

Appendix Four – An Intrusive Thought in My Cloth

COMMENT

You understand, don't you Ian, that this PhD has the possibility of being a seminal work on self-inquiry generally and on race politics specifically, with it being required reading on `A' level and degree programmes!!!!!!!!!!!!

The Exploration of an Intrusive Thought

I have come to detest commencing any conversation or piece of writing with negatives. This is so, whether it is a report on a child, an appraisal of a work colleague or an organisational evaluation presented orally or through script. Yet, in commencing this action research inquiry, focused on affirming the influence of African oral traditions on my way of being and how my way of being, shaped by these traditions, is utilised to create dialogue and advance the learning of self and others, I am somewhat perplexed that it is a story, read in my early childhood, around the age of 5 – 6, which conjures up many negatives for me that is uppermost in my thoughts.

I am acutely aware, in the present, of its intrusion into my consciousness and sufficiently concerned about my condition and sufficiently challenged that I feel it is necessary to focus the early part of my inquiry on detailing this 'intrusive' story, (**I wonder why this story has intruded upon you? What was going on for you in the various aspects of your life?**) exploring what meaning the story has for me and inquiring as to whether there are challenges posed in the story for self-

understanding. I am hoping that by doing this that something new will emerge for me, which will add to quality to my overall inquiry. I do not know what that is, at this point, but I intend to “run wid it”.³¹

The intrusive story, as I remember it, was entitled “Brer Rabbit and the Tar Baby”³² and was included in a series of school textbooks, called the “Nelson’s West Indian Readers”³³, compiled by J. O. Cutteridge (1983) which had information relating to folk tales, geography, history, flora and fauna of the Caribbean. **(This was a compulsory reader in the Caribbean. I wonder why such a story was included? What message/learning was intended? Why was this text considered so important that it had to be included in a national reader?)** This is the story, from which I can recall so many negatives and that remains pervasive within my consciousness.

As I reminisce, I feel that I have never fully explored the impact of the story on me to any significant degree. However, Brer Rabbit and the Tar-Baby now, amidst my musings, appears as a confusing, troublesome irritation in my thought processes and seems to suggest that there is an aspect of self that needs to be given attention.

To be attempting to give that attention to self now, over forty years since the reading of “Brer Rabbit and the Tar Baby”, I consider may have meaning in itself, particularly as I sense within a readiness for self-inquiry, **(self-inquiry – why now?)** and feel that there may be some importance for self-understanding, for life understanding, in the exploration of this story on the shaping of who I am.

³¹ Run Wid It: Follow where it leads me

³² The Wonderful Tar Baby Story: Grosset & Dunlap for Disney: 1946:Adapted from the Original Uncle Remus Story by Joel Chandler Harris

³³ First West Indian Readers: J. O. Cotteridge (1983) Nelson

It is important to note though, that in my recall of the story, the question as to whether I found it interesting or whether I liked it seemed not to be the contention. That there was interest was not in doubt. To say whether I liked it was more problematic, for the story impacted at a base level, in that, it evoked within me, identification with the "Tar-Baby".³⁴ I had called the Tar-Baby into my life and its personification within me presented a complex set of images. Yet the rabbit and the fox in the story were never personified to the same **degree (although there is a relational symbolism)** and remained within the realm of the folk tale, just like other animals I had read about in other stories that provided morals for my inculcation.

For example: The Ass in the Lion's Skin³⁵ - *Fine clothes may disguise, but silly words will disclose a fool*; The Fox and the Goat³⁶ - *Look before you leap*; The Fox and the Grapes³⁷ - *It is easy to despise what you cannot get*; The Hare and the Tortoise³⁸ - *Plodding wins the race*; The Lion and the Mouse³⁹ - *Little friends may prove great friends*; and The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing⁴⁰ - *Appearances are deceptive*.

The story went something like this:

One day Brer Fox thought of how Brer Rabbit had been cutting up his capers and bouncing around until he'd come to believe that he was the boss of the whole gang. Brer Fox thought of a way to lay some bait for that uppity Brer Rabbit. He went to work and got some tar and mixed it with some turpentine. He fixed up a contraption that he called a Tar-Baby. When he finished making her, he put

³⁴ Tar-Baby - "Tar Baby is also a name, like "nigger," that white people call black children, black girls, as I recall.... At one time, a tar pit was a holy place, at least an important place, because tar was used to build things.... It held together things like Moses' little boat and the pyramids. For me, the tar baby came to mean the black woman who can hold things together." ("An Interview" with Toni Morrison 255)

³⁵ PageByPageBooks.com

³⁶ PageByPageBooks.com

³⁷ PageByPageBooks.com

³⁸ PageByPageBooks.com

³⁹ PageByPageBooks.com

⁴⁰ PageByPageBooks.com

a straw hat on her head and sat the little thing in the middle of the road. Brer Fox, he lay off in the bushes to see what would happen.



Brer Rabbit and the Tar-Baby, drawing by E.W. Kemble from The Tar-Baby, by Joel Chandler - Hawthorn Books, Inc.

On reading the term Tar-Baby a chord was immediately struck with me, particularly as tar was a major produce of Trinidad, with its renowned asphalt filled Pitch Lake. I knew what tar was and needed no vivid imagination to wonder what a Tar-Baby might look like. Interestingly, though the image that I recalled was not the image in the above picture, although I am certain that the image of the Tar-Baby in the picture above was the one that I saw. However, this image did not register. My recall is of an image pitch black, formless and abhorrent. **(There's some dialogue to be had here, I'm not quite sure what though. I feel that you may know)** Furthermore, I had no recollection of the Tar-Baby being female. This may be of significance in forming of my male view of the world, but to a great extent, I knew the treatment, **(what treatment are you referring to?)** without discrimination, would have been the same during slavery and the colonial period.

Despite this concern for no recall of the Tar-Baby being female, I turned to the challenge of my recall and self-inquired as to why I would imagine the Tar-Baby to

be ugly. Initially I thought that this might have been so, because of the liquidity of the tar and the difficulty of it keeping its shape. Furthermore, I mused that if the tar on the roads of Trinidad were anything to go by, then if any beauty existed at first, it would not have lasted given the pot-holed and poor conditions of the roads.

However, I found it interesting in my musing on ugliness that the only other story with which I had had such a personal identification was the story of the 'Ugly Duckling'.⁴¹ **(I wonder if some discussion could be had here of your perceptions of self in terms of your beauty or otherwise? What perceptions did you develop of yourself in your own right, in relation to those around you – brothers/other relatives/society etc? – I wonder here if I'm talking of the issue of colourism – I'm not quite sure)** That story held some significance for me in terms of becoming, even though that becoming was from dark and ugly to white and beautiful. The Ugly Duckling seemed to offer a hope that the Tar-Baby in Brer Rabbit could not aspire to. The Tar-Baby would always remain black and seemed to have no hope of becoming something other than what he/she already was. The realisation of the hope of the Ugly Duckling is evident in the following excerpt of that story.

"I will fly to those royal birds," he exclaimed, "and they will kill me, because I am so ugly, ... but it does not matter: better be killed by them than pecked by the ducks, beaten by the hens, pushed about by the maiden who feeds the poultry, or starved with hunger in the winter."

Then he flew to the water, and swam towards the beautiful swans. The moment they espied the stranger, they rushed to meet him with outstretched wings.

"Kill me," said the poor bird; and he bent his head down to the surface of the water, and awaited death.

But what did he see in the clear stream below? His own image; no longer a dark, grey bird, ugly and disagreeable to look at, but a graceful and beautiful swan... He now felt glad at having suffered sorrow and trouble, because it enabled him to enjoy so much better all the pleasure and happiness around him; for the great

⁴¹ The Ugly Duckling: Hans Christian Andersen (1844) : http://hca.gilead.org.il/ugly_duc.html

swans swam round the new-comer, and stroked his neck with their beaks, as a welcome.

Into the garden presently came some little children, and threw bread and cake into the water.

"See," cried the youngest, "there is a new one;" and the rest were delighted, and ran to their father and mother, dancing and clapping their hands, and shouting joyously, "There is another swan come; a new one has arrived."

Then they threw more bread and cake into the water, and said, "The new one is the most beautiful of all; he is so young and pretty." And the old swans bowed their heads before him.

Then he felt quite ashamed, and hid his head under his wing; for he did not know what to do, he was so happy, and yet not at all proud. He had been persecuted and despised for his ugliness, and now he heard them say he was the most beautiful of all the birds. Even the elder-tree bent down its bows into the water before him, and the sun shone warm and bright. Then he rustled his feathers, curved his slender neck, and cried joyfully, from the depths of his heart, "I never dreamed of such happiness as this, while I was an ugly duckling."

On further self inquiry though, and until this very moment of my investigation, I had considered I had often articulated that my first awareness of being black related to the reading of a comic book on the life of Booker T Washington,⁴² which had been purchased for me by my mother, whilst in transit in Barbados, on my emigration from Trinidad to England when I was 10 years old. However, I wondered that if I knew how black peoples were treated at the age of 5 – 6, then possibly I also had information on how black peoples were depicted that could have influenced my thinking from that time. Hence, if I already had that awareness, then a conception of being black had already been shaped in my thoughts at that time. Thus, the reading of the comic book or more appropriately, becoming aware of the life of Booker T Washington had to be reassigned, **(I'd love to hear more hear about your thoughts**

⁴² Booker T Washington: Born a slave in Virginia in 1856, Booker T. Washington managed to get a primary education that allowed his probationary admittance to Hampton Institute. There he proved such an exemplary student, teacher, and speaker that the principal of Hampton recommended Washington to Alabamans who were trying to establish a school for African Americans in their state.

Washington and his students built the school, named Tuskegee Institute after its location, from the ground up. As a result of his work as an educator and public speaker, Washington became influential in business and politics.

on reassignment – why reassign and it what way? What’s the importance of that reassignment?) despite its great impact on me.

For me this line of thought had much import, particularly as Brer Rabbit and the Tar Baby had been read some years prior to the comic book on Booker T Washington. So rather than the comic book being the first conscious moment in my recollections of being black, Brer Rabbit and the Tar Baby provides an earlier memory. There is some worry in this for me, particularly as this assignment of Brer Rabbit and the Tar Baby as an earlier memory of being black, is associated with the evocation of so many negatives related to self, since my early childhood. This is contrary to the evocation of the many positives that I derived from the reading of the comic book on the life of Booker T. Washington, which I have long considered as a defining moment in the shaping of much that is positive in my self-image. This is so, despite the caricature, in a political context, of Booker T Washington as an “uncle tom”⁴³ figure. For on completion of the reading of the comic book I wanted to walk in the footsteps of Booker T Washington and accomplish, as he had accomplished “a great life’s work” in the interest of black peoples”.

I am now convinced though, that in attempting to place my recall of Brer Rabbit and the Tar Baby in the unfolding of my life, must now mean that if only subliminally, the notions of ‘race’ and the significance of colour had already made a mark on my consciousness, even if only at the subconscious level. How else would I have been able to make this identification with the “tar baby?”

⁴³ The concept of Uncle Tom is a black person who shows too much of an obsequious behavior to white people

In searching my recall it appears that I have feint early childhood memories that may be of personal significance relating to stories about how much 'white' a black person had in them determined not only their intelligence, but also their physical and innate beauty, which may have been influences on me. It appears that by the age of 5 – 6 I had already learned that if a black person was bright (intelligent), it could only be due to the 'whiteness' in them. If a black person were considered beautiful, then it would be related to the complexion of their skin, the straightness of their hair and nose and the thin-ness of their lips. These were the characteristics that determined whether you were of a fair and pretty complexion or dark, whether you had good hair or 'picky' hair, whether you had a nice nose or a flat nose and whether you had beautiful lips or 'rubber lips'. **(where did these notions come from for you – it may be that you need to speculate, rather than calling on any conscious memory – my guess though, is that there are some conscious memories that you can call on).**

These pieces of information would have been overheard in conversations between adults, told to children when their hair proved difficult to comb with implements unsuited to that purpose, communicated when marital associations were being considered and utilised by children when 'giving fatigue'⁴⁴ or in argument with peers. The information would have been shared as a matter of course and not seen as unusual. Hence, I imagined it would not have been unusual for me to perceive the Tar-Baby as being ugly.

Thus, despite the dissonance in my image recall, in that, the image that I saw and the imaginary image that I committed to memory, one thing is certain. That is, I identified with the Tar-Baby, because the Tar-Baby was black and though not wholly

⁴⁴ Fatigue: To tease; to make fun at someone else's expense.

grounded in the making of this association, **(did you also know that you were/are beautiful or did you have a perception of yourself as ugly and why?)** I had an awareness of the negatives of being black and I knew I was black.

This awareness of being black had not only personal dimensions, for there were inferences for the wider community. That I could perceive myself as black also meant that I was part of a society within which I had begun to recognise difference, position and place and had already founded a rudimentary (or possibly more than rudimentary) identification with one of the myriad communities - the black community of African descent in Trinidad **(I stand to be corrected – I believe you also have Indian in your family. Why not also identification with people of Indian descent?)**.

This recognition of difference and my ability to identify with a community is of some importance, because being able to understand one's self-conception within the context of the wider society, at this time, meant having some awareness of colonial society. That is, a society where race, complexion and possessions determined the power relationships and inter-relationships between the different peoples that comprised the society in a hierarchical order.

This sense of community would have been found in the dynamic interpretation of the extended family and its co-relation with the appreciation of the ebb and flow of communal boundaries that would have been evident in descriptions of where one lived. For example, I could say dependent on who I was talking to and the context in which I was speaking, that I lived in Lodge Place, Laventille, Behind the Bridge, Port-of-Spain, The North, Trinidad, Trinidad and Tobago, The Greater Antilles and the

West Indies. They would all be true, but each would convey a different inference and meaning.

Conveyed too, would have been how I, as a person, an individual, was developing a premise for making sense of the world through attachment to the differing emphases in the use of the term community. I cannot say that it is with these set of words that I understood the experiences of my childhood, but I did have some sense of personal and communal difference, position and place in which the concept of power was inherent, if only in the context that black peoples were at the bottom in a hierarchical order, differentiated by race, complexion and possessions **(I think it would be great to talk about how these hierarchies played out in Trinidad and also to do a comparison with the England. It might also be a great opportunity to discuss here how the various cultures came into being in Trinidad) (I have some resources and access to resources that may be of value here – if it's something that you are interested in exploring further!!).**

I say this because I am able to recall that the significance of complexion in my early life, in that, being white or near white conferred status. Being black conferred none. I can recall in the front room of my home too, that there was a large picture of a 'white' Jesus, which seemed to be in every home in the neighbourhood. In that front room too, was an arraignment of photographs that contrasted with that of the 'white' Jesus, which detailed the family's history. Those family members who had died or emigrated were remembered in those black and white (and sometimes browning) captured images. One particular picture of my mother, father and elder brother in Trafalgar square remains a seemingly permanent etching on my consciousness **(why this permanent etching on your consciousness – how did colourism play out in**

your family?– where did you fit in the hierarchy and how did/do you feel about that?.

Furthermore, I can recall that it was a Chinese family that owned the grocery shop at the bottom of the steps, in Lodge Place, where I lived with Papa Leo, my great aunt Edna and my aunt Dora. The Scrubbs family, of African descent, also owned a shop near to where I resided in the community. It was interesting though that whereas the children of Scrubbs family played many games with their peers in the quarry, the children of the Chinese family made no such excursions. I can also recall that on my travels from Port-of-Spain to Curepe where one of my brothers resided with my Grandmother that I had come into contact with people from predominantly Indian communities, which encouraged in me confirmation of my recognition that I lived in a community of people from predominantly African descent.

My recall of interaction with white peoples at this time though, seems hazy and not as substantive as with any of the other peoples that comprised Trinidad's population – a population that has been described as the most cosmopolitan in the universe. The most vivid recall of white peoples present in my memory is those distant white priests and nuns associated with the Roman Catholic Church, which played a critical part in generating many experiences in my early childhood. Attendance at church for Sunday mass, First Fridays, the Holy Days, First Communions, Confirmations, Confessions and a litany of other occasions occurred with regularity. I marvelled at the pomp and ceremony of the priests as they marched through the aisles of the cathedral and took their place at their appointed positions amongst the congregation and on completion of the mass, out of sight into the vestibule.

I liked attending church, but had awareness that it was something that I had to do, a ritual. If I did not attend it was likely that I would get a beating or be faced with doing endless chores. It was a place that created a mix of emotions. I had to 'dress up' to attend and this always felt good. This was in keeping with the sense of holiness that being in church seemed to evoke in the incense-burning, smoke-scented atmosphere. The height of this sense of holiness though, was in the receipt of the host at communion, the result of a miraculous event – the transformation of the bread and wine in the tabernacle into the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

At communion I sometimes wondered why the priest drank wine and took the host, but the congregation only received the host. I wondered on occasions when feeling sinful what would happen if I went up to receive the host. I imagined that my tongue would just burn up, so I never took the chance. I felt ashamed though when I did not go up to receive the host, because everyone then knew that I was a sinner. Being a sinner was an important conceptualisation in my early life.

The teachings of the Roman Catholic Church were important in the formation of my early religiosity. It was always perplexing though, why the mass contained so many Latin verses, which I found difficulty in understanding. I would mouth some of these phrases and obtained great pleasure in finding the meaning of some of them. However, it was not the church, but my family, community and school that ensured that I knew the Ten Commandments, the sacraments and the catechism. In fact, I learned to fear God, not through the Church, but through stories from elders, about the life of Jesus. It was from these teachings that I learned what it was to be a sinner and the consequences of committing sin created great fears within me.

These fears were exacerbated with the regularity with which I had to make confessions. The expectation that I held was that it would have to be done at least monthly, for if I remained absent for over three months from the confessional box, it was likely that I would be excommunicated. My confessions were to a white priest in a booth in which a gauzed window obscured him. I always commenced confession with "Bless me Father for I have sinned, it is so many week/months since my last confession" and ended with the priest informing on the penalties for transgression. This was usually the saying of so many Our Fathers and so many Hail Marys⁴⁵ using the beads on one's rosary or chaplet as a counter.

I consider that the experiences noted above must have played a part in how I interpreted the Wonderful Story of the Tar-Baby. They were not the only experiences however, for as I continue to self-inquire I am aware of another set of experiences, which stem from the recognition that though black peoples were at the bottom in a hierarchical order, differentiated by race, complexion and possessions, it was necessary to resist, despite personal and communal difference, notions of position and place based on that hierarchical order.

I remember a picture of Haile Selassie, Emperor of Ethiopia that held pride of place in the gallery over the door that led to the front room. It had been placed so that it could be viewed and revered, by Papa Leo. Family folklore held that Papa Leo had involvement in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Papa Leo though, like many of my elders did not attend only one church. Many attended both the Roman Catholic Church their own lively black Baptist congregational gatherings.

⁴⁵ Hail Mary full of grace, The Lord is with thee Blessed are you amongst women And blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus

Marcus Garvey, the 'Black Moses',⁴⁶ was an important figure though, for he was convinced that every people had a God-given purpose, and so his call to black people was to "think with me in the hope of assuming your responsibility to be the man that God Almighty created you to be, and not the cringing, crawling creature that most of you have become without realising our place in the world."⁴⁷ Garvey's challenge to black peoples, premised on notions grounded in Christian anthropology, was that "every man who has a soul and every man who has a mind is after and in the image of his creator God. Thus man was not made to be a cringing, crawling being, he was made to be captain of his own ship, a master of his own destiny."⁴⁸

Garvey also challenged the universalist presumptions of European theologians and articulated a perspective that was intentionally particularistic, and self-consciously black:

"If the white man has the idea of a white God, let him worship his God as he desires. If the yellow man's God is of his own race let him worship his God as he sees fit. We, as Negroes have found a new ideal, whilst our God has no colour, yet it is human to see everything through ones spectacles, and since the white people have seen their God through white spectacles, we have only now started out (late though it be) to see our God through our own spectacles".⁴⁹

Garvey's declarations were born not from some compelling philosophical notion, but from the rebellion of a proud black man against the overbearing and vulgar imposition of Euro-Christian ideology. He articulated the incongruities that many sensed and agonised over in silence and questioned whether the faith of Christianity, with scripture that spoke of liberation and justice for the poor and oppressed, and

⁴⁶ Black Moses: Edmund David Cronon, John Hope Franklin

⁴⁷ The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey, Or, Africa for the Africans: Marcus Garvey, et al

⁴⁸ The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey, Or, Africa for the Africans: Marcus Garvey, et al

⁴⁹ The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey, Or, Africa for the Africans: Marcus Garvey, et al

which dramatised this in stirring narrative, could become the justification for over 400 years of degradation. What does Jesus, who reached out to the marginalised and sought to restore the outcast, have to do with a religious-cultural framework in which they were taught to hate themselves and blame themselves for having been victimised?

Avowedly anticolonial, Garveyism aimed to inculcate in black peoples worldwide a racial pride, black consciousness, black nationalism, and an acceptance of Africa as the homeland. Garvey's Pan-Africanist philosophy, which established a sense of national identity based on race, instilled in many black people the belief that their economic and political liberation could ultimately be found in a strong and unified Africa. Ethiopianism, a doctrine that glorified Ethiopia based on passages from the Bible offered the spiritual basis for Garvey's common Pan-African identity. Ethiopia was equated with the ancient empires that flourished in the upper parts of the Nile Valley and largely through biblical references and sermons, this territory was perceived as central to the salvation of the black race. **(All of this information is powerfully informative. Perhaps it could be linked back to perceptions of self. Which has the greater influence on you and why – Tar Baby or Garvey?)**

The references to Ethiopia in the Bible were cherished for in them black peoples were depicted in a dignified and human light within which the promise of freedom was held. These passages also informed that African peoples had a proud and deep cultural heritage that pre-dated European civilization. The summation of these sentiments was most frequently identified with Psalm 68:31 where it is prophesied, "Princes shall come out of Egypt and Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto

God."⁵⁰ Garvey made conspicuous use of 18th century biblical Ethiopianism in his speeches and writings. For him, it was "Every nation to their own vine and fig tree."⁵¹

Furthermore, there was in nearly all expressions of Ethiopianism, a belief in the redemption of the race linked to the coming of a black messiah. Garvey assured his followers of the coming of a black messiah when he stated:

*"No one knows when the hour of Africa's redemption cometh. It is in the wind. It is coming. One day, like a storm, it will be here."*⁵² He told black peoples to "look to Africa for the crowning of a king to know that your redemption is near."⁵³

The sovereignty of Ethiopia amidst European colonialism on the continent of Africa further fixed greater attention on the ancient Empire of Ethiopia itself. Ethiopia was considered by many as a black Zion. Thus, in 1896, when the invading Italian forces were defeated by Menelik II in the Battle of Adwa this served to bolster the mythic status and redemptive symbolism of Ethiopia in the eyes of Africans at home and abroad. For Garvey, the liberation of the African continent from colonialism was inseparable from the uplift of black peoples everywhere.

However, it was the fulfilment of Garvey's millennial expectations, the crowning of Ras Tafari Makonnen, alleged descendant of the biblical King Solomon, as the Black King of Ethiopia, as a Rastafarian observed that stirred the imaginations of an entire generation (of Africans in the Americas) and refocused attention upon ancient Ethiopia. Just as Garvey had promised, a Black man had become King. And not just King of anything, but King of Ethiopia, the oldest, and at one time the most powerful

⁵⁰ The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey, Or, Africa for the Africans: Marcus Garvey, et al

⁵¹ The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey, Or, Africa for the Africans: Marcus Garvey, et al

⁵² The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey, Or, Africa for the Africans: Marcus Garvey, et al

⁵³ The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey, Or, Africa for the Africans: Marcus Garvey, et al

throne on earth. This single event resonated with the multiple cultural, political, and religious dimensions of Garveyism and Ethiopianism.

Ras Tafari, who took the name Haile Selassie at his coronation, was seen as the "promised Messiah from the House of Judah"⁵⁴ As Barrett concedes his crowning was seen as "a revelation from God, a fulfilment of Biblical prophecy, and a signal that it was time for redemption".⁵⁵ This importance was represented through his many titles: His Imperial Majesty, Haile Selassie I, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah, Light of this World, King of Zion, and Elect of God.

Since the Middle Ages, a part of Ethiopia's nobility, including the Makonnens, the family to which Selassie belonged, had perceived themselves as descendants of King Solomon of Judah and the Queen of Sheba. This was a belief stemming from biblical prophecies, including the Song of Solomon 1:5-6, which states: "I am Black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon."⁵⁶ As Chevannes points out, "if Solomon was Black, so was the Christ. Both were descendants of David. Redemption of the African race was therefore at hand."⁵⁷

This redemption had been a long time coming, but with the visit of Haile Selassie to Trinidad and the onset of Trinidad's Independence, bringing the imminent end of colonialism, the promise of shaping a nation through one's own endeavours and decisions, created much optimism. I remember being among the throng of African people listening to Eric Williams, who would become Trinidad's first Prime Minister

⁵⁴ Jamaicans Of Ethiopian Origin And The Rastafarian Faith. <http://web.syr.edu/~affellem/napti.html>.

⁵⁵ The Rastafarians, Leonard E. Barrett, Boston: Beacon Press, 1997

⁵⁶ Song of Solomon 1:5-6,

⁵⁷ B. Chevannes, Rastafari: Roots and Ideology: Syracuse University, 1994

at the University of Woodford Square.⁵⁸ Furthermore, I learnt about Uriah Buzz Butler, the father of trade unionism in the island and who placed poor black men on the modern industrial map.

It was in this context that Papa Leo's Ethiopianist perspective, which played a part in the shaping of my understanding of being black, of being African, held importance. I remember retold stories of how I sat in his lap reading stories and the newspaper, and his reading of stories to me. I remember too, the importance given to Tant Bibet and Tant Onut, my great grand mother and my great, great aunt, who family folklore upheld was real Africans. Being African held much significance, in my home. **(I think the reader would benefit greatly from hearing more about the whole impact of Garveyism and Ethiopianism on you and your identity. A lot has been said about the movements – how have these times in history impacted on you as a Black man? How have they influenced your thinking/politics? How have they influenced your raising of two Black males? How have they influenced your relationship to the world more generally?)**

The story continued...

Well, he didn't have to wait long either, 'cause by and by Brer Rabbit came pacing down the road--lippity-clippity, clippity-lippity--just as sassy as a jaybird. Brer Fox, he lay low. Brer Rabbit came prancing along until he saw the Tar-Baby and then he sat back on his hind legs like he was astonished. The Tar-Baby just sat there, she did, and Brer Fox, he lay low.

"Good morning!" says Brer Rabbit, says he. "Nice weather we're having this morning," says he.

Tar-Baby didn't say a word, and Brer Fox, he lay low.

"How are you feeling this morning?" says Brer Rabbit, says he.

Brer Fox, he winked his eye real slow and lay low and the Tar-Baby didn't say a thing.

"What is the matter with you then? Are you deaf?" says Brer Rabbit, says he.

"Cause if you are, I can holler louder," says he.

The Tar-Baby stayed still and Brer Fox, he lay low.

⁵⁸ University of Woodford Square: The Hyde Park of Trinidad and Tobago

"You're stuck-up, that's what's wrong with you. You think you're too good to talk to me," says Brer Rabbit, says he. "And I'm going to cure you, that's what I'm going to do," says he.

Brer Fox started to chuckle in his stomach, he did, but Tar-Baby didn't say a word.

"I'm going to teach you how to talk to respectable folks if it's my last act," says Brer Rabbit, says he. "If you don't take off that hat and say howdy, I'm going to bust you wide open," says he.

Tar-Baby stayed still and Brer Fox, he lay low.

By the time I had read to this juncture my identification with the Tar-Baby had moved beyond simply a matter of association through colour. This depiction of the tar bay as having no voice plucked other chords from which I derived significance beyond my self-identification with the Tar-Baby. I found that it had a meaning that not only characterised self, but also characterised the community – the people of African background, with whom I identified. Thus, at both the personal and communal levels, that the tar baby had no voice, held significance for me and represented that the black individual and the black community had “no voice”. **(Is it really true that we have no voice – I mean NO voice? What does this do to the psyche when the perception is that we have no voice? In the writing of this paper, are you still saying that you have no voice? What does having no voice really mean on a day to day practical level and also on a political level? How could we gain more of a voice?)**

However, alongside this recognition of the absence of a voice, there was an inner voice that struggled for emergence, wherein a defiant spirit was marshalled to question, reason and challenge the behaviour of Brer Rabbit towards the Tar-Baby.

I took the place of the Tar-Baby **(I think that this style of telling your story is so very powerful – takes away the mystery – necessarily of Tar baby and gives her a much needed voice)** in the story and through inner-conversations wondered why Brer Rabbit should be astonished to see me at rest. Why did not Brer Rabbit continue

on his merry way without disturbing my peace? I had no wish to talk to anyone and my parents had warned incessantly that I should be careful with whom I engaged in conversation. I had no wish to engage in idle talk about the weather and had no wish to tell this stranger or trickster how I felt.

There was nothing the matter with me and I was not deaf. I was at peace with myself, just resting on the road. This was not unusual for it is unlikely that any vehicle would pass on this country road. Even, if a vehicle was to come along, there would be sufficient time to move out of the way. The barking of dogs would give advance warning and so too, the whirring of the vehicle's loud engine, together with the diver's constant tooting on his horn, to greet friends. All this would have been heard from far off in the distance.

I did not consider myself stuck up and did not feel too good to talk to Brer Rabbit or anyone else for that matter. I just wished that Brer Rabbit would be good enough just to let me be. For Brer Rabbit to say that he is going to teach me you how to talk to respectable folks and that if I don't take off my hat and say howdy, that he is going to bust me wide open, shows that I am right not to talk to him. He does not deserve my respect. I will not talk.

I knew what was going to come next and was resigned that I would get a beating. That was the order of things. However, my resignation that I would be beaten as I recalled was not from a sense of being defeated. On the contrary, it is derived from a sense of defiance. I will take my beating, but my time will come when the tables would be turned, and such beatings would no longer take place **(where does this sense of defiance come from? How important is it for your sense of dignity and**

survival? I suppose the question before this last one is why defiance is important?)

The story continued ...

Brer Rabbit kept on asking her why she wouldn't talk and the Tar-Baby kept on saying nothing until Brer Rabbit finally drew back his fist, he did, and blip--he hit the Tar-Baby on the jaw. But his fist stuck and he couldn't pull it loose. The tar held him. But Tar-Baby, she stayed still, and Brer Fox, he lay low.

"If you don't let me loose, I'm going to hit you again," says Brer Rabbit, says he, and with that he drew back his other fist and blap--he hit the Tar-Baby with the other hand and that one stuck fast too.

Tar-Baby she stayed still, and Brer Fox, he lay low.

"Turn me loose, before I kick the natural stuffing out of you," says Brer Rabbit, says he, but the Tar-Baby just sat there.

*She just held on and then Brer Rabbit jumped her with both his feet. Brer Fox, he lay low. Then Brer Rabbit yelled out that if that Tar-Baby didn't turn him loose, he was going to butt her crank-sided. Then he butted her and his head got stuck. **(In this instance, I am not wholly sure that Tar Baby was helpless. Brer Rabbit became immobile because he became stuck to Tar Baby. This was Tar Baby's power – she had to do nothing except sit still in order to render Brer Rabbit helpless. She was able to use her own `magic' as power. No matter what he threatened Brer Rabbit couldn't win). I'm reminded here of the words of Maya Angelou when she said you may encounter many defeats, but you must never be defeated)***

This beating meted out by Brer Rabbit on the Tar-Baby impacted deeply. The inability of the Tar-Baby to voice her challenge or to retaliate to the physical assault that the rabbit waged was a double bind for me. They were real blows. What was to follow though, was even more painful, for Brer Fox who had seen the whole incident and had used the Tar-Baby to his own ends, was concerned only with advancing his own interest. What was disturbing here was that not only was the Tar-Baby depicted as being without feelings, but that Brer Fox although able to explain correctly Brer Rabbit's transgressions in relation to the Tar-Baby, Brer Fox really had no concern for the Tar-Baby's condition. **(How has the silence of others in the face of injustice against you impacted on you? How has it felt for you when people have considered you as not having feelings? How has it felt for you when your `boys'**

(sons) have experienced race injustice? I think what would make this even more powerful are some examples from your own personal experience). It was just a big joke. This should not have been surprising for the ill-treatment of black peoples is in some quarters viewed as sport and appreciated as an activity of fun – part of the de-humanising process.

The story continued ...

Brer Fox walked out from behind the bushes and strolled over to Brer Rabbit, looking as innocent as a mockingbird.

"Howdy, Brer Rabbit," says Brer Fox, says he. "You look sort of stuck up this morning," says he. And he rolled on the ground and laughed and laughed until he couldn't laugh anymore.

By and by he said, "Well, I expect I got you this time, Brer Rabbit," says he. "Maybe I don't, but I expect I do. You've been around here sassing after me a mighty long time, but now it's the end.

And then you're always getting into something that's none of your business," says Brer Fox, says he.

"Who asked you to come and strike up a conversation with this Tar-Baby? And who stuck you up the way you are? Nobody in the round world. You just jammed yourself into that Tar-Baby without waiting for an invitation," says Brer Fox, says he.

"There you are and there you'll stay until I fix up a brushpile and fire it up, "because I'm going to barbecue you today, for sure," says Brer Fox, says he.

I drew from this development in the story that after the Tar-Baby's had received her beating, she is essentially forgotten in the story, in that, her use is complete. This showed not only her marginality to the overall scheme of things, but also how little care existed for her battered condition within the overall scheme of things. This caricature, for me, mirrored symbolically experiences not of my own as such, but experiences to which I had an association through my membership of the wider black community. I had imagined that the assault of the Brer Rabbit had been on me. I had done nothing, yet I had been beaten, battered and bruised and just left hurting

in on the side of the road to tend to my injured self. I could have died, but not for a purpose of my own.

Such imaginings encouraged a demeanour mirroring sorrow for myself and the internalisation of negative feelings that told me that no one cared for my condition and no one really cared for me. This was a victim's perspective, and it is from this perspective that I have been able to hold on to the negative feelings and much of the personal despair that had been evoked on the very first reading of the Wonderful Tar Baby story.

However, this victim's perspective, as I now recall, was not the only emotion that charged my consciousness. For from within the depths of my despair I remember saying to myself at that time that the beating that the Tar-baby received will never happen to me. I will fight back. **(Why was this defiance essential to your psyche/soul/spiritual well-being?)** That I subsequently did get a beating, in England some six years after my emigration Trinidad, and did not fight back though was to be an important lesson in my life development.

The beating that I received occurred one evening soon after coming out of Tooting Broadway tube station when four or five white men attacked me. They punched, slapped and kicked me. I felt every blow that they threw as I became trapped amongst an unconcerned crowd of people. Somehow though I managed to escape and I ran and ran with the blows of my attackers impressed on body such was the weight and impact of the blows, such was the bodily pain. **(Why was important for you to run away and to live to fight another day?)** A much greater pain though, was the inner shame that I had felt when I had not been able to utter a word or retaliate to

this attack on my personhood. Many years would pass before I would be able to voice what had happened that day to another person.

Once more though, I vowed, on the day of my beating, that any future attack on me without my retaliation would never happen again. That they have occurred since or at least been attempted, when I have either retaliated or not retaliated has shown me that these vows are just simple gestures (**I, as a reader would benefit from knowing why you feel these vows are simple gestures. It sounds as though you are saying that these vows have no point/validity and I'd quite to know a bit more about what your thinking is on this**) of defiance in response to assaults on one's personhood. The absurdity is that one cannot prevent an unprovoked racist attack from another person or persons, when it is racism that governs much of your interaction with others in a society that is racist (**useful to provide examples that you believe supports this assertion – some high profile examples would be useful – Stephen Lawrence (I've got a copy of this report if it would be of value to you at any point), Roland Adams, SUS, police stats on stop and search etc.**). You become aware that attacks can happen at anytime, anywhere and that there is no logic to when and where it happens and why you. However, you never come to terms with it happening at either a personal level or communal level.

I am of the opinion though, that it is from the making of these futile vows, in the face of assaults, that the development of strategies for not only survival, but the shaping of alternative perspectives is derived. These vows have importance not only as personal mechanisms for saving face, but for enlivening the thought processes to give consideration to the creation of meaningful lives, in what is recognised as absurd conditions. These alternative perspectives, far removed from that of the

victim's perspective, offer the prospect of new ways of being and a different living reality springing from a 'spirit of defiance'. **(If the vows are futile, how can they have importance – strikes me as a bit of a contradiction!!!!!!?)**

This spirit of defiance can take many forms, but no matter the form, it offers an alternative way for the interpretation of events. For example, one can hold a perspective that presents that it is Brer Fox that has set-up the Tar-Baby to be abused. Of course, Brer Fox does not tell Brer Rabbit to attack the Tar-Baby, but it is Brer Fox that creates the conditions in which the attack on the Tar-Baby can be predicted. That Brer Rabbit carries out the attack as a result of the conditions created by Brer Fox, does not excuse his unjust actions. Nor can Brer Fox be excused, for though he did not tell Brer Rabbit to attack the Tar-Baby, it is he that has created the conditions that allows the injustice to take place. Brer Fox and Brer Rabbit though at odds with each other are complicit in their respective activities - the creation of unjust conditions and the undertaking of an unjust act. **(I wonder if it would be possible to get into the mind of the racist, much the same way you got into the mind of Tar Baby – I'm sure that there is loads of literature that would be useful – why? Because you talk of the acts being unjust and obviously I agree with you..... the racist would see it differently and I think this knowledge would add another dimension to your paper).**

That is the order of things and the imagery of the fox in the bush, unseen, but still being able to manipulate the situation, is not too far removed from how relations of power in operation of are often depicted in society. That Brer Rabbit takes on a superior attitude, speaks to the relations of power, but that he seems incapable of learning from his follies, is incongruous to his claimed superiority. His beating up on

the Tar Baby is noted not only as an unreasonable act, but also exemplifies that he is stuck in his mode of thinking. He is trapped within his own prejudices and an impaired sense of justice.

It is the recognition of this incongruity between the being and action of Brer Rabbit that offers the prospect for change in the Tar Baby's conditions. Those holding perspectives far removed from the victim's perspective would see this as a fissure that can be utilised to build their own position. The simplest statement that would give recognition of the fissure would be that the Rabbit is stupid.

How can he just keep beating up on the Tar-Baby? Can he not see that each time he hits the Tar-Baby he becomes stuck? It is this stupidity that divests Brer Rabbit of his claimed superiority in the eyes of those who he considers is his inferiors and as the story unfolds one will see that a similar charge can be made against Brer Fox, who is outwitted by Brer Rabbit. Interestingly, the success of Brer Rabbit provides the prospect of success for the Tar-Baby too.

It is this prospect for success, tied to the defiant spirit, which enables the reinterpretation of the Tar-Baby's conditions. That is, conditions, so aptly described by Richard Wright, in his autobiographical story, *Black Boy*, 1945, as generating feelings of being "emotionally cast out of the world, ...made to live outside the normal processes of life, ... conditioned in feeling against something daily, ... become accustomed to living on the side of those who watched and waited".

The Tar-Baby "on the side of those who watched and waited" cannot be viewed as weak. On the contrary, in the taking of her beating, she remains silent, but strong.

She is simply awaiting a future moment in which conditions are more favourable to strike back. The acceptance of her discard is temporal, for she knows that she will not always be so accepting of such treatment. Thus, the Tar-Baby even in her discard she is able to elicit something positive, for she recognises that in being left to her own devices, a space has been created for her to do her own thinking, find solutions and make plans for retaliation. This is derived from her own perspectives culled from an understanding of her own peculiar conditions.

In the holding on to the perception that her condition is temporal, the Tar-Baby is able to use effectively those conditions – that of being taken for granted with no prospect for change in her lowly position - as a stimulus for self-change and for her impact in the world. The world is changing because the Tar-Baby is changing, but it is a change that Brer Rabbit and Brer Fox would have difficulty in seeing. They would continue as before as if there had been no change and this would be reflected in the maintenance of the character of their relationship. Thus, the order of the world would seemingly continue as before with the Tar-Baby marginal to the relationship between Brer Rabbit and Brer Fox. However, for the Tar-Baby the order of the world is temporal. Her marginality is temporal.

The story continued ...

Then Brer Rabbit started talking mighty humble.

"I don't care what you do with me, Brer Fox, says he, "Just so you don't fling me in that briar patch. Roast me, Brer Fox, says he, "But don't fling me in that briar patch."

"It's so much trouble to kindle a fire," says Brer Fox, says he, "that I expect I'd better hang you," says he.

"Hang me just as high as you please, Brer Fox, says Brer Rabbit, says he, "but for the Lord's sake, don't fling me in that briar patch," says he.

"I don't have any string," says Brer Fox, says he, "Now I expect I had better drown you," says he.

"Drown me just as deep as you please, Brer Fox," says Brer Rabbit, says he, "But please do not fling me in that briar patch," says he.

"There's no water near here," says Brer Fox, says he, "And now I reckon I'd better skin you," says he.

"Skin me Brer Fox," says he. "Snatch out my eyeballs, tear out my ears by the roots," says he, "But please, Brer Fox, don't fling me in that briar patch," says he.

Of course, Brer Fox wanted to get Brer Rabbit as bad as he could, so he caught him by the behind legs and slung him right in the middle of the briar patch. There was a considerable flutter when Brer Rabbit struck the bushes, and Brer Fox hung around to see what was going to happen.

By and by he heard someone call his name and 'way up on the hill he saw Brer Rabbit sitting cross-legged on a chinquapin log combing the tar pitch out of his hair with a chip. Then Brer Fox knew he had been tricked.

Brer Rabbit hollered out, "Born and bred in the briar patch. I was born and bred in the briar patch!" And with that he skipped out just as lively as a cricket in the embers of a fire.

The conspicuous absence of the Tar-Baby in these final parts of the story is instructive, because for me the full story has not been told. I am left with what happened to the Tar-Baby, but in that same moment that defiant spirit tells me that she is not absent, she is there. She will reappear at some future date when she decides to act in her own interest. However, I am concerned that though she will know why she acts, her actions will not only be unexpected, but will not be even understood, by Brer Rabbit and Brer Fox for their manipulation, prejudices and impaired sense of justice will not allow them scope for the understanding of the Tar-Baby's actions. The chasm in their experiences means there is no platform for meaningful dialogue and the absence of purposeful dialogue only presents the conditions for further non-understanding and explosive moments. I explode, in that moment for the Tar-Baby, feeling that through me I will let her voice be heard. Listen, hear me...

I Explode⁵⁹

*I am crying aloud for the Tar-Baby
 Hoping that someone will hear
 However, no one seems to care that she's hurting
 And it hurts her*

⁵⁹ I Explode: Ian L. Phillips (2002)

*That though she is so filled with care,
It is a care that she's not allowed to really share
In conditions which despoils her.*

*I Explode
I know she will have to fight,
Take on another way of being,
And in that fight in an earthly condition
She may cease to belong ... but know!
She will have prepared the ground
Sewn the seeds
For us to walk on ... and flower*

*I Explode
In time...we'll recapture our strong selves
That's culled only for love
And though often submerged in despair
We'll take hold of our ancestral qualities
Be at one with our spirituality,
And find unity... to create ...and with others co-create
Till true freedom comes along*

*I Explode!
You don't want to listen
You don't want to hear
What! You're not ready...I must wait
Wait for what and for how long
I defy you –
Pay attention
I am sharing, storytelling, dialoguing*

*And once more I Explode!
I Explode for the Tar-Baby
I Explode for me
Is no one listening
Is no one listening
Are you hearing
Are you hearing
This is my story too...*

*I Explode!
And my story will be heard
My humanity will not be denied
In this world that will die
Unless there is true caring
So I'll keep sharing – continue storytelling
For there is a way - through dialoguing
It's the African in me*

Reviewing Comments On The Exploration of an Intrusive Thought

In this story I consider that I have revealed aspects of myself in some depth. That I have shared the story in the way that I share I consider too, that the content, like that of "Create Your Own Dance", speaks to my purpose for being in the world. However, probably more than Create Your Own Dance, "An Intrusive Thought" holds more firmly the prospect for "being in the world co-creating democratic structures". I say this, acknowledging that Create Your Own Dance also holds this prospect. In An Intrusive thought though, the comments that are included with the story show that this process has already begun.

I found the comments attached to the story affirming, loving and challenging. They also just asked for more information, contended points of view or offered ideas on the way forward – essential ingredients in any dialogue. The comments, furthermore shows that the dialogue continues. The reader is awaiting a response. I have that the responsibility to make that response.

I say that the comments were affirming in that what I wrote I felt it was appreciated. The reader from the outset made a positive statement. There would be other positive comments throughout the story.

"You understand, don't you Ian, that this PhD has the possibility of being a seminal work on self-inquiry generally and on race politics specifically, with it being required reading on 'A' level and degree programmes!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

"I think that this style of telling your story is so very powerful – takes away the mystery – necessarily of Tar baby and gives her a much needed voice"

The comments were loving in that the reader was concerned with what was happening with me. The following comments give evidence of this.

"I wonder why this story has intruded upon you? What was going on for you in the various aspects of your life?"

“self-inquiry – why now?”

“There’s some dialogue to be had here, I’m not quite sure what though. I feel that you may know”

The comments were challenging at a number of levels, in that, they posed questions not only for further general information, but they encouraged further self explorations. The following are examples.

“I wonder if some discussion could be had here of your perceptions of self in terms of your beauty or otherwise? What perceptions did you develop of yourself in your own right, in relation to those around you – brothers/other relatives/society etc? – I wonder here if I’m talking of the issue of colourism – I’m not quite sure”

“I stand to be corrected – I believe you also have Indian in your family. Why not also identification with people of Indian descent?”.

“why this permanent etching on your consciousness – how did colourism play out in your family?– where did you fit in the hierarchy and how did/do you feel about that?”

“where does this sense of defiance come from? How important is it for your sense of dignity and survival? I suppose the question before this last one is why defiance is important?”

“All of this information is powerfully informative. Perhaps it could be linked back to perceptions of self. Which has the greater influence on you and why – Tar Baby or Garvey?”

“I think the reader would benefit greatly from hearing more about the whole impact of Garveyism and Ethiopianism on you and your identity. A lot has been said about the movements – how have these times in history impacted on you as a Black man? How have they influenced your thinking/politics? How have they influenced your raising of two Black males? How have they influenced your relationship to the world more generally?”

“(Is it really true that we have no voice – I mean NO voice? What does this do to the psyche when the perception is that we have no voice? In the writing of this paper, are you still saying that you have no voice? What does having no voice really mean on a day to day practical level and also on a political level? How could we gain more of a voice?”

“did you also know that you were/are beautiful or did you have a perception of yourself as ugly and why?”

“How has the silence of others in the face of injustice against you impacted on you? How has it felt for you when people have considered you as not having feelings? How has it felt for you when your ‘boys’ (sons) have experienced race injustice? I think what would make this even more powerful are some examples from your own personal experience.”

The requests for information had their challenges too, in that they encouraged further research. The areas though held an interest for me. Some of the requests are as follows:

“useful to provide examples that you believe supports this assertion – some high profile examples would be useful – Stephen Lawrence (I’ve got a copy of this report if it would be of value to you at any point), Roland Adams, SUS, police stats on stop and search etc.”

“This was a compulsory reader in the Caribbean. I wonder why such a story was included? What message/learning was intended? Why was this text considered so important that it had to be included in a national reader?”

“I think it would be great to talk about how these hierarchies played out in Trinidad and also to do a comparison with the England. It might also be a great opportunity to discuss here how the various cultures came into being in Trinidad) (I have some resources and access to resources that may be of value here – if it’s something that you are interested in exploring further!!”

“would be useful to the reader to have these disparaging terms explained and maybe say something about how they came about”

That the comments contended points of view that I held is also of importance, in that this really points the way to true dialogue. Some of the contentions were:

“In this instance, I am not wholly sure that Tar Baby was helpless. Brer Rabbit became immobile because he became stuck to Tar Baby. This was Tar Baby’s power – she had to do nothing except sit still in order to render Brer Rabbit helpless. She was able to use her own ‘magic’ as power. No matter what he threatened Brer Rabbit couldn’t win). I’m reminded here of the words of Maya Angelou when she said you may encounter many defeats, but you must never be defeated.”

“I, as a reader would benefit from knowing why you feel these vows are simple gestures. It sounds as though you are saying that these vows have no point/validity and I’d quite to know a bit more about what your thinking is on this.”

“If the vows are futile, how can they have importance – strikes me as a bit of a contradiction!!!!!!?”

Interestingly, the comments end with a direction:

“I wonder if it would be possible to get into the mind of the racist, much the same way you got into the mind of Tar Baby – I’m sure that there is loads of

literature that would be useful – why? Because you talk of the acts being unjust and obviously I agree with you..... the racist would see it differently and I think this knowledge would add another dimension to your paper.”

The comments were much appreciated and the importance of story – dialogue was once again affirmed for me. “An Intrusive Thought” also affirmed for me that “I had not left my shell behind.” My stories could be placed within the framework of the African story. They could be used as “a primary mode of conveying culture, experience, and values and as a means of transmitting knowledge, wisdom, feelings, and attitudes.” That African oral tradition had made its impact on self too, for it was influencing my values and experiences and helping to shape my attitudes, actions and ways of being. Therefore, as I am writing the thesis I feel this very process is contributing to the makings and unmakings in the making of me.

To have arrived at this juncture – in the makings and un-makings in the making of me - has not been the result of a simple linear development. It is really the result of the explorations on the complex set of events shared earlier in this paper. I cannot say whether any of these explorations or events holds a greater significance when compared with another, and at this point, I do not consider that such a ranking is of importance. Suffice it to say that all of the explorations have importance and each event has its particular significance. Together, as part of my overall focus, geared to improving my professional practices they have been of much value. I begin this section though, positively. I am offering standards derived from my experiences on which I can be judged. I will make claims that are derived from personal and professional values as a basis for setting in motion strategies and frameworks for acidification. I begin ...

It is my love of humankind that moves me to act. That is, to do or not to do. It is love that fires the barometer within which my positive spiritual sense of being (simply articulated as there is importance in how I have lived and I am living and there is a purpose for me to be alive) is held. This is not to say that there are no other motivating or delimiting forces in my everyday living. However, I have had to recognize that it is my love of humankind, which has contributed and continues to contribute to my spiritual well-being and generates the positive energies to act for me, my family, my community and my world.

To act for me, my family, my community and my world I know is a tall order. Yet, I have come to consider that to act in such a way is the challenge of my humanity – the emerging African in me – the essence of who I am.

I am very thankful that my journey to this moment has not been a lonely one, for along the way I have mingled and acted with others whose love of humankind have motivated them to act too. They too have had their spiritual well-being intact, (some only briefly), and have helped (were influential) in the makings and un-makings - in the making of me. I hope too, that my spiritual well-being also had influence on the makings and un-makings – in the making of them ... the making of us. This mingling and acting with others with a positive spiritual sense of being continues into the present and as I am helped in the continuing process of the makings and un-makings – in the making of me, I am having an influence on the makings and un-makings – in the making of others and together we are lovingly co-determining who we are – who we are not.

That I place love at the centre of my motivations to act for self, co-determining with others and making my way in the world amongst humankind is of importance, for it is truly loving relationships that my stories address, in their focus on my mother, grandmother and myself in the tar-baby. Throughout each of the stories I have been challenged to give consideration to how 'love' came into to my life and how 'love' has contributed to the makings of me. Interestingly though, as I began this consideration of the makings of me, a recording of Curtis Mayfield, entitled "The Makings of You", came to thought and it felt important that I should hear the song. I began singing it to myself, but felt unsure about the lyrics.

At the time of my initial consideration of the makings of me, I was in Orlando, staying for a few days with my brother, his wife and their daughter. I was almost certain that my brother would have some Curtis Mayfield recordings, but it was to his wife that I explained my project and made my inquiry. She came up with a compilation of Love Songs by Curtis Mayfield, which included the song - "The Makings of You". I immediately played the recording and was astonished as to how close was my memory of the song's lyrics were – see below.

The Makings of You

*Add a little sugar,
Honeysuckle and
A great big expression of happiness
Boy you couldn't miss
With a dozen roses
Such will astound you
The joy of children laughing around you
These are the makings of you
It is true
The makings of you*

*The righteous way to go
Little one would know
Or believe if I told them so
You second to none*

*The love of all mankind
Should reflect some sign
Of these words I've tried to recite
They are close
But not quite
Almost impossible to do
Reciting the makings of you*

*The Makings of You - Curtis Mayfield
From the Album Curtis, Curtom #8005 (9/70) LPs #19*

I replayed the song many times, singing along with Curtis, recalling how I had made his words my words and sought deeper meanings for those words. I recalled how I had attached much importance to the first verse, within which I considered was held the ingredients for the “makings of you” – the makings of me. I am singing again - singing about the makings of me – singing about the ingredients that are so essential in my making – sugar – honeysuckle – happiness – children laughing...Listen...

*Add a little sugar,
Honeysuckle and
A great big expression of happiness
Boy you couldn't miss
...
The joy of children laughing around you
These are the makings of you*

These words of the first verse excited me. They offered a warm emotional feel and contrasted with the second verse that embraced the emotion and grounded it in the world. David Ritz, in the liner notes on the compilation of Curtis Mayfield's Love Songs, made that exact point relating to “The Makings of You”. Ritz noted that Curtis in seeing love as “the righteous way to go”, he is placing romance in the context of “the love of mankind.” For me this is an important link and I can concur with Ritz that this is truly inspired poetry - an inspirational quality that really speaks of the man - Curtis. Ritz also noted on Curtis' humility, which is evident in the song, when he confesses that though his own words are close to giving meaning to *the*

mystery of the heart (love) ... (it) is almost impossible to do ... the words are not quite up to the "job of reciting the makings of you."

Ritz notes however that *"when singers sing of love ... precious few strike the chord that resonates in the deepest part of our souls, that place where secular romance and spiritual ecstasy merge as one."* He informs though that *"Curtis Mayfield is among the precious few"* and asserts that amongst Mayfield's *many prodigious gifts, the ability to infuse divine energy into popular love songs is his most remarkable – a miracle."*

Listen, listen to Ritz on Curtis:

"I say miracle because much of the extraordinary legacy of African-American music is marked by a sharp division between the secular and the spiritual. I have heard it argued that this division gives the genres on both sides – spirituals and gospel on one hand, jazz and blues on the other – their rich tension. Allegory runs deep. God and Satan, good and evil, salvation and sin – these are the moral juxtapositions that have challenged artists from Duke Ellington to Sam Cooke, from Little Richard to Marvin Gaye. Each handled the dichotomy differently. But no one reconciled the two forces with more natural grace than did Curtis Mayfield."

"Mayfield's legacy, like Ellington's," suggests Ritz, is tied to his skills as a painter of broad musical landscapes. He depicted the lives and articulated the problems of his own people. His most famous songs – Keep On Pushing," "People Get Ready – come out of the politically super-charged '60s yet remain gentle messages, strong but sweet. Sweetness is the great hallmark of Mayfield's artistry... Curtis is seldom corny or trite. His sweetness is essentially spiritual, even transcendent. He deals in wonder and joy..."

He wrote what he heard; he wrote what he felt; and what he heard and felt was a universe of harmony.

The inspiration was everywhere. The inspiration was simple. It was love. And it made no difference whether you were singing in church about the Lord or singing in school about your girl. Love is love. You can't touch it, can't butt it, can't even figure it out. Love comes from above. It just is. You praise it, you express it, you let it flow through you. You can't do any more than that.

These notes on Curtis really got me thinking and took me in some interesting directions. I gave consideration to *the division between the secular and the spiritual, God and Satan, good and evil, salvation and sin – the rich tension, the dichotomies – the living contradictions – the makings and un-makings.*

I also thought about the statements:

- *“Mayfield’s legacy is tied to his skills as a painter of broad musical landscapes. He depicted the lives and articulated the problems of his own people.*
- *His most famous songs – Keep On Pushing,” “People Get Ready – come out of the politically super-charged ‘60s yet remain gentle messages, strong but sweet.*
- *Sweetness is the great hallmark of Mayfield’s artistry... Curtis is seldom corny or trite. His sweetness is essentially spiritual, even transcendent. He deals in wonder and joy...*
- *He wrote what he heard; he wrote what he felt; and what he heard and felt was a universe of harmony.*
- *I’m merely the instrument.”*
- *.. there’s a deeper kind of control we can never have. That’s the control of our hearts.*
- *And when our hearts are pure, we hear the pure message...It can be about politics, or race, or love, or the homeless. The message takes many forms, but when it comes through, you know it. You can’t control it – you simply let you take you where it will.*
- *‘Get out of your own way.’*
- *If you feel me in the songs, you feel my inspiration, the inspiration that goes all the way back to my grandmother preaching at the Travelling Soul Spiritualist Church...*
- *The inspiration was simple. It was love. And it made no difference whether you were singing in church about the Lord or singing in school about your girl. Love is love. You can’t touch it, can’t butt it, can’t even figure it out. Love comes from above. It just is. You praise it, you express it, you let it flow through you. You can’t do any more than that.*

I knew now, after listening to Curtis and reading Ritz that I would have to focus in much greater depth on my loving relationships as I continued my self inquiries. I would also have to focus more considerably on that emerging African in me.

That emerging African in me is a dynamic way of being in the world. It is no static concept and Kobi K. K. Kambon, writing in *African/Black Psychology in the American Context: An African-Centred Approach* captures much of what that

dynamic way of being is to me in his proposal of the Africentric Paradigm, which has the following four key characteristics.

1. *It generates the construction of an African social reality from the framework of the history, culture and philosophy of African civilisation (including its cumulative experiences across time).*
2. *It recognises and articulates the basic continuity of the African Worldview/cultural reality throughout the diverse African populations around the globe.*
3. *It recognises and articulates the basic distinctness and independence of the African Worldview/cultural reality relative to any other, such as the European Worldview.*
4. *It projects the African Survival Thrust as the centre of African social reality.*

For Kambon, each culture generates its own distinct approach to and experience of reality - its indigenous definitional system, philosophy of life or fundamental/basic assumptions about life, nature, the universe - its cosmology or worldview. From this point of departure he argues that there is an African Worldview - the African Survival Thrust – representing the distinct unifying cosmological, ontological, epistemological and axiological principles of the African's natural cultural (conception) orientation, outlook or perspective on and construction of reality - the African way of being in the world.

This African Worldview, Kambon further argues, defines human-nature relations as interdependent and inseparable with positive, affirming and complementary themes determining its character. He writes:

"The fundamental assumption or ethos in African cosmology is that of 'Human-Nature Unity', Oneness or Harmony with Nature, including complementarity, balance and reciprocity in all existence. Humanity, or the Self, and Nature, are conceptualised as one and the same phenomenon ...

"The primary emphasis is on the survival of the corporate whole of nature, which includes all living things, rather than simply advancing some special interest group or some segment apart from the corporate whole. Hence, the basic values,

beliefs and psycho-behavioural modalities characterising the African worldview relate to the principles of inclusiveness and synthesis, cooperation and collective responsibility, groupness, sameness and commonality, and at the core of it all, of course is "Spirituality".

In this African worldview of Kambon, consciousness is holistic, encompassing the person/personal or self-consciousness and phenomenal experience/extended consciousness. There is no perceptual gap between the person and experience, they constitute one continuous process. Everything is relational or holistic and the person acquires significance only within the framework of the community.

Therefore, fundamental in the lifestyle of people of African descent throughout the world, are the intricate relationships between kinship and community, social affiliation, shared participation and communal experience, religion, symbolism and dynamic spiritual association.

Kambon notes:

"Whether African people are observed in Africa, North and South America, or elsewhere, these worldview features are viable and true to their African source."

Kambon further notes that:

"Our music, our songs, our vibrant and deeply-felt emotionality, our religious fervour), and our fundamental moral temperament all attest to the fact that there is such a phenomenon as the African cultural personality defining the natural African psychical reality of African people throughout the African world (continental and diasporan)".

It is that *"African cultural personality defining the natural African psychical reality of African people throughout the African world (continental and diasporan), which is of importance and has meaning for determining the qualities of the African emerging in me. I have no truck with Kambon's Africentric Paradigm, or his arguments informing his justification of an African Worldview, particularly as much of what he writes assists in affirming the African emerging in me – my African worldview.*

However, that love that I claim motivates me to act and that emerging African in me needs to be given validity. I need to assess whether those qualities are grounded in my professional practices. I have to explore its operation in my life and work. I need to explore these qualities in my centres of investigations.