malcolm X, especially after his conversion to orthodox Islam, encouraged a peaceful
transformation of human conditions for all people, not just African Americans. To
critique racism and capitalism does not imply or mean that one is anti-western or
anti-American. Martin Luther King Jr., remains one of the most vocal critics of
racism, and he is also one of the most celebrated figures in modern history. The
critique of capitalism is borne of the realization that it is an ideology that does
not affirm the humanity of any, whether its victims or perpetrators.

In most of the courses I teach at university level, I generally ask students to
identify themselves. Sometimes I will ask them to define their own understanding
of humanity, or what it means to be human. Often times, they will find a way to
avoid or evade the need to give their own definition of what it means to be a human
being. When it comes to racial identity though, many are quick to identify themselves
as white. I usually follow up and ask the question, ‘what does it mean to be white?’
I ask the same question to those who identify themselves differently. After a few
more questions and gentle prodding, most students begin talking about the countries
where their parents or grandparents came from. For the most part, it is from the
Caucasus region, and they describe their parents or grandparents not by racial
terms (white), but by nationality, be it Italian, German, French, etc. Malcolm X’s
observation that whiteness is directly related to racism and capitalism become
all the more apparent.

According to McLaren (2000) “whiteness is linked to the expansion of capitalism
in the sense that whiteness signifies the production of consumption under capitalism,”
(p. 277). Consequently, whiteness and capitalism, or capitalism and racism always
go together. Many scholars have argued that racism can only be associated with
economic power, hence the near impossibility of black or non-white racism on a
global or even local level. At the heart of whiteness, so McLaren contends, “is the
absence of culture. It is the empty and therefore terrifying attempt to build an
identity based on what one isn’t,” (p. 270). It is on this basis that I distinguish
between white/whiteness and Caucasian in my writings. Whiteness is based on a
conscious decision to join the dominant group, to have access to the material
comforts generally reserved for the Anglos, or the upper class Anglos. Because of
the undeniable and indissoluble nature of the bond between capitalism and racism,
McLaren contends that “to abolish racism, we need to abolish global capitalism,” (p. 275).

The link between racism and capitalism is also apparent in the lives and works of Mahatma Gandhi, Malcolm X, and Nelson Mandela. Before beginning his experiments with truth, Mahatma was beholden to capitalism, and went to South Africa in search of both fame and fortune in the legal profession. Phoenix and Tolstoy Farms, as well as the growing appreciation of the spinning wheel were a response to the devastating effect of capitalism on the human soul. McLaren (2000) observes that “capitalism’s constantly changing demands for different kinds of labor can only be met through immigration,” (p. 275). Nothing demonstrates this more than the relocation of Indians to South Africa to work in sugar plantations, or in the case of Malcolm X, the whole nature of slavery and the importation and sale of Blacks. Indeed, capitalism and racism make a mockery of any pretences of nationalism: workers have to move to where the jobs are while peasants and indigenous peoples find themselves landless in their own countries. Callinicos (1993) associates racism with industrial societies. In this book I conflate capitalism with racism, patriarchy, and imperialism.

Granted the symbiotic relationship between capitalism and racism, it seems to me that the best corrective to such a philosophy and way of life might come from traditions and ways of life that offer alternative worldviews. My intention, again, is not to offer non-western traditions as better than the western/capitalistic view. Rather, it is to show the ways in which nonwestern traditions are differently humanistic and inclusive when compared with capitalism. There are countless ways in which westerners themselves have resisted capitalism, including the traditions of western socialism and communism. Some versions of feminism are decidedly anti-racist.

One of the ways that capitalism and racism used to overcome non-whites was a ‘divide and rule’ practice whereby minorities were encouraged to recognize and affirm their differences while whites created and sustained a mythical common history and identity. However, this book offers a way for African, Islamic, European, and Asiatic cultures to engage in a dialogue in the context of global cultures of peace without rejecting or denying the value of other cultures, including so-called western cultures. Sometimes when Africans, Asiatics, African Americans, and Indians meet, it is under conditions that do not necessarily affirm the humanity of the other.

Needless to say, for a select few, capitalism represents the climax and triumph of civilization, particularly Western civilization or capitalism, (Fukuyama, 1992). According to Fukuyama, the collapse of the Soviet Union following glasnost was evidence of the superiority of capitalism over any and all other forms and philosophies of life. Following that logic, the capitulation of the enemy can be taken to imply that the causes for which capitalism stands are righteous and just. However, according to Smith (2006) capitalism introduces “a radical commercialization of human values on a global scale,” (p. 26). Human value and human worth are dictated by the laws of the market. When this happens, “the labor power of aggrieved groups is being subsumed into an abstract calculus and value form that reduces them into inhuman instruments in the process of capital accumulation,” (McLaren, 2007. p. 64). Granted
such inherent pathologies in capitalism, to what extent should humankind look to
capitalism for redemption or redemptive values?
The critique and rejection of capitalism can be easily interpreted as critique and
rejection of westernization and western civilization. Under such circumstances, it
is not the destruction of the west or of western civilization that is called for, but
the oppressive systems that make it impossible for the world’s poor to live decent
and meaningful lives. In general, critiques of capitalism have never called for
armed military insurrections. All the people I write about in this book believed and
practiced the philosophy of nonviolence with regard to transforming capitalist
social and economic relations. For Gandhi, Mandela, and Malcolm X, war could
never be the answer to any of the problems caused by capitalism. On countless
occasions, Malcolm X was accused of being anti-American because of his critique
of capitalism, while Gandhi was accused of being anti-British. Time and again,
they refuted the charges and highlighted the fact that their struggle was motivated
by creating a world in which the humanity of all could be affirmed. Like them and
most of their admirers, I believe in nonviolence.
As it currently exists, it is also possible to argue that both capitalism and racism
need violence, war, and hatred to effectively function. In other words, without war
and hate, it is difficult for capitalism and racism to thrive. This is evident again in
the nature of apartheid and the mechanisms that were put in place to keep apartheid
alive. However, this is also true within the context of the Western world, particularly
in most developed countries, whose arms industry not only keeps the economy
going, but guarantees the need to manufacture wars and export death. The culture
of violence and racism is the norm. McLaren contends that capitalism is founded
on “violence, slavery, and genocide,” (2007, p. 6). These are issues that most citizens
of the western world are generally not comfortable talking about, or exploring ways
of resolving them. When President Obama won the elections on a message of hope
and peace, gun sales skyrocketed even though the country was in a recession. When
he promised diplomacy and engagement with the Islamic world, sections of the
United States population saw that as a weakness. When he was awarded the Nobel
Prize for Peace, the rest of the world in general celebrated. Most of his fellow
citizens were dismayed. The message of peace is not always congruous with
capitalism. Excepting when it is from the victims of capitalism and imperialism:
both Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela are applauded by the West for not taking
up arms against the British/West, (even though Mandela did take up arms and
resorted to revolutionary violence). In almost all circumstances, racism works as an
ideology or theory for excluding non-whites by creating an illusion of white
supremacy so as to withhold rights and opportunities that whites take for granted.
It is possible to argue that apartheid represents the best of both capitalism and
racism, or what they look like when they have perfected themselves.

WRITING, LANGUAGE, AND LOCATION
Many writers from Africa struggle with what language to write in, mainly because
writing is both a political and cultural question. For African writers in the Diaspora,
this is compounded by multiple loyalties and conflicts, to the home nation/motherland, and to their homes in exile. In most circumstances, European languages are languages of conquest and domination with regards to Africa and the nonwestern world. I delude myself with a comforting lie, that by writing in English I reach a broader audience, while in reality I contribute to the hegemony of that language. Gandhi, Malcolm X, Mandela, and Habermas were multilingual. Members of the Frankfurt School generally wrote in German, and their works were translated into various languages, including English. The same can be said of French philosophers, including Sartre. In general, most philosophies are articulated in the languages of those cultures. For the moment, however, I write in English. Here and there, I will use words from Zulu/Xhosa/Hindi/Arabic and a few other languages. I have native fluency in Ndebele, Zulu and Xhosa, but for Hindi and Arabic I am dependent on translations. Through circumstances that I will not write about here, I have been fortunate to have Indians and Muslims as part of my family and neighbors. I also spent many years studying Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and African Traditional Religions. In using words from other languages besides English, my intention is not to confuse the reader, but rather to invite them to explore other worlds, other universes.

James Baldwin likens the task of writing for multiple audiences to that of being caught in a perpetual twilight, especially with reference to black writers writing with white audiences in mind. Baldwin notes that with regard to black writers, “the higher he rises, the less is his journey worth, since all he can possibly find himself exposed to is the grim emptiness of the white world…and the even more ghastly emptiness of black people who wish they were white,” (1993, p. 205). While this might be the case, I believe it (writing in English) is also one of the few ways that imperfect but genuine dialogue can take place. Without such an encounter, human transformation will likely remain elusive. In any case, whatever language I choose, I am a traitor to one cause or another. So, perhaps by writing in English I contribute to my own death while hoping that these self-inflicted lacerations are a form of acupuncture. It is a painful but conscious decision, and often I have to be cognizant of the fact that I am writing to multiple audiences. Yet, as Wolfenstein, (1993) observes, “in the absence of challenges to linguistic hegemony, indeed, language is white. If you do not speak white you will not be heard, just as if you do not look white you won’t be seen,” (p. 331).

A number of African intellectuals have also struggled over the question and politics of language, and perhaps the greatest champion for using African languages remains Ngugi Wa Thiongo, (2003). It is difficult to argue against the logic that is espoused by Ngugi Wa Thiongo, for it is the language and logic of self-love and self-preservation. Language is, indeed, related to culture, life, and philosophy. Nelson Mandela, on whom I base the subject of ubuntu, grew up speaking mainly Xhosa and other South African languages. However, most of the volumes written about him make little reference to any of the words and languages that shaped his world. The same might be argued about Mahatma Gandhi. In the end, Mahatma Gandhi depended mostly on Indian languages, words and culture to define himself and the vision he had for India and humankind. Most readers of Malcolm X will agree that he spent a significant part of his post-conversion days trying to
rediscover the roots and culture that had been stolen from African Americans. He studied languages including Arabic and Swahili. One of the immediate byproducts of the Civil Rights Movement within the United States was a cultural revival and a desire to reconnect with Africa. Sometimes I meet African Americans who have taken up names of African origin, including such names as Biko, Thandi, Ngozi, etc. Others celebrate or recreate African themed festivals, like Kwanzaa. The language question is always there, even if unspoken.

With regard to African languages, Ngugi Wa Thiongo (2003) further notes that “Africa’s global visibility through European languages has meant Africa’s invisibility in African languages,” (p. 160). I, too, would like to contribute to Africa’s visibility, and in particular with reference to depictions of what it means to live a socially just life. In this book I might not use as many African words as should or could be used. However, I view this research as part of an imperfect commitment to Africa and an inaudible whisper to fellow human beings. I am also aware that the next generation of Africans will most likely know less about Africa than I do, and I know less than the previous generation. With loss of language usage and familiarity with language also comes a loss of culture and wisdom. Ngugi Wa Thiongo observes that “each language, no matter how small, carries its memory of the world,” (p. 158). Smith, (2006) observes that most of the information on Africa is stored in Western data banks, something that also leads to the changes in language.

Is it possible to capture African, Indian, and Islamic concepts using European languages? Irele (1980) observes that with regards to most non-western countries “in general, English remains divorced from the true centers of local life and expression,” (p. 49). It is also generally true that for the most part in Africa, English remains a language for the office or work environment, and is discarded as soon as the work hours are over. When I am at home or with family and friends we speak in African languages, and often times the use of English can be easily viewed as sign of disrespect. When we are being truly ourselves we rarely use the English language. Thus, ubuntu is rooted in the experiences and languages of black Africans from which most whites have barricaded themselves through hesitancy to learning African languages or unwillingness to live among black Africans. Ndebele (1994) notes that within the context of South Africa:

Blacks were so largely untouched by much of the discourse of western political philosophy that, even at the popular levels, buzzwords and expressions such as human rights, human dignity, and other standardized elements of political vocabulary have not been absorbed to the extent that they would figure prominently in the subjective expressions of political language, (p. 106).

Apartheid/racism/capitalism made it impossible for languages to be in communion, just as it made it impossible for people from different racial groups to live together. However, it is more likely that many Black Africans speak, write, and read English and other European languages than there are Europeans who speak, write, and read African languages. Regardless of the familiarity and usage of European languages, Irele (1980) writes that “none of the European languages can be said, outside of a few circles, to carry fully with it the reality of African experience as it exists,”
INTRODUCTION

(p. 44). As such, on the few occasions that I use words that are from languages other than English, it is because they capture best the ideas I intend to convey. Fontana, (2006) observes that “since language is intimately related to the development and proliferation of opposing conceptions of the world and of differing structures of knowledge, the nature and type of languages are crucial to hegemony; language and knowledge mutually presuppose each other,” (p. 42). It could be easily argued that ignorance of particular languages is related to ignorance or absence of knowledge related to those said cultures. Mandela goes further and notes that:

Without language, one cannot talk to people and understand them; one cannot share their hopes and aspirations, grasp their history, appreciate their poetry, or savor their songs. I again realized that we were not different people with separate languages; we were one people, with different tongues, (1994, p. 84).

Again, one cannot understate the importance of multilingual competence in a global and globalizing world. Indeed, words and language are the tools we use to create, defend, and debunk the philosophies we create in the attempt to legitimate different worldviews.

I am writing this book while in the United States, where relatively speaking, language and culture wars are part of everyday life, of survival, death, rebirth, and, excommunication. Some Americans believe their country is indeed, one of the best countries on earth. There are, or were, battles over Ebonics, over having the national anthem translated into Spanish, over which communities are better than others. There was a time when the “English Only” movement held a lot of political power such that it affected the nature of education and the curriculum in general. But I also witness the evisceration and near complete disappearance of the many Native American languages and cultures even when there is a tacit acknowledgement of the value of Native American ways of being as well as attitudes towards human nature and nurture. The sad irony though, is that people who neither speak nor understand Native American languages and cultures take it upon themselves to visit Native American reservations to teach Native Americans what it means to be Native American. As Ngugi Wa Thiongo writes, “somewhere along the line, the original text, in the original language, is lost forever. In this curious reversal, what the outsider now says of place, his memory of place, becomes the primary source of subsequent additions of knowledge, of place, even by the nationals,” (2003, p. 159). Consequently I anticipate there will soon be experts on ubuntu who neither speak nor understand any of the Bantu languages, and that these experts will be conducting courses and classes to a bemused audience that could easily be the embodiment of ubuntu. In a similar manner, there will be experts on peace and nonviolence from a people who embody, manufacture, and export violence (for a fee, of course). The merchants of death will be speaking the language of life. Indeed, casinos have hotlines for helping those addicted to gambling. The commodification and commoditization of knowledge reveals that, when all is said and done, most traditional intellectuals are people of the night. However, there are many people of good will who find themselves caught in the contradictions of living in some of the most advanced capitalist countries in the world.

xxviii
While the choice of writing in English was not necessarily an easy one, at the moment most of the volumes on Malcolm X are in English and the same is true for works on Nelson Mandela, Jurgen Habermas, and Mahatma Gandhi. At the same time, it is true that I am partly a product of the encounter with modernity. However, I am multilingual, and generally enjoy the challenges that come with learning other languages. It is also true that both Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi are/were multilingual, and there is ample evidence that suggests that Malcolm X loved other languages and cultures. I would argue that in choosing to write in English I am most likely losing an opportunity to dialogue with the majority of those in Africa for whom English remains the language of the foreigner. I straddle multiple worlds, but many before me have had to wear masks or operate with a double or triple consciousness.

Many who do not speak Bantu languages, Hindi, or Arabic will no doubt ask for definitions of some of the terms or words I use. What is ubuntu, for example? A number of scholars have likened it to Marxism, but ubuntu predates orthodox Marxism. However, it shares with Marxism a critique and rejection of capitalism and general exploitation of human beings by other human beings, (McLaren, 2007, Mandela 2003). It is the antithesis of capitalism, and there are not many English words that can adequately capture it. But just because there might not be many English words that describe it should not be taken to mean it does not exist. There is a glossary of terms that helps the reader understand unfamiliar terms.

At the present moment, the United States is perhaps the only remaining superpower in the world. Militarily, at least. But the election of Hawaiian born President Obama has also changed, to some extent, knowledge and perceptions of Africa- (his father was an African). It definitely has changed perceptions of the United States by the outside world, as evidenced by his being awarded the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize. However, writing from the context of the United States necessarily changes the nature and quality of my writing. The nation’s impact on capitalism, violence, and race relations locally and globally color how I view the nature of humanity as well as my interpretation of capitalism in relation to ubuntu, Islam, and Gandhian nonviolence. Indeed, what might appear to be the dawn of a new age might be the endless dusk of the passing one in which death and birth have become interchangeable. Since the United States is the dominant superpower, (some argue that it is in decline), to a certain extent, I can be blind and deaf to the shortcomings and advantages of capitalism from close range. In the western world in general, the importation and exportation of labor (meaning human beings) reveals the darker side of racism and capitalism as evidenced by battles over immigration and travel arrangements between the Anglo and non-Anglo worlds, a system reminiscent to that which took Mahatma Gandhi to South Africa or led Idi Amin to throw out Indians from Uganda. As with the case of apartheid South Africa, some human beings will have to carry the equivalent of passes with them all the time. Indeed, the “soil on which democracy is cultivated is the dung heap of capitalism’s valorization process,” (McLaren, 2007, p. 63). But battles over immigration are also present in most western or capitalist countries.
INTRODUCTION

MAHATMA, MALCOLM, NELSON, AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

The irony of using autobiographical works in the context of anti-narcissism is almost apparent, since the autobiography is not only a typically western or European narrative, but is almost always geared towards the glorification of the self, of inserting the self as the subject of history. Parekh (1986) observes that the autobiography functions in a different way in the work of Gandhi. While it is possible that Gandhi also affirms the uniqueness of the individual, a concept not common in Hindu tradition, according to Parekh, the appropriate word, is *atmakatha*, which relates to the soul, rather than the physical human being. In addition, the focus is not on Gandhi himself, but rather, the experiments with truths, or the quest for perfection. In a similar fashion, Nelson Mandela places his autobiography in the context of the national struggle for freedom in South Africa. The liberation of the country takes precedence over that of the Nelson Mandela himself. Malcolm X was the embodiment of the Black experience in the United States, according to Ossie Davis (1999).

Although I am aware that Eisenstein (2007) observes that the Black American, African, Indian, and Islamic worlds offer unique conceptions of human relations, I am not cognizant of many texts devoted to the study of Gandhian thought, Malcolm X (Islam), Habermas (Critical Theory) and (Nelson Mandela) ubuntu, all in one volume. A significant part of my analysis of their work and views will come from the autobiographies they wrote. I am not aware of any documented historical meeting involving the four, or any two, for that matter. However, Malcolm X (1992) was aware of the Rivonia Trials and of Nelson Mandela’s renunciation of nonviolence when nonviolence had not succeeded in ending apartheid. On frequent occasions, Malcolm X also compared the racism in South Africa with that obtaining in the United States. While Malcolm X did not always agree with the Gandhian philosophy of nonviolence, his economic philosophy of black nationalism that bordered on socialism closely resembled that of Mahatma Gandhi with its emphasis on local production and consumption (swadeshi). Habermas rarely, if ever, mentions Malcolm X, Mahatma Gandhi, or Nelson Mandela.

I begin with Mahatma Gandhi, followed by Malcolm X (although Nelson Mandela is biologically older than Malcolm X), and conclude with Nelson Mandela and Jurgen Harbemas. In Spike Lee’s *Malcolm X*, Nelson Mandela makes a cameo appearance as himself, and proclaims to be Malcolm X. In some of his speeches, Nelson Mandela acknowledges the inspiration he drew from both Mahatma Gandhi and Malcolm X. Mahatma Gandhi made many comments and observations on the problems that African Americans faced, and the role of nonviolence in ending racism in the United States. Many readers will no doubt be aware of the association between the nonviolence espoused by Martin Luther King Jr., and its relationship to that of Mahatma Gandhi, as well as Malcolm X’s critique of nonviolence.

Sartre, contends that “the aim of critical investigation is to establish a structural and historical anthropology…the intelligibility of Sociological…and Historical knowledge,” (2004, p. 68). Part of this involves an attempt at explaining why historical events take certain directions. The autobiographical works of Mahatma Gandhi, Malcolm X, and Nelson Mandela provide a rich source of material for understanding their critique and rejection of both capitalism and racism. While the
logic of capitalism might give the impression that greed, violence, and racism are natural, the examples of Gandhi, Malcolm X, and Nelson Mandela reveal that humankind is not predisposed to exploit the other for the sake of material comfort. While it might be possible to critique my selecting only four people (all of them male) to be representative of different historical and sociological knowledge, I believe, with Sartre, that “within a totality, each partial totality, as a determination of the whole, contains the whole in its fundamental meaning.” (p. 92).

In some of the conferences I have attended or presented papers on Malcolm X and Nelson Mandela, most people initially believe that the two have nothing in common. Many view Malcolm X as more militant than Nelson Mandela. However, the truth is that Nelson Mandela was more militant than Malcolm X. Mandela was, after all, the commander in chief of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the military wing of the African National Congress. As commander in chief he sought and procured weapons for his soldiers, as well as bases where the soldiers could be trained for guerrilla war. Nonviolence alone, according to Nelson Mandela, could not undo apartheid. While Malcolm X had a relatively large following, it was not an armed militia or guerrilla army, and neither did he go about procuring weapons of war. I have not been able to find evidence of any use of force or violence by Malcolm X as a means to solving any of the problems posed by capitalism and racism. Gandhi certainly had a large political following, and his strategy eventually led to the political independence of India. Habermas, on the other hand, remains one of the most prolific defenders of western democracy or western civilization.

To a great extent, Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela were embraced by the Western world before their deaths. It took close to thirty years for the Western world and Western academies to embrace Malcolm X. However, from the eulogy delivered by Ossie Davies, it is clear that African Americans in general, and the majority of the non-western world embraced Malcolm X while he was still alive. As such, writing about Malcolm X is not an exercise in hero worship: Malcolm X enjoyed his status in the world’s oppressed peoples way before the dominant institutions of his own country did; Ubuntu was a vibrant and nourishing tradition even at a time when most of the non-African world believed Africa had no viable philosophy (and when Mandela was called a terrorist), and Mahatma Gandhi rejected capitalism at the height of colonial expansion. They chose the path of preferential option for the poor and oppressed, in contrast to many who collaborated with oppressive systems if it meant personal material gain. None of them ever presented themselves as heroes, and it is sometimes easy to forget that Nelson Mandela always viewed himself as a peasant, Malcolm X as a reformed thief, and Mahatma Gandhi as a very ordinary man.

Autobiographical texts offer a great source of information, especially in the context of peoples from marginalized communities. Clasby (1974) contends that the autobiographical narrative affords the reader a chance to trace the different genealogies that constitute the individual. But for non-white peoples, the autobiography has added significance. Clasby observes that marginalized groups and non-whites had no “effective national myth…no biography which is not chartered and authorized by the oppressor,” (1974, p. 19). It is important to remember that most
INTRODUCTION

of early literature from Africa and the Third World in general was written by western cultural anthropologists. As such, the autobiographical work also makes it possible to view philosophical reflection in relation to the person or the individual. Through autobiography, oppressed peoples were able to articulate their lived conditions. In the Autobiography we encounter not only Malcolm X, but the lives of other African Americans and Muslims in the United States. Through him, other cultures and peoples gain visibility and make their presence felt. In addition to the individual, autobiographical narratives afford readers the chance of knowing more about other people’s lives. The same is true in the autobiographies of Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi where the personal narrative also serves as source for raising peoples’ social and political consciousness. They are autobiographies of human triumph and love in the face of capitalism and racism. As sources of data, autobiographies provide empirical data for a post-empiricist analysis.

The many stages in the life of Malcolm X enable the reader to follow his political, religious, social, and, psychological metamorphoses. Toward the end of his life Malcolm X realized the challenges that advanced capitalism posed for a world without racial injustice. Reflecting on the relationship between racism and the global political scene, he observed that “the American political, economic, and social atmosphere… automatically nourishes a racist psychology in the white man,” (1992, p. 371). This contrasts with his pre-Mecca equating of biological race with ideological identity. Although Malcolm X had for the most part taken pride in his African heritage, it is during his travels in Africa that he realizes the potential of a global solidarity that could have challenged the injustice associated with advanced capitalism:

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\text{I reflected many, many times to myself upon how the American Negro has been entirely brainwashed from ever seeing himself as part of the non-white peoples of the world. The American Negro has no conception of the hundreds of millions of other non-whites’ concern for him: he has no conception of their feeling of brotherhood for and with him, (1992, p. 346).}
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In many respects, Malcolm X realized not only the predicaments facing Blacks in the United States, but the untapped global solidarity that could undo racism. Without internationalizing the struggle against both capitalism and racism, Malcolm X believed that the struggle by Black Americans was bound to flounder, (1992, p. 427). Schiltz (2002) contends that autobiography is not only a method of self-investigation, but an insertion of the self as a subject of history. The Autobiography exposes the reader to the struggles that Malcolm X faced, and his articulations of the failures and triumphs in the face of capitalism. It also affords capsules of his attempts at creating a better world in the various stages of his life. In the Autobiography Ossie Davis notes that Malcolm X had moved from being a drug dealer to a martyr in a noble cause. Dudely, (2004) contends that there are aspects of a conversion narrative in autobiographies. For Malcolm X, Nelson Mandela, and Mahatma Gandhi, the conversions lead to a life devoted to opposing capitalism. That Malcolm X was an active agent in the construction of his world is evidence that marginalized peoples and groups were beginning to speak for themselves: “protocol
and common sense require that Negroes stand back and let white man speak up for us, defend us, and lead us from behind the scenes in our fight. This is the essence of Negro politics. But Malcolm said to hell with that…fight your own battles,” (1992, p. 464). The autobiography makes it possible for the marginalized to make themselves relevant to historical processes and to tell their own stories. It is a refusal to let dominant society hog the spotlight while the invisible are consigned to the background. And, in contemporary times, it becomes an effective way to critique present day leaders and the philosophies or programs they espouse.

Malcolm X’s identity and its formation contrast with dominant western understandings of identity formation. In most Eurocentric discourses, identity is always linked to culture, which in turn is linked to geographically circumscribed regions. Hermans observes that early western scholars and researchers often saw identity as part of local systems and cultures. Such approaches give the impression that culture, region, and identity often go together. However, for Malcolm X, identity formation could not be limited to a geographically defined region or one religion. It is in this context that the reader has to understand Malcolm X’s embrace of many cultures and peoples that were victims of capitalism.

For Malcolm X, there are multiple factors that contribute to creating identity, which in turn can lead to multiple identities. While history, religion, culture, class, and socio-political ideologies contribute to the making of Malcolm X, his major struggles over his own identity are best understood when taking into consideration the struggle for creating a better world. Involvement in the struggle for a just world led to multiple and heterogeneous identities in the person of Malcolm X. While his birth name was Malcolm Little, by the time of his death he had multiple names, all indicative not only of his travels, but also the relationship he had with the world around him.

Racial identity played a significant role in Malcolm X’s understanding of himself. His rejection of Little, and the adoption of X pointed to his desire to know himself better in light of the experiences of the Black people in the United States. While it is within the Nation of Islam that Malcolm X developed a positive identification with Black people, it was during his travels outside the United States that he affirmed not only Pan-Africanism, but a positive identity between Blacks and other racial identities. His identification with blacks and other oppressed people across the globe question the notion of culture and identity as issues defined or limited by geography. At a time when most countries in the South were colonized, his radical identification with the world’s dispossessed and dehumanized was an acknowledgment of their humanity.

A close reading of The Autobiography reveals the extent to which Malcolm X participated in, and was impacted by world events and cultures. Cognizant of the ways racism worked in the United States, he viewed the Pan-African movement as part of the struggle to counter capitalist exploitation of marginalized and colonized peoples. During his travels in Africa, Malcolm X encountered Islamic cultures and nations which gave him a taste of what free Islamic nations could achieve. Malcolm X saw a cultural migration to Africa as an essential component of the development of a positive identity, especially by black Americans. Pan-Africanism
also made it possible for him to challenge the newly independent African countries regarding advocating for the freedom of blacks in the United States within the platform of the United Nations. Through his participation in international events, Malcolm X was able to see the importance of contemporary global events and history in theorizing about both democracy and justice.

His travels across Africa, and his knowledge of world events in general made it possible to discern the connections between United States violence against minorities in the United States, and non-Whites in the rest of the world. He was aware of the complicities of the United States in the assassination of Lumumba. His initial equating of white people with the embodiment of evil was borne of the realization that capitalism and globalization were nurtured in a culture and consciousness that was inherently exploitative. In addition, there were no ready mechanisms for rectifying the failures of Western democracy.5

Class was also an important signifier in identity formation. Malcolm X’s celebrated class analysis of society based on his delineation between the Field and the House Negro not only questioned the nature of nationalism, but the identification of capitalism with patriotism and human rights. His analysis of the ideological dispositions of the House and the Field Negro was also a critique of a consciousness that sees a relationship between equitable human conditions and the survival of capitalism.

Even though Malcolm X lived during the time when the west, and especially the United States, was gaining political power over the rest of the world, he always identified himself with other peoples who were fighting for justice. He frequently exhorted people to think of issues from a global or international perspective.6

Contrary to dominant or western constructions of identity, Malcolm X rejects the notion of geographically and nationally confined or defined identity. While western discourses construct identity on tapestries of advanced capitalism, Malcolm X delves on the cultural nomenclature of the marginalized and other non-western worldviews. From his travels in Africa, he realized the exploitative nature of capitalist globalization. At the same time, he was aware of the many ways that poor countries were not only fighting for their political independence, but a global solidarity against imperialism and racism. Like Gandhi and Mandela, Malcolm X viewed the world from a global perspective, and was cognizant of the impact of imperialism and globalization among the world’s poorest.

JURGEN HABERMAS

Jürgen Habermas provides a different insight into how human nature can be conceptualized from a Western perspective. The significance of his work is best understood with regards to an attempt at rescuing residues of redemption in the Enlightenment project, especially after its condemnation by the first generation of the Frankfurt School. A study of his work makes it possible to examine human nature from the seat of power or the imperial gaze (I do not dispute the current power held and exercised by the West in how we conceptualize the world). Unlike Gandhi, Malcolm X, and Mandela, Habermas is a trained philosopher, and an heir of the
Frankfurt School. To my knowledge he has not written many/any autobiography, although he has produced many volumes on a variety of subjects. He saw his mission as that of “undertaking a historically oriented attempt to reconstruct the prehistory of modern positivism with the systematic intention of analyzing the connections between knowledge and human interests,” (1972, p. vii). While the first three make it appear as if a significant portion of the world’s problems can be blamed on the West, Habermas argues that there are positives from capitalism and the traditions of the West. As if somewhat unaware of the voices from the margins, Habermas states that:

the human species secures its existence in systems of social labor and self-assertion through violence, through tradition-bound social life in ordinary language communication and with the aid of ego identities that at every level of individuation reconsolidate the consciousness of the individual in relation to the norms of the group, (p. 313).

While my focusing on the Non Western world is meant to avoid a continued marginalization of the analysis of non western cultures, my choice of Jugern Habermas is meant to negate the usual othering of the foreigner through an imperial or indigenous gaze.

FOCUSING ON THE NONWESTERN WORLD

There is a deliberate effort to focus on the non-western world, primarily on Africa and on ubuntu/satyagraha/Islam. While Nelson Mandela is African, Mahatma Gandhi went to South Africa in search of fame and fortune. Malcolm X visited Africa in a quest for self-knowledge. The experiences of Mahatma Gandhi and Malcolm X in Africa differ markedly from those of, say, Mr. Kurtz in Heart of Darkness or of the German philosopher, Hegel. Gandhi and Malcolm X do not encounter an Africa in need of capitalism or civilization, but one with remedies to the problems that capitalism poses to humankind. Morrison (2001) says about Africa, “what little could be known was enigmatic, repugnant, and hopelessly contradictory,” (p. xiii). For her, “Africa is inhabited by people with whom we maintained a delicate relationship of mutual ignorance and disdain,” (p. xi). During my teaching days in the United States it was not unusual to meet college students who had very little knowledge of Africa, or could hardly name any two African countries. However, some had a growing love for Africa, and many who studied abroad fell in love with the continent and its people. However, the focus on Africa is not meant to gloss over Africa’s shortcomings, and there are numerous. At the same time, it is disingenuous to not see the success of capitalism and racism in the suffering and material poverty across the continent. Cesaire (2000) observes that “the great historical tragedy of Africa is in the nature of the contact with Europe,” (p. 45). How did contact with the Islamic and Indian worlds differ, if at all? While capitalism is not necessarily the preferred form of social and material relations, neither is being the world’s materially poorest continent a desired place. What possible trajectories might Africa have taken without an encounter with capitalism and racism? According to Cesaire, traditional African societies “were not only ante-capitalist, but anti-capitalist,” (p. 44). Granted such an observation, what does it mean to be human from an African worldview, and how
INTRODUCTION

does this relate to the nature of capitalism? Or to ask the same question in a different way, can Africa’s ontological outlook be part of the solution to the problems caused by both capitalism and racism?

WRITING MALCOLM X

Islam currently occupies a somewhat uneasy place in the United States. The current president of the United States (Barack Obama) had to consistently tell his audience and fellow citizens that he was neither a Muslim nor an Arab. When President Obama visited Egypt in 2009, he took time to inform the world about Islam’s contributions to the world, especially in the fields of medicine, philosophy, and mathematics. When he chose to greet the world using the words *As-Salaam-Alaikum*, he simultaneously acknowledged Islam as a religion of peace while calling for peace with Islam. The clash of civilizations motif that had been dominant from 2001–2008 was being replaced by dialogue and engagement. For some United States citizens, it is as if being a Muslim and citizen of the United States are mutually exclusive. What many might not be aware of is the fact that most Muslims in the world are not Arabs, and that Islam’s global impact rivals that of westernization in the globe. The dominant culture’s marginalization of Islam and Muslims creates the impression that Muslims are not part of the American fabric, and consequently not part of the human family. Even during Malcolm X’s days, Muslims were generally treated as outcasts in the United States. This has continued in spite of the fact that Islam is one of the fastest growing religions in the United States, and that there are many prominent American Muslims including Muhammad Ali, Karim Abdul Jabaar, etc.

Writing about Malcolm X is a way for opening the complexities of the nation that markets itself as the leader of the free world. It is also a way to examine the place of Islam in the current world in contrast to how Malcolm X saw it during his days. During his travels in Mecca, Malcolm X saw Islam as possibly the only religion that could solve the problems posed by capitalism and racism on a global level in general, and the United States in particular. Consequently, writing about Malcolm X affords me a chance to examine Islam’s contribution to our understanding of what it means to be human. There is little doubt that Islam has as far ranging a global reach as any of the systems that claim to be global. A number of United States’ citizens (Caucasian and other) converted to Islam, including Muhammad Ali. Dar Es Salaam, one of the largest cities in Tanzania, stands as a testimony to the presence of Islam in Africa, and of Africa as accommodating of Islam. After all in most translations, Dar Es Salaam means ‘house of peace or house of Islam.’ But Islam also has a home in the Middle East and in Asian countries.

There is also a school of thought that equates Islam with evil and violence, even though former President G.W. Bush admitted Islam was not a religion that condoned violence. Consequently, there was for a time, an accepted Islamophobia, and those who were students of Malcolm X wondered how a religion and culture that Malcolm X had argued was the only thing that could cure America’s racist and capitalist problems had been turned into a religion of hate and violence. While the West had portrayed Islam as a religion and culture of hate and violence, for the
most part Muslims contended that Islam was a religion of peace and dialogue. Abu-Nimer, (2003) argues that Islam rejects the oppression of other people (zulm), as well as the use of force (quwwah), to solve problems. Instead, at the heart of Islam is a oneness of humankind in peaceful coexistence that is reflected in Malcolm X’s Letter from Mecca. To the said oneness, according to Abu-Nimer, there is an added assumption of the sacredness of human life and the inherent dignity of all.

In writing about Malcolm X in this book my intention is to highlight some of the humanistic dimensions in Islam and their relationships to other non-western or non-capitalistic worldviews. Goodman (2003) observes that “Islamic humanism…is an authentic strand of meaning and values, to be discovered in a rich, often neglected past,” (p. 23). Consequently, the section on Malcolm X examines Islam’s contributions to understanding what it means to be human and its (Islam’s) contributions to the present and future of humankind. Without genuinely engaging Islam, conversations on human nature and a common world miss out on insights from one of the traditions that has as legitimate a claim as any with regard to values that are common to humankind.

It could be argued that most academics in the West (mainly in the United States) struggle with embracing Malcolm X, and accuse him of not having a clearly defined program of action. Dyson (2004) puzzles as to whether Malcolm X was a socialist or not and bemoans the lack of clear cut political agenda in the associations and organizations founded by Malcolm X. However, for a high school dropout who educated himself in the prisons of the United States rather than any of the Ivy-or-not-Ivy League Schools, he generated more ideas on Islam, human nature, justice, racism, and capitalism than many of us safely sheltered in the basements of the academies and beholden to a system whose values we sometimes applaud, at times criticize and often loathe. True to the nature of capitalism, it is fashionable to be dismissive of both Islam and Malcolm X, even as we depend on both for insights into how life could be lived.

Again, the challenge with regard to writing about Islam pertains to theorizing about the place of Islam in the 21st century in the nonwestern and western world. To pretend Islam does not exist, that it does not offer a different worldview, seems like an easy escape from the possibilities of dialogue and mutual engagement. Silence might be the preferred and safer option, but my belief is that without engaging in genuine dialogue, we remain (even those on the margins) trapped in the clash of civilizations motif in which every other is an enemy to be vanquished. At the same time, unless Muslims participate in a conversation and dialogue with the rest of the human community, they are bound to be misrepresented, vilified and objectified and presented as a cancerous tumor on the human body. The examples of Malcolm X and other United States and global figures from Islam show the reader a different aspect of Islam, one that affirms the humanity of all in the peaceful struggle for justice.

UBUNTU

I would hazard that readers in Southern Africa, or those in the Diaspora who grew up in Southern Africa are likely to find it easier to define and explain ubuntu. A few scholars have likened it to aspects of Marxism, mostly because of its critique
and rejection of capitalism. Like Marxism, ubuntu seeks to affirm the humanity of all, and takes into consideration the material conditions under which human beings live. However, ubuntu differs from Marxism, primarily because it predates the existence of orthodox Marxism. It also differs from Marxism (and capitalism) in that it takes human relations as the beginning place for understanding human nature, rather than economics qua economics. With both Marxism and capitalism, the starting point is usually the human being as a laborer, without which a person’s humanity is almost invisible. What many might not be aware of is that Marx wrote his views on capitalism while he was very poor in terms of material or financial resources, (Kamenka, 1983). Consequently, attitudes to private and public property in both Marxism and ubuntu are almost parallel. Cesaire (2000) notes that “Bantu thought is essentially ontological...based on truly fundamental notions of a life force,” (p. 58). For him, it is a way of life that affirms the humanity of all. But the differences between Bantu cultures and advanced capitalist societies are plenty. Perhaps one illustration is on how people get to know each other in Bantu/Southern African contexts and capitalistic/western contexts.

In my travels in the United States I find that when people interact or introduce each other, the general trend is to give the name of the person, and the nature of their job or where they work. It is as if one’s profession, or lack of, defines their humanity. In most of Southern Africa, and especially rural Southern Africa, the norm is to ask individuals who they are related to, who their people are. In other words, one’s humanity is not necessarily defined by their work or socio-economic status. Needless to say, in this book ubuntu is taken as a sub-Saharan “African ontology and epistemology that is both distinctly African and worldly in the context of an overriding European epistemic and existential presence that constantly sought to create and consume an African difference inscribed with inferiority,” (Zelezi, 2005, p. 218). It is true that as both modern urbanization and globalization begin having an impact on traditional life forms in Africa, part of the essence of ubuntu is lost. Because of the ways in which ubuntu has peacefully reconstructed the social relations in post apartheid South Africa, it could be argued that it refutes any of the falsifications that could be used legitimate apartheid and racism.

NARCISSISM AND ANTI-NARCISSISM

There are a few things I should point out in this section. Narcissism and anti-narcissism generally belong to the field of psychology. However, in this book my use of narcissism comes from the common myths surrounding Narcissus, not directly from the field of psychology. Many in the West might be aware of the myth of Narcissus. For those unfamiliar, I will give a very condensed account.

There are a number of versions of the legend or myth of Narcissus, and Levine (1994) contends the myth has been part of western civilization for close to 2000 years. In the Greek and Roman versions, Narcissus is presented as a very handsome son of the gods. According to the legend, Narcissus’s mother was told her son would live for a long time if he did not get to know himself. In some accounts, he fell in love with his own reflection in a pool of water and drowned in that same
pool. In other accounts, he was tricked by a woman whose love he did not return. 
(In most western worldviews or narratives, the woman is not to be trusted, and 
should be controlled and femininity is regarded as a sign of weakness, hence being 
like a girl or a woman is seen as a disadvantage). In both accounts, Narcissus loved 
only himself, and saw his beauty as incomparable. Levine observes that “the myth 
of Narcissus embodies the precarious and ambivalent coupling of charmed love 
and disenchanted self-knowledge,” (p. xii).

While Narcissus has been part of western culture for over 2000 years, I am not 
aware of such a narrative in nonwestern cultures, particularly in African, Islamic, and 
Indian/Asiatic cultures. Capitalism and narcissism appear to be unique to Western 
| societies. However, a study of Narcissus, or in this case, the study of different 
cultures in their struggle against racism and capitalism affords us an opportunity to 
study the different strengths and weaknesses of each culture. According to Cesaire 
(2000) “a civilization that withdraws into itself atrophies,” (p. 33). The same could 
be said of any civilization that views itself as the best in the history of humankind, 
and uses colonialism to spread its significance.

Viewed from another perspective, this book is a study of contrasting ideologies. 
Each critique (of other traditions) and self-legitimation of (each tradition) is an 
argument for constructing a qualitatively better world as well as a different rendition 
of what it means to be human. Each ideology is related to the historical and material 
conditions under which it flourishes and at the same time, contests the legitimacy 
of other ideologies. Each, in a way, claims to be the truth that offers guiding 
principles to the realization of the human in all people. As ideologies, each should 
be subjected to rigorous critique, for each simultaneously tells a different lie and 
a different truth.

In the works of Frantz Fanon, it is important for the individual to “put an end to 
the narcissism on which he relies in order to imagine that he is different from the 
others,” (2006, p. 6). Narcissism inevitably creates an inflated ego in which one 
person views himself as better than others, and in the process, cuts himself from 
the human community. It is generally the powerful and dominant group that is 
prone to narcissistic behaviors and tendencies. Such groups also create and 
legitimate a hierarchy of cultures, with theirs as the highest. Narcissism also operates 
under a false illusion that assimilation is possible, and that the other can discover 
their humanity as they reject their identity. The negation of narcissism also makes it 
possible to create a world in which human fragmentation and alienation do not 
exist or are minimized.

With regard to the relationship between narcissism, racism, and capitalism, 
again, Fanon’s insights are helpful when analyzing the dynamics between dominant 
and inferiorized groups. Fanon (2006) points out the many failures of assimilationist 
strategies with regard to nonwhites, as well as the importance of cultural memory 
and history as a source of liberation and the affirmation of the humanity of the 
oppressed. While this study touches on some issues pertaining to the link between 
racism and culture as raised by Fanon, this book also adds the role and purpose of 
education in the unmaking and making of narcissistic tendencies within the limits 
of capitalisms and anti-capitalisms.
INTRODUCTION

OUTLINE OF THE FOLLOWING CHAPTERS

Conceptually, this book is designed to show that a “critical understanding of the self takes place...through a struggle of political hegemonies and of opposing directions, first in the ethical field, and then that of politics proper,” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 333). To a great extent this makes it possible to view, analyze, and listen to a multiplicity of voices as they articulate their perceptions of what constitutes human nature. In some chapters, the stated views are interrogated within the same chapter, making possible to not only engage in the critique of one voice as representative of one culture, but to appreciate the importance of a multitude of voices with regards to one topic or one subject.

Chapter One focuses on the thought of Mahatma Gandhi and the development of his attitude towards capitalism during the twenty one years he spent in South Africa, and his subsequent return to India. It highlights the links between ubuntu, Satyagraha, and ahimsa, within the context of indigenous cultures and conflict resolution in relation to capitalism and apartheid. Working in a multicultural, racist, multilingual, and global African world, Mahatma Gandhi nurtured a culture and belief system that supported peaceful coexistence in different geographical locations and historical periods. In addition, the philosophical and cultural systems he encountered in South Africa embraced and affirmed other struggles and relationships including ecology, economics, nature, power, class, gender and human relations in general. This chapter also argues for considering the possible impact of ubuntu or African cultures on Gandhi’s philosophy of nonviolence. While most Gandhian scholars readily agree that the twenty one years he spent in South Africa had a significant impact on his development of non-violence, few examine the correlations between Satyagraha, ahimsa, and ubuntu. Many scholars also contend that some of Gandhi’s values are neither Indian nor European. Although the principles of ubuntu have not always gained worldwide support, they offer some of the better alternatives to military engagements that devalue human life, and reflect the many ways indigenous cultures reject systemic violence. By comparing Gandhi’s ideas on women and class with those in ubuntu, I show some of the ways in which ubuntu might have impacted Gandhi’s views on both. By focusing mostly on the work of Gandhi in South Africa, my intention is to show the invisible presence of Africa and African philosophies in the struggle for peace and justice. Often times, the ‘global’ struggle for peace and justice has been deliberately blind to the plight of Indians and Africans or the contributions that Indian and African philosophies might make in the creation of a socially just and peaceful world or what it means to be human.

The second chapter focuses on the work of Malcolm X and its significance for understanding how aspects of Islam anticipated globalizing tendencies as opposed to globalization. This was through critiquing provincialism as well as refusing to treat the human community as circumscribed by race, creed, state and nation. In most discussions about globalization in the United States and Western Europe, Islam is generally viewed as alien. However, it is becoming clearer that excluding Islam takes away from understanding and critiquing globalizing processes that affect not only the United States, but the rest of the world. In examining the work
of Malcolm X after his pilgrimage to Mecca, my intention is to show how he (Malcolm X) was able to construct a global identity rooted in Islam but applicable in other religious and national or cultural and racial constructs. Malcolm X’s work in the United States, in Africa, and in Europe offers new insights that enrich our understandings of the development of Islamic identities in a global framework in which personal identity is acknowledged without negating the importance of community, or the social. In his dealings with Pan-Africanism and other globalizing knowledge systems, Malcolm X shows the extent to which personal identity is a product of mediated relationships in a global community, including Islam, and the many ways for combating both racism and its dehumanizing privileges.

A substantial part of this chapter examines the factors that contributed to Malcolm’s global perspective, well before the term and concept of globalization had become part of the dominant paradigms for describing the world. I also examine the nature of ‘global’ relations before and after the journey to Mecca and Africa and how those travels facilitated the transformation of Malcolm X’s personal and global identities. However, I also highlight the ways in which ‘globalization’ in the life and work of Malcolm X differs from ‘postmodern globalization.’ While postmodern globalizations view national/religious/racial identities as obsolete, in the work of Malcolm X, those very identities are essential for working across and with differences in an international context. Part of this chapter will also focus on Malcolm’s work in Africa and its significance for both contemporary Islam as well as understanding the workings of globalization. While contemporary globalization discourses generally view Africa and Indigenous peoples as peripheral, for Malcolm X, these were the peoples for whom globalization and global networking was imperative for creating a better world. A blending of progressive Islam which respected indigenous knowledge systems and peoples was viewed as essential for transforming the condition of the wretched of the earth.

Chapter Three focuses on ubuntu and the work of Nelson Mandela. At the beginning of the 21st century many in the West marveled at ‘the South African Miracle.’ Instead of demanding retributive justice, victims of apartheid extended a hand of reconciliation. The architects of this miracle attributed it to ubuntu, a blend of Pan-Africanism, humanism, and African traditional worldviews that had been invisible to most of the world prior to ‘the South African Miracle.’ The practical manifestation of ubuntu in the Truth and Reconciliation Process in South Africa and its role in preventing post-independence civil war while articulating an African renaissance belied the strength of indigenous wisdom and knowledge systems. To a great extent, the success of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa also showed the epistemic validity of indigenous African systems of thought which were foundational to that same enterprise. By advocating reconciliation without retribution, ubuntu challenges the hegemonic view of human rationality and wisdom as embodied in Western discourses. This chapter examines the nature of wisdom in ubuntu from a postcolonial and indigenous perspective. The significance of this lies in the fact that the end of apartheid marked the end of institutional racism and the cessation of the need to view African peoples through Western lenses. But the end of apartheid did not necessarily mean the end of capitalism or capitalistic ventures
in South Africa. The success of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Process revealed the real and potential contributions of marginalized knowledge systems to humanity. Indigenous knowledge systems that were neither created nor celebrated in the world’s renowned intellectual institutions were reshaping the world’s youngest democracy in a radically different way. Partly as a result of the success of the Truth and Reconciliation Process, many war-torn or conflict-ridden countries are appropriating aspects of ubuntu while implementing their own versions of reconciliation and compassion. Many countries now realize that the solution to the world’s problems needs a variety of wisdoms, not just that of the West. Reflecting on the changes in sub-Saharan Africa, Ninian Smart noted that “Black Africa will no doubt have a highly creative future with which to contribute to the glories of humanity,” (2001, p. 3). It is in this context that I seek to explore the wisdom in ubuntu.

While the contributions of ubuntu to the transformation of South Africa are hardly questioned anymore, there are few studies that explore how the indigenous people of South Africa define and understand both ubuntu and wisdom. While the aim of this chapter is to draw out the wisdom in ubuntu that enabled South Africa to undergo peaceful reconciliation, it is also important to study ubuntu in the context of globalization. Globalization assumes that the histories of different nations are merging into a single process toward a common future, and the marginalized pasts will become part of a pluralistic future. In this regard, it is important to study how ubuntu relates to other worldviews, and in so doing move from the ideological justifications used to exploit Africa and Africans.

Habermas’ views on human interests and human nature are the subject of Chapter Four. Habermas’ theory of knowledge and human interests situates the notion of knowledge within a philosophical context, thus providing a framework for discussing education. Habermas’ philosophical context provides alternate modes of inquiry (the three forms of science) which generate alternative forms of valid knowledge. In acknowledging alternate forms of knowledge, Habermas relates knowledge to constitutive cognitive interests, thereby eliminating objectivism as the objectivist illusion. Avoiding objectivism removes the primary legitimating factors of the empirical method of inquiry in education. However, it is not the only valid form of arriving at knowledge. The non-neutrality of methods of inquiry is of critical importance to this discussion. Habermas challenges the reader to appreciate some of the positive developments that are associated with capitalism or the Enlightenment project, including the ways it makes cultural pluralism possible. Using his theory of communicative action, Habermas concludes that human suffering can be deduced from the material conditions in which people live, not just the ideologies people espouse. As such, it is important for the oppressed to engage in critical self-reflection so as to unveil the material, social, and psychological causes of their suffering. Within reasonable limits it is possible to argue that Habermas writes from the perspective of one who enjoys a balance among power, ideology, and economics. According to Habermas:

If we assume that the full significance of cultural meanings is not comprehended by their symbolic contents but that they have an ideological function, then we need an explanatory social analysis that relates meanings to
conditions of power, social conflict, and domination. In other words, society is not simply a configuration produced by cultural traditions but is shaped by labor and power relations, (2003, p. 7).

Most students of critical theory and of Habermas will no doubt be aware of his attempts, towards the later part of his life, to transcend Eurocentrism. While Habermas was hesitant to engage Africa and African philosophy (with the exception of obscure references to Augustine of Hippo, he rarely does), he was aware of the encounter between the “secularized West and fundamentalist Islam on the one hand, and between the individualistic West and communitarian Asian traditions on the other,” (p. 291). Habermas contends that to understand the human condition, participants from diverse cultural backgrounds ought to be represented:

This would draw our attention to the normative content already implicit in the tacit presuppositions of any discourse aiming at reaching mutual understanding. For, irrespective of cultural background, all the participants intuitively know that a consensus based on insight is not possible if the relations between the participants in communication are not symmetrical- that is, relations of mutual recognition, of reciprocal perspective-taking, a shared willingness to look at one’s own traditions through the eyes of a stranger, to learn from one another, (p. 291).

To a certain extent, the chapter is a reflection on the reflections regarding human nature from the perspective of Habermas. It is not true that Habermas has the last word. He had argued that “in modernity, particularly given the disasters of the 20th century, the ability of reason to disclose some metaphysical meaning appears irrevocably lost,” (2003, p. 283). Mahatma Gandhi, Malcolm X, and Nelson Mandela persuade us otherwise.

Chapter Five examines the theories of education in the works Mahatma Gandhi, Malcolm X, Nelson Mandela, and Jurgen Habermas. To teach toward a fuller and meaningful humanity requires an analysis and understanding of the many traditions that contribute to humankind. The classroom offers unheralded opportunities for students and educators to be knowledgeable about different cultures, peoples, and continents. By the same token, educators are uniquely positioned to make learning and scholarship genuinely global. To avoid cultural and intellectual narcissism and apartheid requires dialogue with those we would consider strangers. While racism/apartheid and capitalism are part of the west’s gift to humanity, other traditions have alternative versions of what it means to be human and how life might be lived. Although they are celebrated all over the world, and particularly in the Western World, Mahatma Gandhi, Malcolm X, and Nelson Mandela rejected what western education and capitalism stood for. They excelled academically in a system they critiqued. The three saw in the capitalist state a bourgeoisie institution in the service of private property, and in rejecting it, affirmed international solidarity.

Chapter Six invites the reader to critique essentialism or totalities and totalizations, or conclusions that might be easily deduced from a logic based on positivism. In an age when a good education does not always translate into a good job, or a job for that matter, how can schools justify their mission and the purposes of education?
INTRODUCTION

The same is true with peace studies, for example. At a time of undeclared permanent war and permanent peace, what place is there for peace studies, and who is better equipped to teach about peace studies, if at all? While the critique of masculine domination has become part of the problems associated with capitalism, it is possible that feminism, operating within a capitalist paradigm, does not provide a legitimate challenge or method to undoing the negatives associated with capitalism.

Please note that in the sections on Mahatma Gandhi, CWMG refers to the Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi. When and where these are cited, I also indicate the relevant volume. Please also note that to be anti-capitalist does not necessarily imply being anti-American or anti-western.

NOTES

1 Within the African American or Black tradition in the United States, the autobiography has functioned as a way of authenticating one’s story and life. Among the many celebrated autobiographies include The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man, and Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas, An American Slave. Modern day autobiographies that chronicle the political awareness of major figures include Nelson Mandela’s Long Walk to Freedom.


3 Malcolm X was born Malcolm Little. He is later called Detroit Red, Satan, and in his travels to Mecca is called El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, while in Africa (Nigeria) he is called Omowale. In many ways, the names reflect the changes he undergoes in the quest for self-understanding in the struggle against racism.

4 It is after he becomes acquainted with Islam that he removes the conk, which he later associated with a symbol of self-hatred and a desire to be White that Malcolm X begins a different quest for self-understanding. However, his father was part of the Back-to-Africa Movement under Marcus Garvey. See Autobiography.

5 Malcolm X sought various ways to alleviate the conditions of Black people. While within the Nation of Islam, he thought separatism was the key. He despaired of integration, was mistrusting of the vote, and saw violence as futile. See Autobiography.

CHAPTER 1

MAHATMA GANDHI

To be Human is to be One with God

Mahatma Gandhi: A brief outline

The best sources for a detailed life of Mahatma Gandhi are his autobiography and the many collected works that appear under his name. In brief, he was born in India in 1869, was married at the age of 13, and traveled to study law in England at the age of 19. His first trip to South Africa was in 1893 at the request of Indians in that country. While at Pietermaritzburg he was ejected from the train for sitting in a compartment reserved for whites. He sided with the British during the Boer War (although his sympathies lay with the Boers). During the Zulu War he formed the Ambulance Corps to help wounded soldiers, but also to show his loyalty to the British Empire. After the Zulu War, Gandhi took a vow of celibacy, and began using nonviolence as way for attaining rights for Indians in South Africa. It was after the Zulu War that he began articulating the goal of life as attaining moksha, or oneness with God. It was also in South Africa that the word Satyagraha was coined. After 21 years in South Africa, Gandhi left for India and worked for the independence of India from Britain. He was assassinated in 1948. Needless to say, this paragraph gives a brief timeline of Gandhi. Again, The Autobiography and Collected Works (which appear in the text as CWMG for Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi) offer detailed information on the Mahatma.

The depiction of Gandhi’s philosophy and understanding of human nature in this chapter differs from most works on Gandhi by deliberately focusing on the influence of non-western cultures and his rejection and critique of capitalism Most Gandhian scholars present him as a person desperately trying to assimilate into the dominant capitalist culture, or mute his criticisms of capitalism. As such, even while trying to end racism against Indians in South Africa, the impression is that for the most part Gandhi remained insensitive to the plight of blacks in South Africa. In many respects, the Mahatma that exists in the popular imagination, and the Gandhi one reads in The Autobiography appear to be very different people. Yet, a reading of Gandhi’s experiences in South Africa indicates that a different and more just order outside capitalism is possible. In addition, the African world appears comprehensible and accessible in a way that is radically different from most of the European narratives on Africa. This does not mean that Gandhi was totally accepting of the African world and realities. However, it is in South Africa that Mahatma Gandhi critiques aspects of traditional Indian culture and transcends the confines of a Eurocentric vision regarding what it means to be human. By the time he left South Africa for India, Gandhi had rejected almost all the trappings of capitalism and capitalistic relations,
including exploitative work, racism, and oppressive patriarchal family structures. Consequently, it could be argued that Gandhi’s leadership style and philosophy develop within the context of the whole South Africa.

Mahatma Gandhi stated that whatever service he rendered to India came from South Africa. The development of his political consciousness, his first experiments with truth, and the importance of cooperation were in the context of then apartheid South Africa (apartheid became part of the national policy after 1948, but racism had been part of European rule in South Africa even before the legalization of apartheid). Although initially Gandhi did not see the plight of South African blacks as integral to eradicating the problems faced by South African Indians, former South African president Nelson Mandela credited Gandhi with having a significant influence on the course of the struggle to end the violence of apartheid. In stating that whatever service he was rendering to India was because of his South African experience is it possible that aspects of ubuntu influenced or are present in both ahimsa and satyagraha?

That the philosophy of Gandhi has changed how the world talks of non-violence as one of the few viable futures for humankind is indisputable. Yet Gandhi was also a product of his age and context, and in the early stages of his career, was influenced by racist views. For example, he refused to send his children to schools that were designated for black South Africans, including Fort Hare and Lovedale, (CWMG, Vol. 83). In this chapter I give a brief history of South Africa at the time of Gandhi, highlighting the problems of apartheid for both Indians and Africans, Gandhi’s development of the concept and use of satyagraha, his experiments with truth at both Phoenix and Tolstoy Farms, and contrast those with ubuntu.

Although many Gandhian scholars readily admit that he spent close to twenty one years in South Africa, not many include or allude to the significance of African cultures and world views in the development of Gandhi’s philosophy. Brown and Prozesky (1996) acknowledge the influence of Plato, Ruskin, Tolstoy, Thoreau, and Emerson on the work of Gandhi. Because most works on Gandhi generally ignore or are seem to be unaware of any possibilities of the influence of African cultures and thought on Gandhi, the impression given and passed on is that there is none. However, Villa-Vicencio’s (1990) Civic disobedience and beyond: Law, resistance and religion in South Africa gives an account of nonviolence and none-cooperation by South African blacks well before the South African satyagraha. Villa-Vicencio also contends that one of the strategies utilized by Africans included strikes and various forms of non-cooperation. Such strikes occurred as early as 1901. He also observes that South Africans had engaged in military resistance to colonialism from around the 15th century, but after the Zulu War adopted new strategies. While it is possible that there was no influence, it is also true that there is no evidence of ubuntu or African philosophy in written form prior to the adoption of writing as a formal way of preserving history. However, the absence of written documents need not imply that oral cultures had no impact on the thought of Gandhi.

That African cultures might have had an impact on the thought of Gandhi is intimated by a number of events in Gandhi’s work, as well as the changes in his philosophy. Indeed, he was aware of the struggles that Africans waged against racism.
Gandhi organized aid in support of the British during the Zulu War of 1906, (Arnold, 2001). Initially, Gandhi was not immune to the racism of his day, and Arnold contends that Gandhi at one time also believed that Africans had no viable civilization. Towards the end he acknowledged the value of civilizations and cultures that were regarded as barbaric. He began his work in South Africa as a loyal servant of the British Empire while struggling to have the rights enjoyed by whites in both South Africa and the British Empire. However, his critique of imperialism and the demand for Indian home rule began while in South Africa. Gandhi started as someone keen on attaining a middle class lifestyle, yet ended as an ascetic who intimated that capitalism could never be reformed, and saw a peasant life as central to creating and maintaining a better life. It is also while in South Africa that Gandhi questioned the validity of the caste system as it existed in India, and the place of women in Indian culture. To a great extent, the above metamorphoses in Gandhi’s work reveal more similarities with black South African (Bantu) culture rather than that of the West.

The possible impact of African thought and cultures on Gandhi’s work is also implied in the many associations of his emergence as a new person when he left South Africa (Itzkin, 2005). Gandhi is often presented as South Africa’s greatest gift to India (Chatterjee, 2001). The question becomes: which South Africa? White South Africa was inherently violent, patriarchal, and racist, while the Gandhi who returned to India was the opposite. Even in his own works Gandhi noted that “whatever service I have been able to render India comes from South Africa,” (CWMG, vol. 29. p. 38). Again, the question that is rarely asked is, which South Africa? To ignore the presence and impact of African culture and history implies that Gandhi was indifferent and unaffected by what was happening to the majority of the population. Part of the reason this might be so is that in general, mostly works by whites and Caucasians have been published on Gandhi, and in the climate of the day they pretended to be deliberately blind to the presence of Black South Africans. Most academic scholarship, unless written specifically for Africa (African history, African literature, etc) erases Africa or the black world. Dalton (2000) contends that what Gandhi accomplished in South Africa was not as significant as what South Africa did to him. Indeed, it is true that Gandhi began articulating the futility of violence in defense or in opposition to empire while in South Africa. It is equally true that after the Zulu War there was a lull in military resistance to white minority rule until the 1960s, (Saul, 2005). After the Zulu War, black South Africans adopted other ways for resisting the violence of racism, and to a great extent, Gandhi’s adoption of non-violence in South Africa coincided with the dissipation of military violence by South African Blacks. It was in the context of non-violence that the African National Congress of South Africa was formed, and Mandela (1996) acknowledges the centrality of Gandhian ideas to the ideology of the ANC.

SOUTH AFRICA BEFORE MAHATMA GANDHI

The brief background section on South Africa is meant to give the reader a glimpse at the lives of South African blacks in the period Gandhi was in South Africa. More often than not, the historical conditions and experiences of South African blacks are
taken as inconsequential or incidental to understanding Gandhi’s life and work in South Africa. However, the refusal to see the presence of South African blacks translates into denying or rejecting their humanity. If Gandhi’s work and life are to be understood as a struggle to affirm the humanity of all people, what better way to begin than by examining the lives of all the people in the country where Satyagraha was born? Mandela (2003) acknowledged Gandhi’s influence on the South African liberation struggle. Was Gandhi never influenced at all by African cultures?

For many people outside South Africa, the general impression is that the drama that unfolded involved mostly Indians and whites. However, Africans far outnumbered both Indians and white settlers. In the period before Gandhi’s arrival, the Zulus had already fought and lost some wars and land to the British and Dutch settlers. In 1879 at the battle of Isandlwana, the British defeated the Zulus, and in 1881 at Majuba, the Boers also won a major military offensive, the result of which was a loss of land and means of living, (Guest, 1996). Guest further contends that by 1880, over 75 percent of the most fertile and arable land was in the hands of whites. Consequently, Africans found themselves working for white settlers so as to earn a living. Many were underemployed or unemployed and this created what Magubane (1998) termed the pauperization of the indigenous people. In most cases it created migrant and seasonal workers. Loss of land also meant loss of cattle and other means of living, and this brought with it a destruction of the institutions that kept African communities intact.

The discovery of gold and diamonds also changed the political and cultural climate, as well as labor relations in South Africa. The number of Africans who moved to urban centers gradually increased, and often created migrant labors. The creation of urban cities also led to the growth of the railroad system, making it relatively easier to travel from one part of the country to the other. However, with the discovery of gold and diamonds, many Africans chose to work in the mines instead of farms. Partly to compensate or to meet the need for labor, the whites in South Africa entered into an agreement with India (then under British control) to import Indians to work in the sugar plantations. Consequently, most of the Indians who immigrated to South Africa went there as indentured laborers. Guest (1996) observes that between 1860 and 1911 the Natal region received over 150000 Indians. By the 1890s many of them were employed in the railway industry. Like Africans, Indians had little to non-existent rights in South Africa. By 1892, the white government had begun to initiate measures to repatriate some of the Indians, and to prevent Indian immigration into South Africa. The Indians who chose to stay were to be levied taxes that were almost the equivalent of six months wages, (Guest, 1998). Xenophobia became an added characteristic of the white settler political and economic system. The law made it impossible or illegal for Indians to purchase property. The Africans who refused or chose not to work the mines and farms were limited to living in what was later called Native Areas or Bantustans. People who had previously been producers of their own food and goods became dependent on settlers who had taken over most of the resources.

Mainly because of the struggle over the control of resources, including gold and diamonds, the Boers and the British engaged in a prolonged war from 1898–1902.
The treaty of Vereeniging brought peace between the two European factions, and in that same instant “South African whites created a distinctively capitalist nation which was integral not only to the British Empire but the world capitalist economy…based on racial oppression and exploitation,” (Magubane, 1998, p. 27). To a great extent, both the British and the Boers momentarily put aside their ethnic and national differences, and became white South Africans. Whiteness, in this context, brought with it untold rights and privileges. The best land and best schools were reserved for whites. First class travel was reserved for whites, as where the best places to live in the urban areas. As such, class did not matter that much, as evidenced by Gandhi, then a lawyer, being ejected from the train at Pietermaritzburg.

Even though Africans were often unemployed and underemployed, the settler government required them to pay taxes. Because they were underemployed and had lost a significant amount of land and other resources, taxes became an added burden. In some cases the taxes were a means to coercing Africans to go and work in the mines or white owned farms. In 1906 the Zulus under Chief Bambata rebelled. The settler government killed those it deemed a danger to the consolidation of colonial rule and the creation of a capitalist system built on the land and labor of disenfranchised natives. When the Zulus rebelled, Gandhi organized an ambulance corps that sided with the white settlers. In the Autobiography he acknowledges that it was really not a rebellion per se, but a senseless slaughter of villagers. For the majority of Africans though, the question was the extent to which they could count on the support of other immigrants in the fight for justice.

Villa-Vicencio (1980) contends that Africans engaged in different forms of protest ranging from strikes, to marches and boycotts, and armed rebellions. The rural areas where the places were most armed rebellions took place. Such places were relatively untouched by urbanization. In the early part of the 19th century, the majority of Africans in South Africa lived in the rural areas. Guest (1996) observes that only 4% of the Africans lived in urban areas, compared with 54% of the white population. The creation of an urban African or black population was one of the first steps in creating socio-economic classes in a previously classless society. However, living quarters were segregated, and there were curfew hours as well as restrictions related to where Africans could and could not live or walk. The same discriminatory laws applied to the Indians.

Even though most of the military resistance was led by men and chiefs, women were also involved, especially Amafela, (Villa-Vicencio, 1980, p. 35). After the Zulu War, armed resistance ceased being a viable option. Others, like John Dube explored formal schools and literacy/education as an alternative way for challenging the legitimacy of the settlers as well as transforming the lives of peasants. What is beyond doubt is that the traditional structures that had kept societies intact were irreparably destroyed.

Gandhi went to South Africa at the request of Indian merchants who needed a lawyer to fight for their rights. It is also true that at that time he was no gainfully employed
in India. Like most people of his generation, Gandhi went to South Africa in search of fame and fortune, in his case, to earn a living as a lawyer. Gandhi also went to South Africa believing he enjoyed the rights accorded to citizens of the British Empire, hence his decision to support the British during the Boer War, and the British over and against the Zulus during the Zulu War. It could be argued that initially he sought to ingratiate himself into the privileged White settler community. However, in his first days in South Africa, Gandhi found the existing racism against Indians as something he should not be subjected to since he was a member of the British Empire. Even though Indians, like Blacks, were victims of racism, Gandhi strove mostly for the rights of Indians, and was seemingly dismissive of the contributions of Blacks to the struggle against racism. While he was not willing to be called a collie, he had no hesitation with using Kaffir to describe Blacks in South Africa, (1958, p. 253). In his quest for the rights of Indians in South Africa, Mahatma Gandhi did not appear to have been really concerned about the conditions of Africans. Brown (1996) argues that Gandhi showed no concern at all for the problems that Africans faced as a result of white presence in South Africa.

By the time Mahatma Gandhi arrived in South Africa in 1893 (his first visit), the situation had changed for the worse with regards to Indians. Although initially the colonial settler government had gone to seek Indians to work in sugar plantations, by 1893 there were moves to exclude and/or bar Indians from entering South Africa. Marriage laws were changed in such a way that Indian marriages were regarded as illegal, or not recognized as binding within the context of South Africa. Consequently, Indian wives were not able to join their husbands in South Africa. Gandhi observed that “the Union government, in pursuance of their policy of greater repression of the Asiatic than before…discovered that it was possible to prevent the entry of wives of domiciled Indians by declaring their marriages to be illegal,” (1958, p. 225). In the pursuit of material wealth, family lives had been broken apart. One of the arguments advanced by the Union for denying the entry of the Indian wives was that Indians were polygamous and corrupted the institution of marriage. Only Europeans could preserve and define the sanctity of marriage. For Gandhi, it was as if the wives of South African Indians had the same status as concubines.

Besides barring Indian wives from joining their husbands, the Union Government was also considering expelling or repatriating Indians. That is, after many years of contributing their labor to the growth of the sugar industry in South Africa, Indians were facing the possibility of being deported from South Africa without having anything to show for their labor or stay. When some opted to stay after their indenture was over, the Union Government proposed to levy a tax that would have been the equivalent of six months wages, (Gandhi, 1993). Measures were put in place to make it impossible for Indians to acquire property, especially in the Transvaal.

Gandhi’s second visit to South Africa was in 1897, (Guest, 1996). When news of his return reached white South Africans, they protested, and upon disembarking he was assaulted by whites. Gandhi refused to press charges against his assailants. Partly as a result of that, he gained the respect of number of South African whites, and began sharing in their social life, including discussions on religious affairs. In the following section I focus on the relationship between Gandhi and South African
blacks, and its implications with regard to racism and the struggle for creating a better world. If the struggle for a better world consistently implies ignoring the plight and humanity of Africans, then such a struggle is self-defeating.

GANDHI AND THE PROBLEM OF RACISM (TRYING TO BE WHITE)

It is beyond doubt that Gandhi was on countless occasions the victim of racism while in South Africa. However, during his early days in South Africa, Gandhi himself was not sympathetic to the plight of Blacks, perhaps as a way to gain the respect of Whites. For a significant amount of time he told the Indians in South Africa that “in order to look civilized our dress and manners had as far as possible to approximate to the European standard,” (1993, p. 185). Even when reflecting on his experiences during the Boer War he noted that “the relations formed with whites during the war were the sweetest,” (p. 216). At its most violent expression of identity (during war) Gandhi found the relationships between Indians and whites to be at their best. One could also argue that the Boer War should have shown Gandhi that the unity of whites was based on violence and their collective approach to acquiring and securing resources, or to colonialism. After all, the Boers and the British had fought each other a few years earlier. Again, during the Zulu War Gandhi at first volunteered to fight alongside the settler government against the Africans. When the offer to join the army was turned down, he offered to form the ambulance corps to help the wounded soldiers. He was cognizant of the fact that the war was waged on the pretext of a non-existent rebellion, and he himself described it as a slaughter of the innocents, while grudgingly accepting that there was legitimacy in the Zulus refusing to submit to the hut tax. Just as the Indians were unwilling to pay unjust taxes to the settler government, the Zulus were not willing to pay taxes. While there is no reason to doubt that Gandhi formed the Indian Corps because of his belief in the legitimacy of the British Empire, in his dealings with the Zulus and Africans it appears as if he was not committed to ending racism as much as gaining a seat in the table of privilege.

Partly because of the current status of Mahatma Gandhi, the trend is to focus either on his life before 1906 when he was intent on becoming part of the dominant group by striving to find room in the white power structure of the day. Within that context, Gandhi appears as a condescending Indian racist even though he himself was a victim of racism. Other scholars focus on the post 1908 Gandhi, and as a result play down the racism that Gandhi displayed before the adoption of satyagraha. But splitting Gandhi into two periods and freezing him in either misses the point that Gandhi’s views changed over time. Just as he had learned racism, he unlearned it. The same is true regarding the other transformations in his personality and ideas in his journey to becoming the Great Soul.

From early childhood until just after 1906 Gandhi appears to have had a strong infatuation with the European world, and England in particular. Reflecting on his travel to study in England Gandhi wrote, “I thought to myself if I go to England not only shall I become a barrister, but I shall be able to see England, the land of philosophers and poets, the very centre of civilization,” (CWMG V 1, p. 42).
Even before setting foot on England, he had a very positive impression of what the country stood for. Those lofty ideals and expectations led him to believe that at one time England and India shared a common heritage. During his stay in England he changed his diet in the hope that his physique would approximate that of whites. By the time he left England he had come to view the British Empire as existing for the good of all its subjects. Between 1894 and 1906 while he was in South Africa, Gandhi was indeed a loyal servant of the Empire, and he was willing to pocket insults while seeking accommodation within the settler government. For a long period, Gandhi viewed whiteness as tied to a set of behaviors that each person could attain through enculturation and learning. However, his experiences in South Africa revealed that color made a big difference. In spite of his love for all things English and an unquestioning loyalty to the British Empire, he remained to most South African whites just another coolie.

Granted Gandhi’s status in the world, it is difficult for most Gandhian scholars to admit that during his stay in South Africa his vision of humanity did not include Africans. Part of this could be due to the fact that his method (Satyagraha) is associated with the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, and the work of Martin Luther King Jr., in particular. Part of this could be his initial desire to conform to the European or western model of what it means to be human. In other words, his positive reception in the dominant European world might be due to his initial love and appreciation of the European world and what it stood for. Yet there is more than ample evidence to show that Gandhi indeed had little concern about the affairs of blacks or Africans, and that prior to 1906 he strove to keep some distance between himself and Africans. While his philosophy and practice of nonviolence remain among the most radical, his attitude toward Africans remains problematic, and in a way condones the systematic racism that plagued the region in the 20th and 21st centuries.

GANDHI AND SOUTH AFRICAN BLACKS REVISITED

Prior to 1906 it could be legitimately argued that Gandhi had an unquestionably negative attitude towards Blacks. Even while in prison, he thought it wise that facilities be segregated so that Blacks would not share with Indians. For him it was “beyond the dignity of Indians to sleep in the same room with Kiffirs,” since at that time he believed there was nothing that Indians had in common with Blacks, (CWMG, V 9, p. 149). The point here is not to unearth the uncomfortable things about Gandhi, but rather to show that as much as he learned racism from the dominant culture, he was also able to unlearn it. In his quest for truth, he ended up rejecting the logic and practice of racism.

Gandhi’s relationship with Africans appears to have changed after 1908. There were radical changes in his attitude toward South African blacks especially after he had returned to India for the final time, and particularly after the Zulu War. Writing from India, he observed that black South Africans could hardly be described as savages, and expressed his hope that within a few years Western nations would stop exploiting Africa, (CWMG, 48). Reflecting on his experiences with South African
blacks after 1908, he wrote: “I yield to no one in my regard for the Zulus, the Bantus, and the other races of South Africa. I used to enjoy intimate relations with many of them. I had the privilege of advising them,” (Harijan, July 1, 1937). Du Toit (1996) reveals that Gandhi was intimately familiar with the work of John Dube, and might have been familiar with that of Isaiah Shembe who had an independent institution close to Phoenix Farm. In many respects, his quest for integration into white South Africa had largely been unsuccessful. Indeed, he began describing himself as black, and embraced/or endorsed socialism against capitalism or western civilization, (1996). Only a few months after helping the British during the Zulu War, South African Indians found themselves subject to the Black Act, which basically turned them into criminals as they had to be figure printed and carry passes when traveling into different parts of the country. A few scholars contend that there are intimations that initially the noncooperation movement was modeled on that exercised by South African blacks. Speaking to South African Indians before the march to resist pass laws Gandhi observed that “even the Kiffirs, who are less advanced than we, have resisted the government. The pass law applies to them as well, but they do not take out passes,” (CWMG, 5, p. 410). I have already made reference to the derogatory use of Kiffir, but that does not take away Gandhi’s real and implied awareness of the strategies used by South African blacks.

Dalton, (1996) credits the savagery of the Zulu War with transforming Gandhi perhaps in the same way as the Pietermaritzburg experience had done. The Zulu War confirmed to him that at its best and worst, western civilization was based on pillage and violence. It was after the Zulu War that he began taking vows that marked his break with aspects of western civilization. According to Dalton, the experiences during the Zulu War helped Gandhi realize that “racism, imperialism, and sexism are all related, all distinct, yet similar forms of domination,” (p. 9). After taking the vows and committing to nonviolence he set as one of his goals the deliverance of “the so-called weaker races of the earth from the crushing heels of Western exploitation,” (p. 99). His admiration of the British Empire gave way to total revulsion, and with his country in mind he observed that “if India copies England it is my firm conviction that she will be ruined,” (CWMG, V 10, p. 18). The western model of development or progress could not be copied or moved to India.

Although there is no evidence that he allowed or accepted South African blacks in the ashrams or Satyagraha, after he returned to India, Mahatma Gandhi advised South African Indians to work together with blacks, and observed that “Indians have too much in common with Africans to think of isolating themselves from them,” (CWMG, V 36, p. 190). He even drew inspiration from Booker T. Washington, observing that “he chose first of all to raise his people…a life as this teaches a lesson to all of us,” (CWMG V 3, p. 440). With time, Gandhi began to see the validity of African and Black civilizations. However, he was not knowledgeable of the strengths and depths of that civilization for he believed that “one day the black races will rise like the avenging Attila against their white oppressors unless someone presents them the weapon of satyagraha,” (Gandhi, 2007, p. 71). As Chapter Three shows, African cultures had enough resources to reconcile with
their oppressors without resorting to vengeance and mayhem, especially within the context of South Africa.

Towards the end of his life Gandhi had a very positive appreciation of Black South African culture, and Africa’s potential contribution to regenerating the spirit of humankind. At a time when racism was holding sway, and even before the emergence of academic black theology, he claimed regarding Jesus that “if he was reborn and went to South Africa and lived there today, he would have to live in a ghetto,” (Gandhi, 2007, p. 72). In that single sentence, Gandhi unequivocally dismissed the pretensions of the rich as the embodiment of the meaning of the Christian gospel. Amidst the squalor and suffering of the Africans in segregated South Africa was where Gandhi located the message of hope for humankind. In his opinion, South Africa had the potential to rewrite a new grammar of human values not based on western civilization. Perhaps what captures his rejection of any notion of white supremacy, or western civilization as possessing any universally redemptive qualities is his observation that “the greatest teachers of mankind…did not possess a white face,” (Gandhi, 1983, p. 282). The changes in his attitudes toward Blacks in particular and non whites in general reveal the many ways in which Gandhi had unlearned racism.

COUNTER-HEGEMONY AND CONSCIENCE

To understand Gandhi’s outline of the concept of swaraj it is also important to examine and study the concept of hegemony and the use of the conscience. To a great extent, his reflections on swaraj point to his reading of the cultural, material, and ideological circumstances that would make it easier for Indians to rule themselves in a qualitatively different way compared to the British. As such, his swaraj takes into consideration the importance of self-understanding and self-rule for transforming the state and the individual. According to Gramsci, to understand how hegemony works “a critical understanding of the self takes place…through a struggle of political hegemonies and opposing directions, first in the ethical field and then in that of politics prosper, in order to arrive at the working out at a higher level of one’s own conception of reality,” (1971, p. 333, as quoted in Fontana, 2006). To practice and embody counter-hegemony, Gandhi embraced the material conditions of the oppressed and sought to undo the ideological conditioning that made oppression possible before transforming the material conditions. Urbinati (1998) views hegemony as related to domination and subordination, with the later pertaining to “a relation of domination by which the subjects are deprived of their self-reliance as persons as well as citizens….powerlessness and a representation of oneself as an impotent hostage in the hands of an ineffable destiny,” (p. 370). Counter hegemony strives to make the powerless be aware of the power they possess.

The concept of hegemony is usually associated with Gramsci, particularly with regards to the role informed and uninformed consent play in legitimating ideas of the dominant class as well as the need for decolonizing the mind. Within the work of Gramsci, the study of hegemony helps with understanding how human and political relationships need not be reified and the ways people are shaped by
Hegemony is also a byproduct of the disenchantment with capitalism, and is often associated with Marxist analyses of society as well as the emergence of mass society. As the sections above make it clear, Mahatma Gandhi was familiar with Tolstoy, Marxism, and socialism. For Gandhi, understanding how dominant powers were able to maintain and perpetuate their domination over subordinate groups was central to establishing swaraj. Rustin, (1984) describes the effect of hegemony as that of shifting “the ground of analysis away from complex structures in which ideology is seen as one moment, to discourses which reject the idea of an external reality constraining social consciousness,” (p. 147). To a certain extent it can be argued that the study of understanding how hegemony works helps with debunking the belief that external coercion and compulsion leads to conformity and obedience to unjust laws. For Gandhi, each individual was imbued with a conscience that would enable them to resist obeying unjust laws, or committing any forms of himsa. As a result, each individual had a role to play in their own liberation. In a similar way, oppressors could not claim external coercion in enforcing unjust laws or exploiting others.

Haugaard, (2006) argues that hegemony deals with ways of understanding how power and domination work in society, as well as the sources of power. In most cases, analysis of power is confined to the material and visible: the military and other state apparatus as well as the economy. Within the context of Gandhi’s India and South Africa, a partial analysis would conclude that the sources of power were the military might of the British Empire and the economic resources which sustained it. The reality of military violence and economic deprivation or need could be used to coerce the subordinate or vanquished to comply, and the Zulu War reflected the use of such power. However, with regards to Indians in South Africa and India, in particular the middle and upper class Indians, it was not necessarily the threat of military violence and economic deprivation that enabled the British to have power. The British had managed to create a narrative that made it appear as if their interests and those of the Indians were the same. That would explain Gandhi’s defense of the British Empire before 1906: “if the Empire perishes, with it perish our cherished aspirations….To bring about [partnership in the Empire] we should have the ability to defend ourselves, that is, the ability to bear arms and to use them,” (Gandhi, 1983, p. 109). Such an attitude is closely related to what Lukacs (1971) describes as false consciousness, or what Malcolm X (Chapter Two) describes as the attitude of the House Negro.

Even under very oppressive conditions, Gandhi (1983) claimed that it was possible for the individual to assert their freedom and individuality, sometimes by refusing to cooperate with the oppressors. He observed that “a slave is a slave because he consents to slavery. If training in physical resistance is possible, why should that in spiritual resistance be impossible?” (p. 178). Gandhi was familiar with the history of slavery as well as the experiences of indentured Indian workers in South Africa. He had a deep knowledge of the workings of the caste system. He was also intimately acquainted with the horrors of war as he had witnessed
the Boer and Zulu Wars in South Africa. However, after 1906 Gandhi’s ideological critique of both colonialism and capitalism also focused on the active role that the oppressed played in their own predicament. Among the conclusions he came to was that “all exploitation is based on the cooperation, willing or forced, of the exploited,” (p. 248). It was partly on the basis of this understanding that the struggles for independence and freedom could be waged. With the observation that exploitation was enabled by the cooperation of the exploited, Gandhi argued that the occupation of India by the British was also made possible by the cooperation of the Indians themselves. Similarly, the success of the colonial capitalist economy was made possible by indigenous peoples consuming colonial products instead of what the locals produced. Although he highlighted the extent to which ideas played a role in perpetuating oppression, Gandhi did not shy away from making explicit the material or concrete effects of those ideas.

Gandhi viewed the possibility of the oppressor liberating the oppressed as an impossibility whether it was in the political or economic realms. This was regardless of nationality or social class: only the Indians could liberate themselves, and it was idle talk to imagine that the British could free India. In a similar vein, the wealthy class in India could not, without a preferential option for the poor, help liberate the paupers of India. More often than not, according to Gandhi, the wealthy classes had a false sense of generosity, and soothed their consciences through false charity:

The grinding poverty and starvation with which our country is afflicted is such that it drives more and more men every year into the ranks of beggars, whose desperate struggle for bread renders them insensible to all feelings of decency and self-respect. And our philanthropists, instead of providing work for them and insisting on their working…give them alms, (1983, p. 127).

What the oppressed needed, according to Gandhi, was an opportunity to develop themselves and to be self-sufficient or independent. Their own economic independence was integral to their self-rule. False charity, according to Gandhi, did not lead to any form of development, but turned donors into patrons who perpetuated poverty. Instead of viewing the rich and powerful as providing liberation, Gandhi saw the oppressed as having the power to humanize the oppressors. Speaking to the Economics Society, he observed that India’s “salvation can only come from the farmer (peasants). Neither lawyers, nor the doctors, nor the rich landlords can secure it,” (p. 113). As such, Gandhi rejects the ideology of the dominant power as the bearers of liberty. But Gandhi also knew that if he was rich he could not advocate for the liberation of the oppressed, and stated that he could not “hope to bring about economic equality…if I am the owner of fifty motor cars or even ten bighas of land. For that I have to reduce myself to level of the poorest of the poor,” (p. 69–70). Gandhi further argued that it was well nigh impossible for slaves to a system to free other slaves. To a great extent one can argue that Gandhi’s analysis of hegemony anticipates that of Adorno according to whom:

We might say, then, that progress originates in the fact that the justice that amounts to a repetition of sameness is unmasked as injustice and perpetual inequality. Where bourgeois society satisfies the concept it cherishes of itself
it knows no progress; where it knows progress it sins against its own law in which this offense is already present, and with this inequality it perpetuates the wrong that progress is supposed to transcend, (2006, p. 170).

The existence of class differences based on power or any other criteria makes it impossible for those with power to help the powerless without themselves giving up their power and privilege.

Gandhi was also aware of the power and significance of governmental structures, and the role the colonial government played in India and South Africa. The general impression was that the Empire and all governments existed for the good of the ordinary citizens, and that without them there would be chaos. The imagined fear of chaos also led people to tolerate and accept unjust systems. As with the case of the system he had left in South Africa, Gandhi argued that “even the most despotic government cannot stand except for the consent of the governed…which is often forcibly procured…..whether we advertise the fact or not, the moment we cease to support the government it dies a natural death,” (1983, p. 134–144). British rule of India, or any forms of colonization, for that matter, could never be said to be in the interest of the colonized.

Although it could be reasonably argued that individuals are shaped by their culture, in his analysis of the ways that the ideas of the dominant group exercise a stranglehold on the culture of the subordinate groups, Gandhi (1983) argued that it was possible for each individual to resist mass culture. He associated the exercise of the conscience with dharma, observing that “performance of one’s duty should be independent of public opinion,” (p. 188). While Dalton (1996) argues that a Gandhian ideal society would be characterized by conscionable anarchy, Gandhi’s stance on the need for each individual to obey their own conscience reveals the extent to which traditional societies have and had room for individual freedom and expression. For Gandhi the conscience was a relatively stronger and better alternative to violence as well as more reliable guide when it came to knowing what was true or false. While some might object to the reliability and validity of relying on the conscience, Gandhi’s belief on the oneness and goodness of humanity led him to believe that each person would act with the interests of the community at heart. In the Gandhian worldview human beings are naturally good, in contradistinction to the fallen and sinful nature of humankind in most Western worldviews.

HUMAN NATURE IN THE WORK OF MAHATMA GANDHI

The compartmentalization of human nature into various components that makes sense within a Western or Eurocentric framework, does not always obtain in the nonwestern world, especially with regards to Mahatma Gandhi. In Young India Gandhi wrote that he believed “in advaita (non-duality)...in the essential unity of man, and for that matter, of all that lives,” (4 December, 1924). Gandhi further claimed that his belief in the oneness of humankind was derived from his convictions in the oneness of God, (Bose, 1948). Just as God could be said to be in everything, for Gandhi, human nature could not be easily divided into different sections.
The quest for truth, sometimes described as Satyagraha, ahimsa, and Moksha greatly influenced Gandhi’s understanding of what it means to be human and the purpose or goal of life.

How are we to understand human nature, or what it means to be a human being, based on the work of Mahatma Gandhi, particularly his work in South Africa? To a great extent, Gandhi’s view of human nature was shaped by his own cultural background and experiences in South Africa and India. Gandhi drew from different religions, including Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. However, in refining and defining his view of human nature he depended mostly on insights from Hinduism and Indian languages. Gandhi subtitled his autobiography “The story of my experiments with truth.” It is within the quest for truth that he frames his statements about human nature. Even though his South African experiences had been shaped largely by racism, violence, the Boer and Zulu Wars, he came to the conclusion that war and violence were against the best of human nature, that when humans knew the truth, they would opt to be non-violent. It is from this observation that he adopted Satyagraha as the method and name for the strategy he was using to combat injustice in both South Africa and India.

In the following section I discuss aspects of moksha, satyagraha, ahimsa, swadeshi, and swaraj with regards to Gandhi’s concept of what it means to be human. These are some of the central tenets in his understanding of human nature. For Gandhi, truth (satyagraha) was closely tied to nonviolence (ahimsa). Central to Gandhi’s understanding of human nature is the possibility of transcending duality or multiple personalities and identities. Such a person is at one with the world and him/herself. The ideal person is a reflection of near perfect serenity in the face of many challenges. Such a person is:

A devotee who is jealous of none, who is a fount of mercy…who treats alike cold and heat, happiness and misery, who is ever forgiving, who is always contended…who renounces all fruit, good or bad…who is untouched by respect or disrespect….Such devotion is inconsistent with the existence at the same time of strong attachments, (1983, p. 62–63).

It could be reasonably argued that for Gandhi, the ideal human being was one who was already practicing the Gandhian cardinal virtues, namely, (nonviolence) Ahimsa, (celibacy) Brahmacharya, and (non-possession) Aparigraha. But these teachings are found in almost every civilization and culture.

MOKSHA: ONENESS WITH GOD

I begin by discussing the concept of Moksha because in many ways it appears to be prized higher than both Satyagraha and ahimsa. At the same time, the concepts appear to be co-equal members of a triumvirate in the best of human nature in the work of Mahatma Gandhi. To a certain extent, they are all variations of truth. Gandhi claimed that his life’s work had to be understood as a quest to attain Moksha, “what I want to achieve…is self-realization, to see God face to face, to attain Moksha…I live and move and have my being in pursuit of this goal...
all I do by way of speaking, writing, and all ventures in the political field are
directed to this same end,” (1993, p. xxvi). Gandhi elaborated that for him Moksha
meant seeing God, whom he also equated with Truth. At the same time he made it
clear that he had not yet found or seen God: “but for me…the Absolute Truth, the
Eternal Principle…is God. There are innumerable definitions of God because His
manifestations are innumerable…I worship God as Truth only. I have not yet found
Him, but I am seeking after Him,” (p. xxvii–xxviii). However, the path to Moksha
necessarily goes through both Satyagraha and ahimsa.

Gandhi understood the quest for attaining Moksha within the context of moving
toward perfectibility. Such perfection or perfectibility did not come from disengaging
the world, but in the context of community. Cognizant of those who believed that
no one could be perfect, Gandhi noted that “to say that perfection is not attainable
on this earth is to deny God,” (Gandhi, 2008, p. 39). The existence of God was also
the basis for Gandhi’s conviction in the goodness of humankind to the extent that
he could declare “not to believe in the possibility of permanent peace is to disbelieve
in the godliness of human nature,” (p. 42). Attaining Moksha, made godliness
possible within human beings.

While seeing the face of God is the ultimate goal, Gandhi does not specify which
God it is he is referring to. Consequently, Gandhi did not seek to convert people
from one religious tradition to another. Staal (1989) contends that current non-
western religions are a byproduct of the historical encounter between the West and
others, and as a result the concept of religion or God as it exists in the West is not
applicable when talking about Moksha. The categorization and naming of religions
as Hinduism, Buddhism, etc., is viewed as a western invention since people in
those parts of the world rarely used those words to describe themselves or their
beliefs. Similarly, western pathways to understanding the ways the individual attains
oneness with God might not be applicable. In describing the desire to attain Moksha
or to see the face of God, Gandhi does not confine God to any one religion or
tradition, but rather to one universal law of love and nonviolence, which he equates
with truth. Just as Gandhi did not see any major distinction or difference among
religions, at the end he did not see any differences between people governed by
the law of love.

Considering that Gandhi viewed his life as a quest to see the face of God, it is
possible to trace some of the characteristics and qualities he considered essential
for attaining perfection or moving towards perfectibility. Among these include
self-discipline and purification. Gandhi often fasted with the aim of achieving
specific goals. He held fasts in South Africa and India, and in most of the instances
he believed his fasts were successful. After the Zulu War, Gandhi also took the
vow of celibacy (Brahmacharya) as a way toward attaining self-discipline and a
virtuous life. However, the adoption of the vow of celibacy did not necessarily
imply disengaging the world. The minimization of personal and egotistical desires
was replaced by selfless love in the service of humanity. To a great extent, for
Gandhi, one of the initial steps towards attaining Moksha was freedom from
attachment, (Gandhi, 2008). Yet this nonattachment (Aparigraha) did not imply
or mean the end of dharma, or other obligations to the community. While Gandhi
opted for voluntary poverty by adopting Aparigraha, he did not see poverty as a desirable condition for any people.

SATYAGRAHA

According to Mahatma Gandhi (1996) satyagraha is a combination of two Hindi words, and together they mean ‘truth force.’ In the context of Gandhi’s work, satyagraha implied standing for what is true, and the ultimate belief that in the end truth will prevail over what is false. One of the dilemmas this poses is that of trying to define what truth is, and how to arrive at it. Is it possible to agree on what is true about human nature, or is truth itself always culturally relative? Gandhi saw truth as closely associated with nonviolence, since for him “lying is the mother of violence,” (1983, p. 183). As such, violence was closely related to falsehood, or to what was not the best in human nature. In Gandhi’s view, truth was the supreme force, and those who stood for the truth were bound to be ultimately victorious.

Satyagraha, according to Gandhi (1996) is also related to and dependent on empirical verification of what works. In other words, the truth that Gandhi views as essential to the creation of a better world is not solely derived from philosophical reflection. Satyagraha was based on the conclusions he drew from the experiments he conducted, or “experiments with truth.” These conclusions were a result of engaging the world, carefully reflecting on what worked towards creating a more harmonious world. Such experiments ranged from healing the body, issues related to celibacy, and the place of nonviolence in the struggle for human liberation. To a certain extent it could be argued that Satyagraha reveals his understanding of what constitutes truth, how life should be lived, and ways toward attaining truth.

Gandhi arrived at Truth/Satyagraha and the ideal society through empirical verification of data as well as philosophical reflection. Koetting & Malisa (2004) observe that “conceptualizations about the good life, the nature of humankind…take place through the descriptive, normative, and analytic perspectives,” (p. 1013). In the same work, they note that “the Western tradition in philosophy has wrestled with…ontology/metaphysics…epistemology…and axiology,” (p. 1011). Gandhi studied in England, and was familiar with Western philosophy and Western civilization in general. In addition, he studied the Koran as well as Hindu scriptures. The development and evolution of Gandhi’s concept of how the human being comes to understand what is true reveals aspects of Hegelianism where “the modern self-critical and self determining spirit [is seen as]…rejecting everything not authorized by its own standards…as a stage from objective to absolute,” (Habermas, 2005, p. 177). Gandhi’s rejection of violence as a means to creating a just society begins with his experiments in South Africa, and from the South African experiences he deemed nonviolence to be a universal truth about human nature. Consequently, it can be argued that there are dimensions of analytical reasoning or deduction in how one arrives at what is true. Gandhi generally begins with himself as the subject of the experiments, and from the particular he moves to the universal, or rather, generalizes or universalizes his conclusions. That there are parallels in the ways Gandhi sees as the path to arriving at what is true does not necessarily imply that he used similar methods.
MAHATMA GANDHI

However, the individual is not the ultimate source of truth. For Gandhi, the validity or place of nonviolence as truth was also grounded on metaphysical reality. Gandhi (1996) contended that the Gospels, the Koran, and Hindu scriptures pointed to love rather than force or violence as the better path. Belief in God, or a supreme being was central to Gandhi’s understanding of what it meant to be human and to attaining the truth. Without belief in God, Gandhi contended that it was impossible to be a satyagrahi. He even saw his own work as part of a divine plan: “God laid the foundation of my work in South Africa and sowed the seed of the fight for national self-respect,” (p. 140). The reason peoples and nations resorted to violence, according to Gandhi, was that “we forget the principle of nonviolence, which is the essence of all religions,” (1996b, p. 52). He also acknowledged that he learned about the idea of non-violence from listening to the Sermon on the Mount. Partly because of the derivation of truth for the metaphysical realm, Gandhi always associated truth with ethics or right conduct. Consequently, truth could not be used for obtaining unethical gains, whether financially or politically.

In his writings Gandhi (1996) often indicated that satyagraha was closely linked to ahimsa, or nonviolence. Roughly translated and paraphrased, truth could not be identified with any forms of violence, and violence itself was contrary to the best in human nature. According to Gandhi, “without ahimsa it is not possible to find truth. Ahimsa and Truth are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentangle and separate them,” (p. 45). Nonviolence was viewed as the highest good, and could be regarded as perhaps a guiding practical philosophy on how to achieve and maintain a qualitatively better life. Both Satyagraha and ahimsa were viewed by Gandhi as related to the whole of life, including politics, economics, and personal life.

Dalton (2000) contends that the origins of satyagraha lie in South Africa. Even Gandhi himself stated that Satyagraha was born in South Africa in 1908, (Gandhi, 1996). In looking for a word to describe the nature of the struggle he was leading in South Africa, Gandhi relied on his language and culture. None of the concepts or languages he had learned in his many travels in Europe and Africa could define the nature of his struggle. Chakrabarty (2006) defines satyagraha as a combination of truth and force, originally made from satya and ahimsa. Although satyagraha was originally designed within the context of the struggle for the rights of South African Indians, it is possible Gandhi had observed the futility of violence from his work and experiences in South Africa. After all, initially he had been a loyal servant of the British Empire, and had supported the British during the Boer and Zulu Wars. Neither war brought about lasting peace, nor did the military resistance offered by South African blacks earn them even grudging respect from Gandhi. His appeal to the British Empire for the recognition of the rights of Indians in South Africa had not yielded any meaningful concessions. Nonviolence and non-cooperation were the few options left at Gandhi’s disposal as he strove for the rights of South African Indians. Yet, as Villa-Vicencio (1990) points out, South African blacks had already resorted to strikes and non-cooperation to achieve some of their ends, especially when it came to issues of compensation. What distinguished satyagraha from the strikes and non-cooperation waged by South African blacks.
include the use of non-cooperation for political ends, not just economic compensation. In addition, Bondurant (1988) contends that at the centre of satyagraha is truth and love. As mentioned earlier, initially Gandhi did not identify with the plight or struggles of black South Africans. As such, his love did not include the majority of those affected by the violence of racism. However, towards the end of his life Gandhi rejected the version of United States democracy because of its racism, and predicted that blacks in the United States would be the ambassadors and embodiment of non-violence at its best, (Kytle, 1969).

Gandhi argued that satyagraha was a universal law applicable to all people in all circumstances, and incomparably better than any military force or violence, (Chakrabarty, 2006). Yet it also required a belief in a God of love. Gandhi expected those who adhered to satyagraha to be brave even in the face of death. Part of the metaphors that Gandhi used to describe satyagraha came from his knowledge of the Christian faith. As a form of resistance, satyagraha implied it was possible to resist violence, and in the end convert persecutors to accept the validity of the claims of the persecuted.

What distinguishes satyagraha from ubuntu? Within the context of South Africa, ubuntu seeks, or calls for reconciliation of former adversaries, as well as mutual forgiveness (Chapter Three). Villa-Vicencio (1990) argued that South African blacks had engaged in nonviolent resistance or civil disobedience from after the Zulu War until the emergence of uMkhonto weSizwe. Without reconciliation, a mutual indifference without a true community might be the norm. The concept and practice of amandla (power) also distinguishes ubuntu from satyagraha. Mandela (2003) notes that the Gandhian strategy of nonviolence had its limitations, hence the ANC resorted to armed struggle to overcome apartheid. Satyagraha offers a radical critique and rejection of military violence. Ubuntu, on the other hand, rejects passivity and docility in the face of dehumanizing forces. However, it is not violence for the sake of violence. Just as ubuntu is built on the question or attempt to define what it means to be a human being, satyagraha, also attempts to answer that question, but from an Hindi perspective. In ubuntu, one of the objectives of the political struggle was to gain power and to use it to create a society with justice for all.

AHIMSA

If satyagraha stands for truthforce, ahimsa, according to Gandhi stood for non-violence. As such, according to Gandhi (1996), truth could only be attained through nonviolent means. Gandhi had witnessed two wars in South Africa, and neither could be said to have created a better world for anyone in South Africa. He had also tried to win favor within a racial caste system in South Africa, and despite his efforts to win favors in an unjust political and economic order, his overtures were rebuffed. Ahimsa, according to Gandhi, implied a spirit of goodwill, charity, and love for all people, and even extended to all living beings. It was based on the belief in the dignity and worth of all human beings. Merton, (2007) argues that Gandhi’s belief in nonviolence “is based on the assumption that human nature in its essence is one and therefore unfailingly responds to the advances of love,” (p. 38).
It was within the context of both ahimsa and Satyagraha that Gandhi (2007) began talking about the need to end both racism and colonialism. In his view, “the real white man’s burden is to desist from the hypocrisy which is eating into them. It is time white men learned to treat every human being as their equal,” (p. 71). The violence that colonialism and racism inflicted on nonwhites was also, according to Gandhi, tearing at the soul of the colonizers and racists. However, even in the face of violence and brute force, Gandhi implored the Satyagrahis to not retaliate with any form of violence.

Many scholars define ahimsa as a strategy for conflict resolution, (Chakrabarty, 2006). At the same time, others view it as mode for changing social and political conditions, (Bondurant, 1988). While satyagraha and ahimsa are often used interchangeably by some Ghandian scholars, a few note that satyagraha predates ahimsa, especially within the context of South Africa. Chakrabarty (2006) contends that prior to the Rowlatt Act of 1919 it was mainly satyagraha that was central to Gandhi’s practice of nonviolence. After the anti-Rowlatt satyagraha, ahimsa became a central piece, and informed the practice of satyagraha. While satyagraha was initially for local political rights, ahimsa combined with satyagraha were for the national struggle for political independence, (Brown, 1972). This combination was suited for struggles against imperialism. In many respects, ahimsa corresponds to the ubuntu concept of *amandla*, with the exception that *amandla* did not completely negate the use of revolutionary violence.

As a component of satyagraha, ahimsa informed the nature of resistance by advocating love, or a unique disposition toward the oppressors. As such, it sought to instill a spirit of goodwill toward those that the Indians were struggling against. While it was important not to harm or injure the enemy, it was also important to love them. Chakrabarty (2006) argues that in addition to absence of a desire to harm others, “ahimsa had a positive or active meaning of love and charity,” (p. 59). Gandhi saw ahimsa as applicable to the whole human family. After his final return to India, Gandhi saw blacks, particularly those in the United States, as part of the embodiment of nonviolence well before the Civil Rights Movement began.

After 1906 Gandhi distanced himself from any and all forms of military violence, and reflecting back on his role during the Zulu and Boer Wars he was adamant that after Satyagraha he would “rather risk imprisonment and even the gallows if...forced to take up arms or otherwise take part in military operations,” (1996, p. 181). This was a radical change bordering on conscientious objection from someone who had at one time volunteered to fight on behalf of the British Empire.

While many scholars write as if Gandhi’s ideas were developed without any meaningful contact or interaction with *ubuntu* or African cultures, in the section dealing with women and class, I argue that his ideas are neither western nor Indian. In his works on satyagraha, Gandhi argued that women were the bearers of truth, of ahimsa, (Chakrabarty, 2006). The change in his attitude toward and treatment of women points to non-western and non-Indian influences. The same can be said, to a certain extent, with regard to class and the caste system. Mandela (1994) noted that the South African society he grew up in was patrilineal, and women had more power and rights as compared with patriarchal societies.
Although Gandhi embraced and struggled for women’s rights, to a great extent his vision of women’s rights and freedom reflects a worldview reminiscent of that described by Mandela.

SWARAJ

In his description of swaraj, Mahatma Gandhi reveals the extent to which he saw independence and freedom as multifaceted and not confined to one sphere. As with most of Gandhi’s ideas, the concept of swaraj draws from Western and non-Western ideas. Parek (1996) observes that the major ideas on swaraj are contained in *Hind Swaraj*, which was written while Gandhi was not in India. Although it partly addresses the nature of political independence, it also delves into the nature of human freedom. In both contexts, Gandhi contrasts internal and external freedom, and seems to place premium on the former. Against the colonial system of the day, Gandhi, like many nationalists, saw the ending of the colonial venture as central to defining independence. But freedom from colonial oppression had to be followed by freedom from ignorance and greed, or the desire to emulate former oppressors. In both circumstances, Gandhi (1996) called for the use of nonviolence in achieving swaraj. Instead of resorting to military violence to achieve political independence, he stated that his swaraj “will be, therefore, not a result of the murder of others, but a voluntary act of continual self-sacrifice,” (p. 171). He had witnessed war in South Africa, in particular the Boer and Zulu Wars. Although the British had emerged victorious in both, Gandhi was convinced that “freedom won through bloodshed is fraud and no freedom,” (p. 181). Chapter Three, to a certain extent, reveals the possibility of salvation and freedom through revolutionary violence.

Swaraj is a combination of two words meaning self (swa) and rule (raj). As such, the interplay on the word swaraj could be taken to imply that Mahatma Gandhi was implying political self government or independence. It could also be interpreted as implying that each individual has the responsibility for their own personal conduct. In light of the many vows that Gandhi took, including brahmacharya, the relationship between individual self-rule and political self-government does not seem to be farfetched. For Gandhi, swaraj was to be achieved by peaceful means with no room for personal aggrandizement. Intimating the creation of a classless society, he noted that he was working “for an India in which there shall be no high class and low class of people…women shall enjoy the same rights as men,” (1983, p. 171). Self rule necessarily implied giving up the desire to rule or oppress other people whether by virtue of gender or class differences, and these same ideas reverberate in the work of Mandela and Malcolm X as well.

Within the work of Mahatma Gandhi, the concept of self rule has to be understood in relation to the attainment of Moksha. Self control and self discipline were viewed by Gandhi as part of purification and a rejection of attachment to material objects or himsa. Swaraj was also understood as the realization of the reign of God whereby the individual practices selfless love while experiencing spiritual freedom. Although the freedom or self-rule experienced was personal, the community remained important. Without such love, Gandhi reckoned it was nearly impossible the optimism that
was essential to believing in the goodwill of humankind or to become part of the reign/kingdom of God. Absent love and optimism, Gandhi observed that “the pessimist, being himself a prey of violent attachments and dislikes, looks upon every person as his enemy…he flits from pleasure to pleasure, daily tiring of them…and finally dies unloved, unwept, unsung,” (2008, p. 40). Without self-rule the individual remains trapped in samsara and subject to himsa, and consequently far from truth.

Although political freedom from colonial powers was important in Gandhi’s outline of swaraj, economic, cultural, and individual/personal freedom played a huge part in his conception of independence. As with the nature of truth, Gandhi did not compartmentalize freedom into different categories. In articulating his vision of a free India he portrayed the all-encompassing nature and noted that for him independence meant “political, economic…entire freedom from British capitalists and capital, as well as their Indian counterparts,” (2007, p. 44). It was not just the end of British rule and occupation of India that mattered, but the end of an oppressive system that could not be legitimated even if run by Indians themselves. Gandhi was explicit on the distinction between British capital and Indian capital, and often pointed out the need for capital, since it guaranteed leverage and power that could be used to transform conditions for the poorest of the poor in India. What Gandhi achieved in his conceptualization of swaraj was to reveal the extent to which freedom and independence are more than military conquests of the material domain.

While Gandhi valued the need for economic freedom and independence, he hardly equated it with industrialization or the rapid and major transformation and adoption of modern technologies. Instead, for him, local technologies, in particular the spinning wheel (charkha) was better suited to the needs of India. Not only would the spinning wheel make it possible for most Indians to be gainfully employed, but for Gandhi (1983) the charkha was “not only a symbol of simplicity and economic freedom, but it is also a symbol of peace,” (p. 195). In many respects the spinning wheel represented indigenous technological innovation that was appropriate for the Indian context. For Gandhi, economic independence was so important he believed it was better to live a simple life than to be dependent on the charity of other nations. The introduction of machines, while a labor and time-saving device, was for Gandhi also a way to deny ordinary Indians a chance to earn a living.

Economic independence was not only limited to the use of the spinning wheel and employment of villagers but to the consumption and purchase of locally produced goods. Gandhi argued that he was not against internationalization, but firmly believed India’s economic independence could not be built on an import-based system. Consequently he encouraged Indians to take pride in their own products, including wearing Indian produced clothes, (1983). Self-reliance (economic and political) was an essential component of swaraj, and Gandhi believed that any country that depended on another for its food supplies was destined to perpetual dependence. Even at a time when parts of India were in need of grain, Gandhi objected, while observing that “import of food grains is the worst form of slavery. There is nothing more degrading for a country than to beg from others when it can meet its own requirements,” (1996, p. 137).
Gandhi linked political and economic swaraj to internal or psychological freedom. As such, he envisioned a return to the best cultural practices in India as well as a decolonization of the mind with regards to Western ideas and cultural practices. While the exodus of the British from India could have been viewed as a political victory, for Gandhi “mere withdrawal of the English is not independence. It means the consciousness in the average villager that he is the maker of his own destiny,” (1983, p. 253). In the previous sections I examined the concept of hegemony in Gandhi’s thought. In many respects, he viewed cultural and psychological domination as a component of the military, political, and economic domination of India.

Needless to say, Gandhi was also aware of the independence of Western countries, or advanced capitalist countries in general. At a time when most colonized nations were struggling for political independence, European countries could claim that they had already attained freedom. While they could flaunt their ideals as universal and worth adopting at a universal level, Gandhi tried to read beyond the surface appearances, and argued that any form of independence that depended on violence for its security was not swaraj:

The people of Europe have no doubt political power but no Swaraj. Asian and African races are exploited for their partial benefit, and they, on their part, are being exploited by the ruling class or caste under the sacred name of democracy. At the root, therefore, the disease appears to be the same as in India. The same remedy is, therefore, likely to be applicable. Shorn of all the camouflage, the exploitation of the masses of Europe is sustained by violence, (1961, p. 76).

If European independence was dependent on the exploitation of the colonies, it could not be in a real sense described as independence. In addition, Gandhi saw the existence of the class system or class structures in European societies as indicative of continued oppression. True swaraj, according to Gandhi, would move away from violence, imperialism, and racism:

My notion of democracy is that under it the weakest should have the same opportunity as the strongest. That can never happen except through non-violence. No country in the world today shows any but patronizing regard for the weak. The weakest, you say, go to the wall. Take your own case. Your land is owned by a few capitalist owners. The same is true of South Africa. These large holdings cannot be sustained except by violence, veiled if not open. Western democracy as it functions today is diluted Nazism or Fascism. At best it is merely a cloak to hide the Nazi and the Fascist tendencies of imperialism, (1961, p. 11).

An argument could be easily made that Gandhi’s conception of human freedom, or freedom in general, differed from what availed in western nomenclature.

**MASCULINITY/FEMININITY/HUMANITY**

The split between masculinity and femininity with regards to understanding human nature is not necessarily applicable within the work of Gandhi after his adoption of
satyagraha. In the overriding quest to attain moksha, Gandhi seems to have abandoned the dualism that is associated with western thought systems. In *Young India* he wrote that he believed in “advaita, non duality…the essential unity of man, and for that matter, of all that exists,” (4 December 1924). Partly as a result of being jolted by the masculine violence he witnessed during the Boer and Zulu Wars, he embraced femininity as the embodiment of the best in human nature without giving up home on masculinity. The oneness in masculinity and femininity is best reflected by Gandhi’s own description that his ideal was that “a man should remain a man and yet should become a woman; similarly a woman should remain woman and yet become man,” (as quoted in Richards, 2005, p. 120). Advaita would also help in creating and nurturing both swadeshi and sarvodaya.

Many scholars have pointed out that Mahatma Gandhi’s descriptions of womanhood and femininity were from a relatively middle class background, (Thapar, 1993; Patel, 1988; Kishwar, 1985). They also make it clear that Gandhi was educated in the West (England) and was also familiar with western ideals and ideas on the sexes. Such scholars encourage caution on the euphoria that surrounds the ‘progressive’ vision of womanhood in the thought of Gandhi. However, they also acknowledge the impact of traditional Indian cultures on Gandhi’s evolving ideas on femininity and masculinity.

The issue of gender and sexuality played a central role in Gandhi’s understanding of human nature. As with other issues that Gandhi explored, gender and sexuality were examined within the context of modern civilization (capitalism), Indian traditional cultures, and various religious insights. Kishwar (1985) observes that Gandhi’s first experiences with the types of political power women could exert was in South Africa. It was there that he saw Indian women from different class and religious backgrounds struggle together when their marriages were viewed as illegal by the white settler government. He himself acknowledged that Satyagraha became more successful in South Africa after the women began playing an active role in it, (Gandhi, 1985). Prior to 1906 Gandhi had primarily worked within the framework of a western model of masculinity. He momentarily changed his diet so as to be bulky like the Englishmen he saw in England. His desire to enlist in the military and the subsequent formation of the Ambulance Corps during the Boer and Zulu Wars were a way to prove the masculinity of Indians. If Englishmen could fight, so could Indian men.

After the beginning of Satyagraha, Gandhi’s vision of womanhood changed, and gravitated towards Hindu/Indian and non-western women in general. However, Gandhi did not seek to polarize or create a dualism of the sexes, but rather a unity based on a shared humanity. As his understanding of the struggles women faced increased he began identifying the fate of the nation with the best of womanhood, and to a great extent laid the maladies facing India on the pathologies associated with masculinity and patriarchy. Patel, (1988) sees Gandhi as a feminist who refused to take women as objects of any liberation movement in India, but as subjects who could play an effective role in creating new political and economic conditions. In many respects, Gandhi’s views on women were radical even by the standards of his own generation. However, his views were also informed by Hindu culture
and traditions. Thapar, (1993) observes that in Indian culture and tradition it was
the norm to deify women.

Although Gandhi did not deify women, he equated them with the best in what
humanity could aspire to be. Contrary to western thought where women are regarded
as the weaker sex, Gandhi (1983) claimed that compared to and with men, women
are “the nobler of the two…the embodiment of sacrifice, silent suffering, humility,
faith, and knowledge,” (p. 213). He saw in their patient enduring of the difficult
conditions they lived under, evidence of non-violence in practice. In his autobiography
and other writings he pointed out that women represented Ahimsa, the highest and
noblest virtue in Hinduism.

While the easier way would have been to blame women for poverty and
prostitution, Gandhi turned the tables and ascribed those to patriarchy and the
subordination of women in general. When it came to the plight of Indian women at
the hands of Indian men, the concept of hegemony did not really apply as men were
solely responsible for that blight: “of all the evils which man has made himself
responsible, none is so degrading, so shocking, so brutal as his abuse of the better
half of humanity, the female sex,” (1983, p. 213). It is also possible to read Gandhi’s
vow of Brahmacharya as a way to not free himself from passion and attachment
and to take the burden off his wife as well. The horror and consternation with
which many readers (and some of Gandhi’s associates) greeted his sharing the bed
with women while naked is understandable within and outside the puritanical
confines of western morality. But in his experiments, radical and unorthodox as
they were, Gandhi showed that it was possible to have non-sexual relationships
even under very close and intimate contact.

Gandhi also critiqued and rejected aspects of Hindu culture and tradition that
sanctioned the oppression of women, including child marriages and widowhood. In
abusing women, Gandhi claimed, “society recedes from God as well as swaraj,”
(CWMG vol. 27, p. 309). There was nothing to be gained in manipulating religion
and tradition to gain advantage over women. Without men voluntarily taking up
the spirit and practice of self sacrifice that was near universal in women, Gandhi
concluded that Hinduism would remain imperfect or disfigured.

GANDHI AND ANTI-CAPITALISM

The battle over Gandhi endorsing one economic system over another usually means
that scholars working in western academies are hesitant to point to his attitude toward
capitalism. Scholars working in developing nations generally see Gandhi through
western eyes, and as such might not be aware of his anti-capitalist stance. It is beyond
doubt that prior to 1906 Gandhi saw himself within a capitalist system, and strove
to consolidate it. However, after the establishment of Phoenix and Tolstoy Farms,
he took a decidedly Marxist view of economics, war, and violence. He was adamant
that a peaceful society, one that was governed by ahimsa, was mutually incompatible
with capitalism. According to him it was impossible to “build non-violence on
a factory civilization…rural economy as I have conceived it eschews exploitation
altogether, and exploitation is the essence of violence,” (Gandhi, 2007, p. 68).
The link between colonialism, violence and capitalism was almost indisputable. Capitalism would make ahimsa impossible. In this book, my understanding of capitalism follows that of Marx, and at a socio-economic and psycho-political level implies the pursuit of self interest and profit on the basis of the concept of the survival of the fittest. It is based on the belief that competition, rather than collaboration, is essential for progress. As such, my critique is also informed by insights from the discipline and language of critical theory.

Gandhi saw the profit motive/incentive that marks the triumph of capitalism, as founded on dishonesty and manipulation, (2007). Basing his conclusions from Phoenix and Tolstoy Farms, he stated his preference for collective (workers) or state ownership of the means of production as one of the ways to minimize exploitation. After observing that “what is true is that honesty is incompatible with the amassing of a large fortune,” he stated that under individual or free enterprise “we are all thieves, but most of us are tolerant towards those that are found out and are not of ordinary run. What is man if not a thief who openly charges as much as he can for the goods he sells?” (p. 76). The shift in Gandhi’s attitude toward capitalism was so radical, and his critique so uncompromising that he was convinced that western civilizations in general “live on the colored races by exploiting them,” (p. 77). Part of the change might have been due to his readings of Tolstoy, but it is also possible that he had realized that the industrialization of India had changed the social and political/moral landscape of the country.

While it is apparent that Gandhi rejected capitalism, his turn toward, and embrace of socialism or socialistic practices is very explicit. His brand of socialism, though, differed from that which he saw as occurring in the Soviet Union or Russia. In Gandhi’s view, “truth and ahimsa must incarnate in socialism,” (2007, p. 78). Among one of the traits of this new society was a gradual disappearance of socio-economic class. He began critiquing the existence of the caste system, seeing in it one of the cruelties and shortcomings of ancient civilizations. His new criteria for human worth moved from economic might or Eurocentric culture to advaita, recognizing and acknowledging the humanity of all by virtue of their being children of God. At the heart of the ideal community would be sarvodaya, or working for the common good or non-violent socialism, (Brown, 2000). Towards the end of his life his views had moved closer to ubuntu (Chapter Three) with the recognition that “man becomes man only by recognizing his dependence on others,” (CWMG, V 88, p. 231). In such a context, the bonds that bind people to each other are constructed on compassion and collective interests rather than atomized and individuated self-preservation. Roy, (1984) states that not only was Gandhi’s vision of a new society against personal aggrandizement, but it placed emphasis on “the essential unity of existence since it sees the one reflected in all, and all reflected in one,” (p. 41). In words that foreshadow Malcolm X’s vision of the ideal society (Chapter Two) Mahatma Gandhi saw the strength of socialism as reflected in that “the prince and the peasant, the wealthy and the poor, the employer and the employee are all on the same level…it is all unity,” (Gandhi, 1996, p. 139). He saw his role in transforming social and economic conditions as joining and identifying with the poorest of the poor. Indicative of the distance he was placing between himself and capitalism, he claimed “to be
foremost a communist,” (p. 141). Such a declaration shows the camp with which he identified towards the end, when he had become Mahatma. However, it should also be made clear that Gandhi’s version of communism differed from that which existed in then Russia. Even though he declared that he fought capitalism, he was critical of the then expressions of communism, especially its appropriation of utilitarianism, (Gandhi, 1983). It is also true that Gandhi disavowed any ism, and at one time declared himself to be a different kind of anarchist.

Even before the development and use of the term globalization of capital, Mahatma Gandhi was cognizant of the international ties that bound capitalists together in a network for systematic plundering of the poorest. Global capitalism, tied to imperialism, made any prospects of universal peace almost impossible. For peace to exist it was important that, “big nations shed their desire of exploitation and the spirit of violence, of which war is the natural expression,” (2007, p. 47). This does not imply that without capitalism there would be no war, but that capitalism and greed increase the likelihood of war. Indeed, many observers note that most of the world wars were waged or initiated by countries with capitalist economic relations. Gandhi himself attributed the First and Second World Wars to human greed and the desire for ill gotten wealth.

Gandhi’s vision of a free India, of a free world could hardly be described as supporting any form of capitalism or capitalistic social relations. Crass materialism was deemed as not part of Indian culture especially with regard to the best of ancient Indian civilization. Brown opines that “at the heart of Indianness was a civilization that elevated the moral in contrast to the godlessness of the materially oriented west,” (1996, p. 27). In the India of Mahatma Gandhi’s, this ideal community could be found in the rural areas, or areas that had not yet been touched by westernization. It was for this reason that he claimed urban centers were not representative of India. As if gravitating towards a Lukacsian viewpoint, Gandhi began viewing peasants as the agents for the regeneration of India.

Because of the predominance of either capitalism or Marxism in discourses about economic systems, other alternatives are generally invisible. Yet there are economic relationships that neither can capture. In a similar way, just because someone is not a capitalist does not necessarily imply they are socialist, and the reverse is true. There are a number of occasions when Gandhi seems appreciative of aspects of capitalism as well as socialism. Yet in the end he charts his own course with regards to economic relations locally and globally. Neither capitalism nor socialism can claim perfection or ability to address the problems of human suffering. But the violence that is inherent to capitalism makes it the less desirable alternative. Regardless, Gandhi was optimistic in that he believed human beings could unlearn the exploitative tendencies in capitalism. In contradistinction to orthodox Marxism, Gandhi stated that he did “not believe the capitalists and landlords are all exploiters by any inherent necessity or there is a basic or irreconcilable antagonism between their interests and those of the masses,” (Gandhi, 1983, p. 248). Just as with the case with racism, Gandhi believed it was possible for people to unlearn acquisitiveness or the desire to amass wealth. In a nod to aspects of wealth redistribution associated with socialism, he observed that “if each
MAHATMA GANDHI

retained possession of only what he needed no one would be in want and all would live in contentment,” (p. 200).

If ownership of private property can be taken as one of the centerpieces of capitalism, Mahatma Gandhi’s attitude toward private property reveals him as an anti-capitalist. His disavowal of private wealth was unequivocal, for he observed that “possession seems to me to be a crime…the only thing that can be possessed by all is non possession,” (1983, p. 55). One of Gandhi’s misgivings about the acquisition of wealth was the violent and unjust ways it was procured, and the equally violent ways used to defend property and wealth. He found attachment to material as a hindrance to attaining Moksha, hence the taking of the vow of Aparigraha. Merton, (1985) contends that for Gandhi a true democracy was essentially a post-capitalist socio-economic and political order where class, gender, religion and other discrepancies ceased to exist, and for the greater part the state assumed a significant amount of responsibility for the wellbeing of its citizens.

ANTI-NARCISSISM

For a person whose goal was the attainment of moksha, the charge of narcissism could be easily dismissed. A reading of Gandhi’s work and life indicates that he had moved beyond excessive love of himself and his tradition, as well as beyond seeing human nature as perfected in the masculine gender. As someone who had lived in three continents, studied and participated in and with different religious traditions, he had arguably moved from ethnocentrism. The desire to convert or change others into a mirror image of oneself was not reflective of either satyagraha or ahimsa:

I came to the conclusion long ago, after prayerful search and study and discussion with as many people as I could meet, that all religions were true, and also that all had some error in them….So we can only pray, if we are Hindas, that not a Christian should become a Hindu, or if we are Moslems that not a Hindu or a Christian should become a Moslem, nor should we even secretly pray that anyone should become converted, but our inmost prayer should be that a Hindu should be a better Hindu, a Moslem a better Moslem, and a Christian a better Christian…I broaden my Hinduism by loving other religions as my own…I disbelieve in the conversion of one person by another, (1983, p. 184).

From the above quote it is thus clear that Mahatma Gandhi’s outlook and philosophy had no room for narcissism, or a desire to present either himself or his culture as having the key to solving humankind’s problems. While his rejection and critique of Western civilization was a consistent theme after 1906, it was not a wholesale condemnation as he admitted that when there was need he was “humble enough to admit that there is much we can profitably assimilate from the West,” (p. 252). The potential for redemption was present in every culture and tradition.

While many people are likely to display both cultural chauvinism and jingoism, Gandhi was open to changes that would result in the affirmation of the dignity of
all people. He argued that if he had to choose between the survival of Hinduism and the abolition of the caste system or the untouchables, his choice would be for the end of the caste system. The untouchables were considered as the undesirables or the pariahs of Indian society. However, Gandhi was able to not only affirm their humanity but compare the way they were treated in India to the way Jews were treated during the holocaust. For India to condemn Nazism and yet continue to turn a blind eye to the existence of the caste system would be dishonest. Partly as a result of his experiences in South Africa, he rejected all forms of xenophobia. It is within his abhorrence of the discrimination between indigenous and foreign citizens that Gandhi’s call for a unity between different religious and ethnic groups in India has to be understood.

Traditional cultures are generally considered as conservative, chauvinistic, and stifling the freedom of the individual. However, this is not what one encounters in Mahatma Gandhi, especially with regard to his elevation of femininity and women. In his estimation, women were the embodiment of ahimsa, among the best qualities that human beings could strive to attain. Cognizant of the many ways in which traditional societies policed women’s sexuality, Gandhi pushed for equal treatment of men and women when it came to the nation’s attitude toward sexuality in general. Anticipating the sexual revolutions that would transform women’s lives in most parts of the world he asked: “why is there all this morbid anxiety about female purity? Have women any say in the matter of male purity?...Why should men arrogate themselves the right to arrogate female purity,” (Gandhi, 1983, p. 213). For him, women deserved equal rights that men enjoyed. Male preoccupation with female sexuality was uncalled for. In as much as men had no right to monitor women’s sexuality, Gandhi blamed female prostitution in India on masculine values and perverted notions of masculinity.

For most people the family remains one of the hallowed institutions worth preserving and protecting at all costs. It is also true that prior to taking the vow of celibacy Gandhi had placed primacy on the survival of his own family. However, after taking *brahmacharya*, his views on the family changed, to the extent that he saw life insurance policies as not only fraudulent, but based on a distrust of God and the best in human nature, (Gandhi, 1993). Instead of being a stern patriarch, he opted to liberate not only his wife by adopting a celibate lifestyle, but by treating her as an equal. When his own children chose a different lifestyle and even when one of them chose to convert to Islam, Gandhi gave them the freedom to experiment and search for their own truth. The correspondence between Gandhi and his children reveals the pain he felt in seeing his children walk on a different path.

While it is relatively easier to argue there are almost no indications of any narcissism in the work of Mahatma Gandhi, it is also true that he prized aspects of Indian culture above anything else. His uncompromising rejection of capitalism and industrialization was perhaps matched by his unconditional embrace of the spinning wheel. In many respects, he saw it as the panacea to most of the ills that plagued India. In his view it was “not only a symbol of simplicity and economic freedom, but it is also a symbol of peace,” (Gandhi, 1983, p. 195). In some respects he always saw Indian culture and civilization as inherently better that Western
civilizations, arguing that “the tendency of Indian civilization is to elevate the moral being, that of western civilization is propagate immorality,” (p. 108). It is the same strand the reader encounters in the thought of Malcolm X, (Chapter Two). However, it is also true that Gandhi saw something positive in almost every civilization he studied or encountered.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I outlined Gandhi’s understanding of human nature primarily from the context of his experiences in South Africa and India. By focusing on South Africa as the birthplace of satyagraha and ahimsa I show a different part of the impact of that continent: as a place of cultural renewal and regeneration rather than the heart of darkness. It is also within the context of South Africa that Gandhi theorizes Hind Swaraj and dispels any illusions about the possible benefits that could be derived from the colonial venture whether in South Africa or India. Brown, (1996) observes regarding Gandhi that “what South Africa gave him was a vision of public work, including political activism, as the service of all humanity, rather than as a path to personal or group advancement,” (p. 24). Although there is a scarcity of theoretical literature on his interactions with South African blacks and African culture, Gandhi’s stance on class (especially the caste system) and women point to a source that is not within those usually associated with him, (Western, Marxist, Muslim, Indian, etc). While the Gandhi who went to South Africa aspired for a middle class lifestyle based on the Western model, the Gandhi who left South Africa renounced all forms of violence, capitalism and racism. In his autobiography and other writings, Gandhi provides the reader with a new language for describing human nature, the goal of human life (moksha) and the place of capitalism in his depiction of the ideal society. In contradistinction to most works on Gandhi, we placed the attainment of moksha above both Satyagraha and Ahimsa without belittling either. My description of Ubuntu (Chapter Three) and its role in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Process highlights the place that African indigenous cultures in interaction with Gandhian insights play in conflict resolution. Just as Gandhi sought an answer to the problems facing Indians by resorting to traditional Indian concepts of ahimsa and satyagraha, South Africans resorted to ubuntu, an African philosophy, in solving the problems of both apartheid and the post-apartheid era so as to create lasting peace. While the bulk of this chapter examined the different traditions that influenced aspects of Gandhi’s thought, I would argue that ignoring the impact of twenty one years spent in a struggle parallel to that waged by blacks in South Africa consigns Gandhi to the same apartheid he rejected at the end. To a great extent, each indigenous culture has the framework for creating lasting peace in which there is justice for all. Like satyagraha and ahimsa, ubuntu (Chapter Three) points to the possibility of peace not founded on military might or violence and exploitation. As indigenous cultures resurrect and affirm the best of their values, the civilizations that depend on military strength have the opportunity to participate in the birthing of a new humanity. The success of the Truth and Reconciliation Process in South Africa indicates that South African blacks retained their indigenous cultural identity
even after centuries of European colonialism. At the same time, it also points to the need for a deeper and greater understanding of ubuntu and other non-western cultures in solving contemporary problems.

When Muslims and Hindus were agitating for the partitioning of India into India and Pakistan, Gandhi argued that Muslims and Hindus had too much in common to allow political divisions to come across their common humanity. According to Gandhi, “Islam stands for unity and brotherhood, not for disrupting the oneness of the human family,” (1983, p. 308). In the following chapter I examine the depiction of human nature in Islam from the work of Malcolm X. While there are obvious differences between Malcolm X and Mahatma Gandhi, particularly with regard to revolutionary violence, in their critique and rejection of capitalism their views are almost parallel. Mahatma Gandhi eschewed violence as a means to achieving freedom. A few of the similarities between the two were pointed out in the introduction to this book. For Malcolm X, freedom was worth attaining by any means necessary.