

Appendix 1 Section One: Dialogue with Paulus

Reply to Paulus

Mutse Atsi and Sawubona Paulus. Respect and dignity.

Dear Paulus

Thankyou for your responses to your visit to my web-site. I feel a certain strangeness about the circumstances in which we formally dialogue after all this time. You see, I have read your writing over a period of time and viewed a video clip of you speaking. Your work has had a significant effect on me and my thinking. It has struck me as affirming of humanity in its broadest sense and challenging. It feels like a communication between us has already begun.

How have I been influenced by your work? Well, I have read your postings on the list and other places but I think the biggest influence was when I saw the video clip of you expressing what your work is about. Something about the strength that I saw in your physicality contrasted and complemented the agonising, pain and anger I feel in so much of your writing. I was pleased to see your strength, wellness and your considerable ability to articulate your values. I have not watched the video again before writing this so what I am giving you is the emotional memory that it has left me with. This memory may not be factually accurate in detail but it is honest in terms of the sense it has left me with of you.

I have found engaging with your responses to my site very useful in helping me decide what areas I need to provide greater clarity on. Hope my response is not too jumbled. I am tired at the moment but I am still able to recognise that engaging in responding to your response to me has significantly assisted my clarity. This clarity is greater than the words I have put to paper so far.

Beginning to agree

It may surprise you to hear that I agree with much of what you say. I too am vehemently against any set of beliefs that puts others down and does not seek ways to embrace the truth of our universality as a species on the planet. There are those who espouse versions of African nationalism that I find as troubling and as contemporarily dangerous as the continuing imperialist and colonialist policies of respectable (White) institutions whose economic, political and military policies wreak so much havoc across the face of Africa and across the psyches of people of African origin all over the world. I will say more about this later.

Your work has already assisted me in avoiding conceptualisations that reflects a simple “essentialist” notion of what Blackness or Africanness is. When you say: -

Adam also felt my pain and concern with the notion of bi-cultural competence rather than Daniel's notion that embraces epistemological shift to a holocentric racial self, much closer to what I understand my life to be a commitment to - multiple expressions of multicultural competence or better yet, what Gloria Anzaldua refers to as a new mestiza consciousness.

I do not have a problem with your concern about the notion of bi-cultural competence Paulus. Thank you for voicing it. It helps me clarify my motivation and intention in aligning with the notion. I also do not see an excluding contradiction between bi-cultural competence, multicultural competence and new mestiza consciousness. I will try to explain why later.

I do think that I need to restate that the site as presently constituted is aimed specifically at people who have been on sessions that I have led. It sets out to remind more than restate and explain. As such it is shorthand and open to misinterpretation. Sharing it with the rest of the CARRP community then was a calculated risk and I am not surprised that you react to what you have read. I am deeply grateful for your response. It justifies taking that risk because it provides an added motivation to me to get on with the process of stating what I think more clearly. It has also challenged and extended some of my thinking.

Claiming back stolen parts of my identity whilst acknowledging them all.

The people who have attended the sessions that I have led work for and in an organisation in which stories and perspectives of their historical and contemporary (lack of) value still dominate the structures, culture and consciousness of those who influence most significantly the practices and norms of the organisation. This is one of the reasons why they do not enjoy the career success that their ability would suggest them to be deserving of. Too often this lack of success is internalised and this causes obvious problems. People can feel that their lack of success is their own fault and that they are inadequate.

In other instances their rejection is rejected, but this too can be problematic because of the form that this reciprocated rejection can take. They go to an extreme and reject the dominant systems so vehemently and totally that the strategies they develop to manage their situation are so strongly ‘anti’ and devaluing of so much of the dominant patterns in the organisation that they are unable to produce sustaining outcomes and can reinforce antagonism. People often suffer, personally and professionally, from their holding of such a negative frame that too often becomes self-fulfilling.

I want to offer other possibilities so I try to in my presentations to:

- Explain the importance for people to have a sense that they are of value
- Offer them ways of reframing their sense of themselves in order to embrace that value
- Assist them develop strategies and perspectives that are founded on an acknowledgement of their own needs which can assist them to meet those needs in a manner that is appreciative, capable of effective transformation *and* embracing of the other.

This is quite difficult to get over sometimes. (How do you reject the negatives from a system, embrace the positives and still generate sufficient energy to help you establish different, more personally sustaining and nurturing positions for yourselves within the shifting patterns of organisational and societal reality?)

I want people to start off from a position of valuing who they are. Their “who they are ness” is complex and made up of multiple identities. I embrace this in the explanations I give and explain that my focus is on assisting them to embrace those parts of themselves whose value has been denied. Without embracing (literally – and positively) their ‘dark

sides' they are too often operating from a position of self-devaluation with the consequent implications this has for their psychological wellbeing and the chances of success of the life strategies they adopt. I use the idea that we have many selves' and to allow only one to define us is dishonest and unhelpful. I talk of my [own 'multiple selves' that constitute my identity.](#)

I have no problem, for example, acknowledging my French grandfather. I also do not feel much need to spend time rediscovering my Frenchness, maybe because it has never been portrayed as negatively as my Africanness. I do not face discrimination; oppression and devaluing because of it to anything like the extent as I do for the colour of my skin & my African ancestry.

When you describe your identity in the following sentence – “As a visibly White mixed race/heritage European-Griqua 'british' male I have a living practice that is multicultural.” You are bringing together a set of identities that go some way to constituting you. Did you never have to reclaim any of them? Was there ever any one of those identities or heritages that you found problematic? Did you ever feel uncomfortable with any of these elements of your selfness? I think that you may have. How would you respond to the thought that you (one) can have a living practice that is multicultural and Black?

Maybe it would help if I describe my work as being about helping people to value those parts of their identities that have been traditionally devalued, denied and hidden.

I also think that it is important that we do not get into either/or-polarised approaches to developing liberational thinking.

So the idea of falling back into the binaried opposition of Black and White that seems to then dominate the discussion, or even 'people of color' that still represents identity in crude biological and phenotypical terms, i.e color, seems to be a backward step and not one that encourages movement forwards.

I do not want to be “falling back into the binaried opposition of Black and White that seems to then dominate the discussion “. As I have tried to explain, when I speak about bi-cultural competence, I am speaking of a tactical conception. Black and White are not biological terms when applied to human beings, they are political. I believe that in a situation in which there is a dominant group in power that there is a certain binary reality between those who control and determine and 'the rest'. But this binaryness is temporary and fluid and exists in particular contexts and at particular moments. This pattern exists at the same moment in time as other patterns. People who share that binary position of exclusion are not homogenous and in different conceptual frameworks and or contexts are members of groups whose boundaries may not intersect, embrace and exclude each other. In the work that I have posted on the Internet I am seeking to address the specific situation in which a 'White' pattern of thought, behaviour, history and power negatively and differently influences the lives of people who's skins are not White. Would you agree that in that sense there is a binaryness? I believe that the secret is in not having that as your only way of understanding the world.

Doing things Differently

I use a story I heard Malcolm X tell when I am working with people to illustrate a point about the type of strategies that I think make sense (and which break away from simple “us

and them”, “good guy/bad guy” dichotomised and polarised understandings and strategies). He was speaking about people calling him violent and saying that he believed in fighting fire with fire. He said something like, “I’m not stupid. If my house is on fire, am I going to put more fire on it to fight that fire? No, I’m going to use water!” What I draw from this is that you don’t break away from an oppressive system by doing the same things that that system is doing. You have to find another way. I remember Judi Marshall, quoting from somebody or the other, saying “the first weapon that the oppressed use is that of the oppressor”. I have seen too many African countries try to emulate both the political institutions, with their underlying, programmed biases (e.g. institutionalised tribalism) at the same time as they articulate breaking away from colonialism. It is not what you say that matters it is what you do. We have tried drawing from the West and we have tried drawing from the East. We need to continue to do this of course, but we have to draw from ourselves to an extent that we have not previously successfully managed. We have to find another way.

The relevance of this to the previous discussion about binaried opposition is that I do not think it makes sense to get into a binaried opposition to the oppression we face. An opposition that positions one force against an opposing force often serves to either make both stronger and entrenched or to make one the victor and the other the loser. History shows that the ‘loser’ will try to reverse their position and so the ‘winner’ has to maintain defences against the other that tend to distort whatever it is that it thinks it has won!

I have worked with hatred and seen the damage it does to the hater. I have worked with violence and seen the damage it does to the violent as well as to those caught up in it. We need different ways.

I have only recently returned from working in Sierra Leone where I witnessed the awesome psychological damage done to the so-called “war brides” who were forced to act as “wives” to the rebels. These women are now living with their children, the sons and daughters of the people who raped them and killed their partners and other male family. No, I do not believe that at this time in human development we can afford to embrace such demonstrably unsuccessful strategies. (Georegie Bush – can you hear me?) I believe we need strategies that reflect individual value and difference and draw from each other in a manner that serves the individual and the collective. You cannot do this with hatred. I think Ubuntu speaks so powerfully and has so much to offer in this regard.

A large part of my intent is to contribute to thinking on different approaches to change that can enable us to get to that stage on interdependence. Drawing on stories, myths, histories, belief systems – all of which we partially recreate in the praxis of reclamation – can give us sources of inspiration and suggest new (old?) ways of approaching our liberation which, because they can feel more authentic, might be more easily integrated and translated into successful action. They can assist us to develop a healthier, more congruent sense of self from which the contribution of our identity to the world is richer and of greater value.

If you do not value yourself and do not have a sense of what you can contribute; if you believe yourself, at some level, to be inferior, then you cannot bring anything to offer apart from the descriptions and patterns of your selfness that you have been given by others. I believe myself to be more than I have been told that I am. My African history and culture is greater than I have been led to believe. I am not the denied nigger that I was told I was as a boy and young man growing up in this country. I see myself differently now. I have

worked on myself in order to move proudly and respectfully though the world. I want to move from the position that I think Nelson Mandela was when he said in this section from his oft quoted Inauguration speech:

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us... we were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone."

The perspectives we hold about the world influence the beliefs we hold about ourselves and about the kinds of actions that we need to privilege in living our lives. One of the frameworks in which I operate perceives that not all groups have equal access to power. My aim is to help develop 'strategies that work for us', i.e. ones that can actually, significantly and effectively improve the quality of life of people of African origin globally through my work locally. These strategies need to be different from the ones that have failed in the past. In this perspective I hold, people of African origin (and I'm not referring here to the people of Arab origin who live in the North of Africa) face a unique constellation of issues born out of the particular White-Black racism from European (White) colonialism that require approaches that recognise that and attempt to address that reality.

Our particular oppression is as much psychological as it is material/economic/political. I feel that addressing the psychological issues is a critical stage in enabling effective re-emergence. It seems to me that one starting point has to be to explicitly address the issues of de-colonising our minds. Embracing our own beauty, value, power, intelligence and ability; loving ourselves, is a prerequisite for taking sustainable action for change.

I believe that before we can move forward, or at least as part of the process of moving forward we need to first move from a **dependant** mentality to an **independent** one as a way for achieving a healthy, mutually respectful **interdependence**. (Covey, 1989)

I believe that oppositional, 'anti' approaches to the world are insufficient. We need highly sophisticated strategies that are founded upon self-love and love for others. That are strong and gentle, that are beautiful in process and effective in outcome. They need to be strong and dynamic and flexible and reflective. I hope you see that I agree so strongly with you Paulus at the same time as not being prepared to let go of the need for a reclaimed identity in which I embrace my African self. I heed your warning that in developing, redefining and reclaiming that identity we do not replace simplistic notions of identity, the self, ethnicity, culture, etc, with their equally simple, ossified and dangerous opposites. There is also the danger that too simple an interpretation of a position that asserts one identity can lead to people only defining themselves in contrast (and opposition) to the other. I need to be wary of that in the way that I articulate.

When I speak of the need for us to draw from African cosmology, I do not believe that I am searching for something that exists in some complete form somewhere. I am engaged in creating as much as discovering. I find some resonance and support for this view of identity and culture as not being something that you find pre existing somewhere in the following quote from Stuart Hall

Cultural identity. . . is a matter of "becoming" as well as "being." It belongs to the

future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history, and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous "play" of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere "recovery" of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past." (Hall, 1992)

So I am not trying to assert that Africa is a cultural 'monolith' as much as a source of information and inspiration from which we can draw upon. The present nation states and dominant ruling cultures there are not where I am inquiring. I am looking deeper than that and so I do not find the conflicts between ethnic groups and nations, largely the playing out of legacies of division bequeathed by colonialism, as disproving of my claims for an African cosmology. In fact they highlight the need for people to have a stronger sense of their common heritage and interests.

Multicultural competence and new mestiza consciousness

When you say "I felt in my soul a shock when I read how you are privileging the idea of a bi-cultural competence." I am saddened at your pain and disappointed to think that you interpret what I am saying as valuing the contributions and constitutivity of one group over another. What I hope to be 'privileging' is the notion of people, particularly people of African origin, valuing themselves and seeking strategies that can meet their self-defined needs. I am not for replacing one in-power group with another, one type of oppression for another. I believe that bi-cultural competence may be one (of many) effective tactical concepts for people who are oppressed because of their colour in organisations, and in wider political society, use. I also believe that, in terms of understanding realities of the enormous diversity of humanity, it is inadequate. I believed that prior to reading your response and having read your thoughts I feel so more strongly and clearly. There you go Paulus, I am grateful to you for your attempting to influence my "cognitive range to embrace the idea of multicultural competence and new mestiza consciousness." I thank you for your courage and your commitment to humanity that informed your taking the time to respond to me.

I like the idea of 'new mestiza consciousness' and value the contribution it makes to enriching my sense of my constitutivity and identity. I also have questions to ask of you; how do you operationalise "multicultural competence and new mestiza consciousness"? What do you do with it? What kinds of strategies and tactics does it suggest? I would love to dialogue with you and others interested in liberation on finding new ways of approaching the achievement of justice and equality. I do not believe for one moment that any set of strategies that are based on being 'anti' anything can have much success at nurturing fruitful human growth. I agree with the notion that "what you focus on grows". I believe that we need to focus on creating futures in which people all over the world are treated fairly and humanity cares for itself well. We do not do that by denying difference or by denying that there are many different paths necessary to be taken to arrive at that place. I do not believe that a mindset that is anti difference can create the future I desire.

I wonder if you have come across Dr Jayne Ifekwunigwe's book 'scattered belongings' about the experiences of people of mixed-race heritage, who can also

be 'people of color', and who can also be mixed-race and 'visibly White'. Her work at UEL into new ethnicities is worth exploring.

I have not read her work and would be interested in doing so.

Ubuntu African Cosmology

My ex-student and friend Nceku Nyathi, who wants to research into African Ways of Knowing in respect of organisational theory, and work from an understanding of Ubuntu (a southern African cosmology and consciousness of community).

I am familiar with the concept of Ubuntu and have met, whilst in South Africa a few years ago, a man called Lovemore Mbigi who has written on Ubuntu and the ways it can be used in organisations (Mbigi and Maree, 1985). Nceku Nyathi might be interested in his work. I feel a lot of synergy with the ways he is seeking to apply Ubuntu in organisations and the work I am doing on African cosmology and organisational strategies. Sometimes it just feels like a different word for the same thing – but not always! I sometimes feel that it is the 'acceptable face' of African cosmology. In a similar way to the valuing of native American understandings, insights and wisdom – once they had been defeated and stripped of their land. It can be valued once it is not seen as posing a threat. I feel that it can be used as a way of facilitating transition to a more just order. I do have the concern though about being so embracing that that you lose direction and sufficient focus to be able to make a change that makes a change. What do you think? Am I too cynical in your eyes?

Both/And

I think the fact that other societies also have a both/and ways of understanding being in the world. I think it is reasonable to assert that African cosmology is more 'both/and' than the presently dominant tradition in Europe. I think the notion of both/and is very simple but of tremendous power, application and value in assisting people (I include myself as I try to find better ways of being in the world). I try to apply this to relationships and the conflicts that can arise in them. I am seeking to apply it in this response to you Paulus as I both seek to acknowledge, understand and embrace what you say (and to appreciate the genuine contribution that you have made to how I understand the world) and to advance ideas that are different. I am seeking to change through embracing and maintaining. I guess it's an evolutionary approach.

The table I use is simply to make a point. I know that it is flawed and at the same time believe it to be of explanatory value. The very first time I drew it in front of a group of Black people, a Jamaican man pointed out the contradiction to me in the way it was laid out. I accept this. I respond in the following ways:

- I am influenced by the dominant Euro tradition
- It is meant to highlight differences and not to imply that they are fixed and immovably separate.
- It is meant to highlight these differences (in a temporary manner) so as to enable people to 'see' and value parts of their historical heritage and contemporary ways of being that they may not recognise the value of.
- I actually embrace and claim this way of understanding the world as well as wishing to give value and embrace other ways.

Embracing one identity is not to deny the existence and value of others

Many if not most people in the Caribbean are in fact biologically “mixed race”. They are mixed in terms of the coming together of people from different parts of the continent of Africa and in terms of their mixture with people from Asia and Europe. My grandfather, for example, was a White French man. I hold dearly to the notion or position of ‘both-and’. In which I am both (more than 2 things) European and African and Caribbean and British and a cricket supporter and a father and a lover of traditional English puddings and, and, and... I am all of these things and proudly Black.

Most people who proclaim their “Africanness” from the Diaspora are aware of their, ‘mixture’ or genetic hybridity. They speak of themselves in terms of their hybridity at the same time as proudly (sometimes) proclaiming their Blackness. They both have a sense of their “a holocentric racial self” and are make choices within that as to which parts they most need to work with at any given time given the context that they are situated. They are choosing, as we all do, an identity. They are making choices. Identity is, after all as much taken as given. Is there objective, positivist reality to identity? Does it exist in a library somewhere that tells you who you are and who you are not? Identity always exists in comparison with the other. I remember reading somewhere many years ago that before White people came to Africa that nobody there would have called themselves African. That term, like ‘Blackness’ then are political namings that only exist because of the interactions between people’s from different parts of the world and the subsequent imbalances of power and justice.

The fact that I seek to embrace my African heritage is not to deny other realities of identity that also constitute who I am. The fact that I seek to find a commonality in Africa is not to deny the differences between us. I do also feel that there are times though when you need to embrace boundaries and a collective identity – even if that is temporary and situation specific.

I guess I also find the claim to an existence of an African/Asian cosmology juxtaposed with a European/Western cosmology as too rigid, too respectful of the very borders of race and racialised discourse that people with mixed-race heritage clearly and visibly subvert, defy, transcend and most importantly travel back and forth across, and live around in terms of our multicultural competence. That gave me some head colic!

I agree with what I feel to be your concerns Paulus. I do not believe in straight lines of separation between things. Everything is interconnected, overlapping and is both the same as and different from the things it comes into contact with, embraces and rejects. I do not see African cosmology and European/Western cosmology as mutually exclusive. I remember a discussion with Charles Hamden-Turner in which he showed me a drawing of the way that Eastern thinking deals with difference – it embraces and includes it (I have a memory of seeing a big wobbly circle with differently shaded wobbly shapes inside it that represented ideas from ‘within’ the culture and ideas from ‘without’.) – compared with the dominant approach in the West, which is to find lines of difference/separation. That is the tradition I lay claim to having been raised with, an inclusive one.

‘Multicultural’ means many cultures? A multicultural person embraces and or embodies many cultures? Would you agree that in the context of colonialism and racism that not all of those cultures are equally valued and socially, culturally, economically and politically privileged? Would you go along with the line of thought that says that people whose

identities are devalued, distorted and used as a means of their own oppression have to engage with those parts of their being in a different manner than they do with the others? I am influenced in this position by the work of Selma James, (James, 1975a, James, 1975b) she is an American Feminist who lived and campaigned in the UK in the 70's and 80's. She was a founder of a movement called "wages for housework". What I valued about her writing was her position that it is through the health and strength of the individual components of a system (group, nation, world, etc) that the collective becomes stronger. Campaigning for the good of a part is, in her perspective campaigning for the good of the whole.

Whether you agree with me or not I hope you get a sense that I seek to embrace a perspective of flexible, situational identities that both understands that we are complex in our individual multiple identities. It is a perspective that also recognises that at times we are defined and/or choose to define ourselves, by one of them. We just have to make sure that we don't get stuck there or allow others to do that 'sticking' to us.

Questions of explanation

You spark off some questions from me: Why Embrace an African Identity? Why seek to reclaim truths that counteract stories of our inadequacy? Why learn to love ourselves for our Blackness as well as for our general humanity? Why seek to understand that we are not just darker versions of the people around us in whatever location we find ourselves? Why seek to reclaim other ways of being, loving strategising and transferring thought into successful action? Why seek to identify areas of difference at the same time as recognising our oneness and interconnectedness as human beings on this planet? Let me try to respond to these.

African Americans spent years trying to see themselves as "Americans". As citizens of the United States they were characterised by a strategy that paradoxically differentiated them from most of the other ethnic and national groups in the tapestry of differences that is the US. They consciously spent years trying to assimilate, to become "White"! You know the story. Whiteness was equated with goodness, rightness, intelligence, beauty and a host of other generally positive characteristics. Their Blackness was the opposite. They fought amongst themselves: those who spoke more like the White Americans were somehow considered superior, those whose skins were lighter were seen as better looking, more intelligent. To be African was to be one of those 'jungle bunnies' from Tarzan films. To look like one was to risk being seen as sub-human. Black Americans ran away from their phenotypical and cultural selves, they ran away from that reality as a form of survival that might well have been the best that was possible at one time in their situation. The psychological consequences are devastatingly obvious. You will be aware of notions of "internalised racism" in which the subject actively perpetuates and reproduces beliefs and behaviours that are self-denigrating and self-defeating. I will not spend too much more describing this pattern because I believe you to be familiar with it and anyway bell hooks does it so well:

No social movement to end White supremacy addressed the issue of internalised racism in relation to beauty as intensely as did the Black Power revolution of the sixties. For a time, at least, this movement challenged Black folks to examine the psychic impact of White supremacy. Reading Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi, our leaders begin to speak of colonization and the need to decolonise our minds and imaginations. Exposing the myriad ways White supremacy had assaulted our self-

concept and our self-esteem, militant leaders of Black liberation struggle demanded that Black folks see ourselves differently-see self love as a radical political agenda. That meant establishing a politics of representation which would both critique and integrate ideals of personal beauty and desirability informed by racist standards, and put in place progressive standards, a system of valuation that would embrace a diversity of Black looks.

We must acknowledge, too, that Black folks who have internalised White supremacist attitudes and values are as much agents of this socialization as their racist nonBlack counterparts. Progressive Black leaders and critical thinkers committed to a politics of cultural transformation that would constructively change the lot of the Black underclass and thus positively impact the culture as a whole need to make decolonising our minds and imagination central when we educate for critical consciousness. Learning from the past, we need to remain critically vigilant, willing to interrogate our work as well as our habits of being to ensure that we are not perpetuating internalised racism. Note that more conservative Black political agendas, such as the Nation of Islam and certain strands of Afro centrism, are the only groups who make self-love central, and as a conscience capture the imagination of a mass Black public. Revolutionary struggle for Black self-determination must become a real part of our lives if we want to counter conservative thinking and offer life-affirming practices to Black folks daily wounded by White supremacist assaults. Those wounds will not heal if left unattended. (Hooks, 1994a)

How do you heal those wounds? One path has to be an embracing of who you are. African Americans are people who have, to a greater or lesser extent genetic African origins. The denial of the Africa in them is damaging psychologically and removes a basis for collective resistance and re-emergence. I draw upon these comments from Paul Friere

“.....the invaders penetrate the cultural context of another group, and ignoring the potential of the latter, they impose their own view of the world upon those they invade and inhibit the creativity of the invaded by curbing their expression.

..... it is essential that those who are invaded come to see their reality with the outlook of the invaders rather than their own; for the more they mimic the invaders, the more stable the position of the latter becomes.

The oppressed 'I' must break with this near adhesion to the oppressor 'Thou', drawing away from the latter in order to see him more objectively, at which point he critically recognises himself to be in contradiction with the oppressor. In so doing, he 'considers' as a dehumanising reality the structure in which he is being oppressed. This qualitative change in the perception of the world can only be achieved in the praxis”. (Freire, 1970)

How do you embrace your Africanness if you believe doing so is to embrace savagery, ugliness and inferiority? I believe that in order to do so you have to engage in a process of self re-education. You need 'contrary evidence' to that which you have previously received. No other group of people have had such a successful and systematic erasure from history, no other people have had their contribution to world civilisation so distorted and denied, as have people of sub-Saharan African origin; 'Black' people.

You know that though people in Africa fought each other before the coming of European led colonialism and imperialism, they also loved each other and built relationships, families, civilisations. You know this Paulus, but many raised at a greater distance from these realities than yourself do not and I believe that they need to know. They need to know that in the past, people who looked liked them and from whom they are, at least in part, descended from, achieved great things. We were not always subservient, defeated and trampled on. There was a time when we had successful independent societies that traded on an equal footing with South-East Asia, the Middle East and South America. There was a time before that when Egypt, ruled by dark skinned Africans, gave intellectual and academic birth to Greek civilisation from which modern European civil society claims descendance. People of African origin, we, need to have a different set of information to assist us in transforming the self-hatred into self-love. We need to have standards of self-judgement that are affirming and this information can assist in that. If you do not believe in yourself your ability to achieve satisfaction in your life is severely hampered. Therefore the need for, among other things, an embracing of an African aesthetic (in which, for example, one views one's African features with the criteria of beauty that is congruent with the physical reality that one observes), is of huge potential value.

To be able to show how many of the characteristics that are considered African are still within you (people of African origin in the West) now, helps break down barriers between people of African origin whose histories have located them in different countries and circumstance. Which in turn assist collective action for positive change. This is the purpose of some of my work. I think that we should not all attempt to merge into a oneness in which difference is not recognised and valued. I believe that if we do not have a story that shows that people of African origin have made major contributions to human civilisation then all we have as evidence of our potential are the consequence of our conquest, imperialism, colonialism and racism – not much to inspire self belief!

In researching African Cosmology I am seeking to name and value that which we bring that is different. I am seeking to identify parts of myself (my individual and collective self) that have been denied, hidden and devalued, I am seeking ways of understanding the world that are more congruent with how I experience myself in the world. I am seeking greater form for my embodied knowing. I am seeking information and inspiration not templates.

I do not see my making a claim for the recognition of African Cosmology to be exclusive or excluding. The fact that I assert it to exist and to have developed out of the experiences of a particular set of groups of people is

Eden, you refer to African cosmology as 'both/and' and yet I can send you a paper from a Shona think-tank in Zimbabwe that is every bit as evil as those Nazi proclamations dehumanising Jews. African cosmology can, in hard reality, also be very clearly 'either/or'.

I do not think those ignorant hate-mongers, despite what they might claim, are acting from the sense of African cosmology that I hold. The paper you refer to reads as narrow hatred of one group for the other and is so dangerous.

I am not looking at present day nation states and the tribal cultures that they contain as evidence or form of African Cosmology. When I think about 'Cosmology' in my work I

am speaking about something that lies beneath national, tribal representations of culture. I think of it as “ways of being” and “ways of understanding, explaining and being in the universe”. In the same way that I think that we can speak of a (dominant) European way of being in the world at the same time as acknowledging the tremendous diversity that exists within that and which transcends its boundaries that we can do the same for African ways of being.

In just the same way as most present day European societies (with all their diversity) can claim a common heritage that is descended from Greece through to Rome through to the current nations states of Europe in their cultural and political institutions, sensibilities and reflexes then it is possible to identify characteristics of Black African peoples that are common and exist in different combinations than they do in Asia or Europe. The work of people like Cheikh Anta Diop and others attests to this. I do need to do some more work in this area because I am clear that I am not speaking about something that is fixed and genetic or solely based on skin colour.

Thankyou for he comments that you make about the web-site Paulus. I was determined not to use a template and to create something that carried something of the spirit that I want to hold.

With Thanks
Eden