Becoming with the dog in South Africa

Reflections on family, memory, and Human-animal relations in ~~post-~~apartheid South Africa

By

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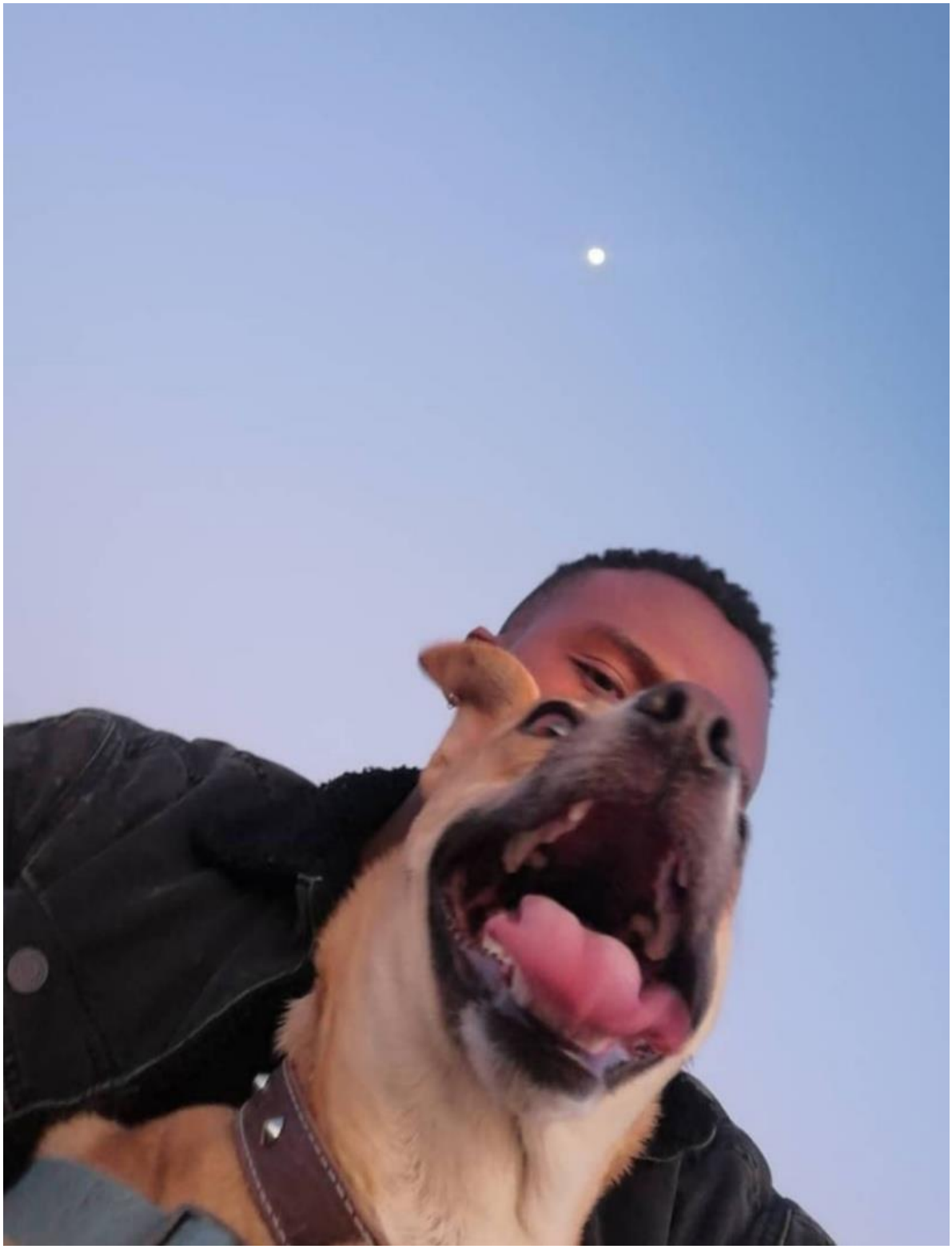

Declaration

I declare that this is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the partial requirements of an MPhil Degree, at the University of Cape Town. It has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

Signature: .....**Date: 12 November 2021**

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Acknowledgements

Each morning, during the past five years, I have, without fail, started my day by kneeling on the ground, uttering these words: “Grace abounds.” I perform this ritual in remembrance grace, all the hands that have held me, close, and tight, even in the times when I felt unworthy of care.

Grace overflows, it runs deep, and cuts across the relationships we have with people with whom we walk this earth. It reminds us that we too are worthy of community, kindness, gentleness, and radical compassion. One of the many joys this project brought me, as I would later discover, is how it operated as a medium around which my thoughts, ideas, and ramblings could be affirmed. Thank you, to the Environmental Humanities South at the University of Cape Town, for honing my intellectual curiosity.

Dr. Hedley Twidle, thank you for being patient with me. Mdlalose, my brother, those impromptu discussions we had on blackness and *being* in the world – standing behind the kitchen counter at random hours of the day in Illovo, Johannesburg – sparked in me a fire that will never go off, dikgomo. La Marr, my friend, I love you. Palesa and Paballo, my sisters, thank you; thank you for being a soft-landing place for me, always.

Abstract

Can the relationship White people have with the figure of the dog, in what currently exists as South Africa, be free of antiblackness? Following instances where I saw black women who worked as domestic workers walk dogs belonging to their White employers, I write these letters addressed to you, my sister, Palesa – meditating on the dog-Human relationships as sites of racial violence. The core analytic framework and theory I employ to explore these extreme, mundane, and in-between forms of violence, is Afro-Pessimism.

Key words: antiblackness, dogs, White supremacy, Afro-Pessimism, Anthropocene, violence, apartheid, ~~post-~~apartheid, South Africa

Introduction

"sihamba nzima, siyazama" - *Bantu Biko Street*, Simphiwe Dana[1]

What can our memories of the figure of the dog reveal about South Africa and its symbiotic relationship with antiblackness?[2] Palesa, I titled these letters to you *Becoming with the dog in South Africa* because upon reflecting on my childhood experiences with Joy, a dog I had while growing up in Rammolutsi, I realised that the domesticated dog, as a species, can operate as a medium through which remembering the narratives of violence – beyond our own immediate family life – happens.

The fact that a large part of my childhood remembering of Joy solicited memories of the gender-based violence, poverty, and wealth and income inequality – experiences that defined the life we have always known – too did not come as a surprise. This is what it means to live black in what currently exists as South Africa.[3] Over the years, there are artists who, like Simphiwe Dana, on *Bantu Biko Street* (a song whose lyrics I open this letter with), use the sonic to offer us a sobering reminder of this perpetual structural violence afflicting black existence in this country. "Lomhlab'uyahlaba sinyathela ameva" [this world is a painful place,

[1] Dana, S. 2006. *Bantu Biko Street*. The One Love Movement in Bantu Biko Street.

[2] By the term "the dog" I mean the domesticated dog. There will be instances where I refer specifically to the German Shepherd, which I will interchange with "Alsatian" and "the police dog."

[3] South Africa is an antiblack settler capitalist colonial invention. Further, my reference to South Africa, within the context of these writings, is meant to denote this place as antithetical to Azania. As such, South Africa exists as "occupied Azania". Most scholars, including philosopher Ndumiso Dladla in "The Azanian Philosophical Tradition Today", writing from the Pan Africanist and the black consciousness movement, consider Azania an ideal. I on the other hand advance that Azania is the starting point.

being here feels like walking on thorns], Sisonke Xonti on *Sinivile*, like Dana, too laments.[4] Palesa, even without artists like Dana and Xonti, among others, reminding us of this violence, it is impossible to forget that this is the norm. For it is our mothers, their mothers, and those who came before, whose existence has been nothing but a living archive of antiblackness.

Palesa, whenever I shared with comrades, past lovers, and friends, that one of the ways I could revisit my earlier childhood memories of growing up, was via the figure of the dog, this often was met with odd responses, laced with judgment. The judgment from some of these people, whom I knew deeply loved me or at least cared, was not targeted at the painful stories they themselves would have encountered in their lives. Instead, how I accessed these narratives was what invited their sense of awe; the presence of the dog somewhat rendered me mad.

Now, political theorist La Marr Jurelle Bruce, in *How To Go Mad Without Losing Your Mind: Madness And Radical Black Creativity*, reminds us that "In normative Western philosophy since the Age of Enlightenment, Reason and rationality are believed essential for achieving modern personhood, joining civil society, and participating in liberal politics".[5] And that "Reason has been entangled, from those very Enlightenment roots, with misogynist, colonialist, ableist, antiblack, and other pernicious ideologies".[6]

What Bruce argues, when we think of South Africa, best finds expression in how the colonial and apartheid systems also framed black people as mad.

This, among others, we see in the deliberate construction and uses of *swart gevaar,* that idea that black people are these mad figures against which White people and the system of

[4] Xonti, S. 2020. *uGaba The Migration: Sinivile*.

[5] Bruce, L. J. 2021. *How To Go Mad Without Losing Your Mind: Madness And Radical Creativity*. Duke University Press. p. 4.

[6] Ibid.

apartheid must always guard against.[7] Beyond *swart gevaar*, we have also seen black women relegated to the "mad" category. Remember Nina Simone, Stella Nyanzi, Billie Holiday, Brenda Fassie, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, and Lebo Mathosa? How these women – using their creative genius, intellectual prowess, and overall bravery to question imperialism, patriarchy, settler colonialism, and general societal norms – were rendered mad black women?

I now know that what is regarded mad, crazy, and odd is what sustains life – black life, in an antiblack world. This I say because it is only through madness that we can end the world as we know it.

Thinking through/with the figure of the dog – a form of madness I consider to be necessary – is a mad inquiry out of which I believe we can explore the world's very own madness.

As part of exploring the dog as an archive of the settler-colonial and apartheid violent histories that consigned black people as belonging outside the Human category, an act that involves loitering (hours spent reading, writing, and pacing up and down in my rooms in Cape Town, Yeoville, Braamfontein, Rammolutsi, and Berea), among others I came across the work of trauma researcher Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela.

Gobodo-Madikizela in *A Human Being Died that Night: A South African Story of Forgiveness*, argues that "the narratives of trauma told by victims and survivors are not simply

[7] There are multiple ways this has been referred to. Andile M-Afrika in "The Black Consciousness Movement and the Diplomatic Offensive" refers to this as "black peril". While Zulaiga Adams in "Demitrios Tsafendas and the Subversion of Apartheid's Paper Regime" prefers to use "black menace". In general, however, what this means is that the apartheid state produced the notion of *swart gevaar* to render black people as perpetual threat to the system.

about facts. They are primarily about the impact of those facts on victims' lives and about the painful continuities by violence in their lives".[8]

What she reminds us of, is that the focus should not only be on the objects with/through which we remember. Instead, our energies must also be dedicated towards honouring, exploring, and making sense of the feelings we derive from these memories.

And this is not to say that the dog as an animal, does not matter. We learn, from historian and animal studies scholar, Sandra Swart in "*Dogs and Dogma: A Discussion of the Socio-Political Construction of Southern African Dog 'Breeds' as a Window on Social History*," that dogs have been entangled in human lives for as long as humans have existed:

> Dogs have been entangled in human lives, myths, illusions, and sentiments for at least the last ten to twelve thousand years.' The alliance between dogs and humans is the oldest among all the animals, and the relationship is so long that the story we think of as theirs is often our own.[9]

And while this is the case, these relations have not been uneventful.[10] By this I mean that the production and maintenance of antiblackness has relied on the employment of the dog. It is my submission that this is something we can better understand when we turn to the notion of "thingification". Aimé Césaire, in *Discourse on Colonialism*, argues that the system of colonialism was not a "human contact, but relations of domination and submission which

[8] Gobodo-Madikizela, P. 2003. *A Human Being Died that Night: A South African Story of Forgiveness*. Mariner Books. p. 86.

[9] Swart, S. 2003. *Dogs and Dogma: A Discussion of the Socio-Political Construction of Southern African Dog 'Breeds' as a Window on Social History*. *South African Historical Journal.* p. 190.

[10] Here I use humans to refer to the human species.

turned the colonizing man into a class room monitor, an army sergeant, a prison guard, a slave driver, and the indigenous man into any instrument of production."[11] Thinking about the dog, alongside the notion of "thingification", the observation political theorist Zakiyya Iman Jackson makes in "Losing Manhood Animality and Plasticity in the (Neo)Slave Narrative" is useful.[12] Jackson argues that "Slavery's archival footprint is a ledger system that placed black humans, horses, cattle, and household items all on the same bill of purchase."[13]

And although I am writing within the context of South Africa, that the dog as an animal does not occupy the same status as black people (where *being* is concerned), however, there have been forms of objectification/thingification processes out of which an antiblack economic, social, and political world order is sustained – as a matter of necessity.

Palesa, in these letters, the analytic framework I use to make sense of the dog-Human relations and antiblackness, is Afro-Pessimism. Afro-Pessimism argues that black people are socially dead. Political theorist Frank Wilderson in "Afro-Pessimism and the End of Redemption", gives a succinct explanation:

> Afro-Pessimism is premised on an iconoclastic claim: that Blackness is coterminous with Slaveness. Blackness *is* social death, which is to say that there was never a prior meta-moment of plenitude, never a moment of equilibrium, never a moment of social

[11] Césaire, A. 2000. *Discourse on Colonialism*. New York: Monthly Review Press. Print; Kelly, R. D. G. 1999. *A Poetics of Anticolonilsim*.

[12] Jackson, I. Z. 2016. *Losing Manhood Animality and Plasticity in the (Neo)Slave Narrative*. Critical Humanities and Social Sciences, Volume 25, Numbers 1 & 2, Fall/Winter 2016. Duke University Press

[13] Ibid. p. 95.

> life. Blackness, as a paradigmatic position (rather than as an ensemble of identities, cultural practices, or anthropological accoutrement), cannot be disimbricated from slavery.[14]

In addition to the claim Wilderson makes, that blackness is interchangeable with slaveness, it is important to understand that these arguments, together with their application, extend beyond the borders of what currently exists as the United States of America (USA). Palesa, a scholar whose academic and intellectual contributions Afro-Pessimism heavily relies on, is Orlando Patterson. Patterson in his seminal book, *Slavery and Social Death*, outlines the three interrelated features central to black social death: gratuitous violence, natal alienation, and general dishonour.[15] In his elaboration concerning the usefulness of Patterson's formulation of social death, Wilderson argues:

> In pursuit of his "constituent elements" of slavery, a line of inquiry that helps us separate experience (events) from ontology (the capacities of power—or lack thereof—lodged in distinct and irreconcilable subject positions, e.g., Humans
>
> and Slaves), Patterson helps us denaturalize the link between force and labor so that we can theorize the former as a phenomenon that positions a body, ontologically

[14] Wilderson, B. F. 2015. *Afro-Pessimism and the End of Redemption*.

[15] Patterson, O. 1982. *Slavery and Social Death*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Harvard University Press.

(paradigmatically), and the latter as a possible but not inevitable experience of someone who is socially dead.[16]

Further, Patterson's formulation of social death, according to Wilderson, sets apart black(ness) from the category of the Human, placing us outside of what he considers to be a civil society.[17] In an interview conducted by art historian Zamansele Nsele, for the *Mail & Guardian* newspaper, Wilderson argues that "the slave, the Black, exists in a paradigm of gratuitous violence — violence that never goes into remission, even when the slave, the Black has shown no signs of transgression. This is because anti-Black violence secures a different paradigmatic division than the division between the worker and the boss. It secures the division between the Human and the Black."[18] He also goes on to argue that "Social death bars the slave from access to narrative, at the level of temporality; but it also does so at the level of spatiality."[19]

Here an important point worth accounting for, considering its relevance in this meditation, is the idea that social death transcends temporality. In the case of the 1994 democratic dispensation – while this was an event meant to signify the incorporation of black people into a civil society – we can draw a conclusion that this moment did not mark an end to antiblackness.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Nsele, Z. 2020. *Part I: Afropessimism and the Ritual of anti-blackness*.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Wilderson, B. F. 2015. *Afro-Pessimism and the End of Redemption*.

I read this argument, that black people permanently cannot access narratives, alongside Frantz Fanon's notion of the "zone of nonbeing".[20] Given that black people are not Human, in the case of South Africa, this means that the violence (even when carried out using the figure the dog) never goes into remission, following Wilderson's claim. And this is what sustains South Africa, considering that antiblackness as its foundational logic(s).

My sister, central to this meditation, the argument I advance is that – considering that black people exist outside the category of the Human, with White South Africa(ns) existing as a coherent political identity/group – the dog-Human relationships (always) produce forms of antiblackness.

Palesa, by antiblackness I mean "a world in which black torture, dismemberment, fatality, and fracturing are routinized and ritualized—a *global*, sadistic pleasure principle."[21]

The decision to make the figure of the dog a subject of these letters to you reflects my desire to understand the implication of this animal's incorporation into systems whose core interest is antiblack violence – my specific interest here is both the animal and black people.

Linked to my personal wandering about the dog, the more academic questions related to this meditation, emerged out of the experiences I had while living in Cape Town. It is here where I first encountered black women walking dogs belonging to their White employers. This would go on to shape my interest(s) around antiblackness and the uses of this animal.

[20] Peau noire, masques blancs (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952) and Black Skin, White Masks, trans. Charles Lamm Markman. New York: Grove Press, 1967.

[21] Warren, C. 2018. *Ontological Terror*. Duke University Press. p. 2.

And although I will get into this in detail, much later, overall, I find that the Anthropocene as an analytic framework – its uses in South Africa – is contradicted by the claims Afro-Pessimism makes about *being* and blackness in the world.

This contradiction emerges at two interrelated fronts: in the Anthropocene's assumptive logic that there exists universal humanity; that everyone, including black people, belongs in the Human category. Relevant in this regard, is the point Emily Parker raises, that 'To talk about ecology without a questioning of this ultimate homogeneity of "the human" means leaving unquestioned the fact that many [black] bodies are its negative referents. In this way ecological thinking can be a continuation of modern Manichaeanism'.[22]

Secondly, Palesa, the Anthropocene assumes that black antagonism can only be limited to the material – this we see in how the planetary crisis are attributed to the material/capitalist exploitation. [23]

In its entirety, despite that a meditation of this nature will never be complete, I recognise that writing on the figure of the dog has several potentialities. One of these relates to the function of the archive(s). Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Jane Taylor, Michele Pickover, Graeme Reid, and Razia Saleh in "*Refiguring the Archive*" argue that the archive is both a site of exclusion and an object around which power is configured.[24] I do not conceive of the archive as some old records shelved away somewhere. Palesa, when it comes to disciplines such as

[22] Parker, E. A. 2018. The Human as Double Bind: Sylvia Wynter and the Genre of "Man" The Journal of Speculative Philosophy, Vol. 32, No. 3, Special Issue with the Society for Phenomenology And Existential Philosophy. p. 442.

[23] Wilderson, B. F. 2003. *Gramsci's Black Marx: Whither the Slave in Civil Society?* Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture.

[24] Carolyn Hamilton et al., eds., 2002. *Refiguring the Archive*. Cape Town: David Philip Publishers

animal studies, trauma studies, memorialisation, a meditation on the dog highlights the failures to account for the intersection of antiblackness, South Africa, and the dog. This also signals to how some questions are undervalued.

Reflecting on some of the ways things can be undervalued, especially where memorialisation is concerned, sociologist, Nthabiseng Motsemme, in "The Meanings of Silence: Memory", poses these important questions:

> What do South Africans consider legitimate and authoritative memories? Which dominant collective memories are shaping this young democracy? Why these specific memorialisations, and not others? What meanings do we attach to these collective stories? What analytic frameworks do we use to uncover their authentic meanings, if such a thing exists? What do we consider legitimate memory sites, and why? What kinds of socio-political contexts contribute to the formulation of particular meanings around specifically chosen memories?[25]

In essence, Motsemme's questions are a call for us to expand our meaning-making processes. In ~~post-~~apartheid South Africa, there are scholars who – in what I consider to be ways of responding to the call Motsemme makes, more so because black intellectual thought exists in an ecosystem – challenge our understanding of memory-work.[26] Among these is

[25] Motsemme, N. 2004. *The meanings in silence: meaning*. Rhodes Journalism Review. Volume 2004, Issue 24. p. 4.

[26] In these letters, I think of ~~post-~~apartheid South Africa as indicative of the death of the system of apartheid. 1994 came with a readjustment of the system to ensure its continuity. In this regard, I appreciate the question Saidiya Hartman asks: "Can one mourn what has yet ceased happening?". In essence, this meditation itself, by seeking to

historian Jacob Dlamini, who for example, reflects on the politics of nostalgia, as linked to ~~post-~~apartheid South Africa:

> The master narrative would have us believe that black South Africans, who populate struggle jargon mostly as faceless 'masses of our people', experienced apartheid the same way…This is not to say there was no poverty, crime or moral degradation. There was. But none of this determined the sum of black life in its totality.[27]

Palesa, added to this is the contribution of sociologist Shireen Ally, who investigates how some residents of KaNgwane (a former apartheid Bantustan, which according to its residents at the time, did not encounter political violence as often is written about concerning other parts of South Africa during the height of apartheid) remember apartheid. Ally, concerning some of the experiences people of KaNgwane share, goes on to ask: "Given the profitability of recovering heroic narratives of political rebellion, why would some memories in KaNgwane make elaborate investments in recollecting apartheid through tropes of peaceful order, rather than the more lucrative one of subjection and insurrection?"[28] She further argues: "Indeed, KaNgwane's dismembering practices of remembering defy the logics made gainful by political projects that craft heroic subjects out of victimization by (and resistance to)

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think of the dog uses across time, is to recognise the very fact that antiblackness defies time and the related socio-political events.

[27] Dlamini, J. 2009. *Native nostalgia*. Jacana. pp. 18 -19.

[28] Ally, S. 2011. *Peaceful memories: remembering and forgetting political violence in Kagwane, South Africa.* p. 351.

political violence, enigmatically recuperating heroism out of narratives of political tranquillity and disavowals of the political instead."[29]

Contrasting the questions that emerge out of both Dlamini and Ally's work, there is a sense that memory itself, and the practices of remembering in ~~post-~~apartheid South Africa, ought to be expanded and rendered complex. The contestation of memory as a practice, in these letters, happens at two interlinked levels: in making the figure of the dog a site of remembering antiblackness, and in thinking about what the mainstream public narratives of the dog include and exclude.

From a methodological point of view, I am very much aware that within the South African humanities and social sciences, there are specific approaches encouraged when it comes to undertaking any academic and intellectual questions/projects. I appreciate that my approach with these letters to you, is indicative of a deliberate deviation of a sort; considering that I insert myself (us) into the very subject of my inquiry.

Palesa, this is aimed at speaking to the very idea that nothing is as is. I do not enter the lecture hall(s) free of the experiences that make me. By taking these methodological approaches, therefore, I put into practice what literary and cultural studies scholar Pumla Dineo Gqola, in "Ufanele Uqavile: Blackwomen, Feminisms and Postcoloniality in Africa" argues; that we must do away with the Cartesian dualism where (in the academy) there tends to be a separation of theory from praxis.[30]

Further, my preferred mode of writing, and presenting ideas, is aimed at reflecting, among others, the academy's antiblack nature and origins. Legal scholar and critical race

[29] Ibid.

[30] Gqola, P.D. 2001. *Ufanele Uqavile: Blackwomen, Feminisms and Postcoloniality in Africa.* Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity. No. 50, African Feminisms One.

theorist Joel Modiri, makes an important point in this regard, that "critical investigations into the sociology and politics of knowledge have definitively refuted the notion of an objective, neutral, and perspective-less researcher and thereby dissolved the distinction or distance between researchers and their research techniques and findings".[31]

Modiri further argues that "Because white people constitute the socially dominant group in 'South Africa' and because this social dominance then manifests in white demographic overrepresentation in the academy, it is inevitable that a 'white ideological methodology', a set of 'white logic[s] and white methods', came to dominate and shape the 'canon' of the humanities and social sciences". What Modiri argues captures well the place from which I am operating.

Becoming with, in antiblackness

> "Ms. Cayenne Pepper continues to colonize all my cells – a sure case of what the biologist Lynna Margulis calls symbiogenesis. I bet if you checked our DNA, you'd find some potent transfections between us. Her saliva must have the viral vectors. Surely, her darter-tongue kisses have been irresistible" - Donna Haraway, *Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness.*[32]

Palesa, I posited that considering what blackness and Whiteness mean in South Africa, the relationship between White people and the dog is one that always produces forms of antiblackness. To make sense of this observation, I propose "becoming with in antiblackness"

[31] Modiri, J. 2021. *Azanian Political Thought and the Undoing of South African Knowledges*. Theoria: journal for social and political thought. Volume 68: issue 168. p. 46.

[32] Haraway, D. 2003. *The companion species manifesto: Dogs, people, and significant others*. Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press. pp. 91-198.

as a framework. I draw the notion of "becoming with", out of the work of scholar Donna Haraway. Haraway in the opening of *Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* alludes to forms of becoming, between herself and her dog. In *When Species Meet*, Haraway argues that together with her dog, they can ensure co-relations of a sort, which she calls a "dance of relating".[33] She further goes on to use "companion species", in reference to these forms of relating:

> The term *companion species* refers to the old co-constitutive link between dogs and people, where dogs have been actors and not just recipients of action. *Companion species* also points to the sorts of being made possible at interfaces among different human communities of practice for whom "love of the breed" or "love of dogs" is a practical and ethical imperative in an *always* specific, historical context, one that involves science, technology, and medicine at every turn. Further, *companion species* designates webbed bio-social-technical apparatuses of humans, animals, artifacts, and institutions in which particular ways of being emerge and are sustained. Or not.[34]

She argues that this "refers to the old co-constitutive link between dogs and people, where dogs have been actors and not just recipients of action".[35] Thinking about Haraway and her dog, within the logic of a co-production, there is an appreciation of the fact that the dog and Haraway differently influence one another's worlds.

[33] Haraway, D. 2008. *When Species Meet.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. p. 134.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Haraway, D. 2003. *The companion species manifesto: Dogs, people, and significant others*. Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press. pp. 91-198.

This thinking is a shift from what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in "Becoming Animal" think of the human-animal relationship – which they prefer be looked at within the limits of paleontological and archeological scientific research – as just a relationship between the two entities and nothing else.[36] However, according to Haraway, "dogs are not a projection, nor a realization of an intention, nor the telos of anything. They are dogs i.e., a species in obligatory constitutive, historical, protean relationship with human beings."[37]

What emerges out of Haraway's thinking, is the idea that the Human (herself) and the animal (Ms. Cayenne Pepper), become; that she cannot conceive of herself outside of this relationship (vice versa). And this is because her world, and that of Ms. Cayenne Pepper see them being one another's building blocks: partners/objects/subjects/players.

Further, while it is the case that the Human and the dog have co-constitutive worlds, Haraway appreciates the unique positionalities between herself and the dog (based on the dog's differing animal status, among others). She argues:

> Even though we share placement in the phylum of vertebrates, we inhabit not just different genera and divergent families, but altogether different orders. How would we sort things out? Canid, hominid; pet, professor; bitch, woman, animal, human; athlete, handler. One of us has a microchip injected under her neck skin for identification; the other has a photo ID 1 2 California driver's license. One of us has a written record of her ancestors for twenty generations; one of us does not know her great grandparents' names. One of us, product of a vast genetic mixture, is called "purebred." One of us,

[36] Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. 1987. *A thousand plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia*. University of Michigan Press.

[37] Haraway, D. 2003. *The companion species manifesto: Dogs, people, and significant others*. Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press. pp. 12-13.

> equally product of a vast mixture, is called "white. Each of these names designates a racial discourse, and we both inherit their consequences in our flesh.[38]

Borrowing and expanding from the conceptualisation Haraway does, Harlan Weaver, another scholar, meshes "becoming with" with his own, which he terms "becoming in kind". Sharing about the time when he underwent a gender-affirming medical transition, considering that he was assigned female at birth, Weaver in "Becoming in kind: Race, class, gender, and nation in cultures of dog rescue and dog fighting" writes about how he and Harley (his dog) co-created worlds for one another. He shares that Harley gave him a sense of safety, while in turn, his own class, race, and gender identity, too played a role in Haley's experiences of being in the world:

> While the social is always part of the personal in trans, transgender, and transsexual experiences, in my case Haley's presence deeply shapes my world. In moments when my appearance has been at its most liminal, when I have felt vulnerable as a visibly transgender person, she has ensured my safety. Concurrently, my whiteness, queer identity, and middleclass status encourage other humans to read Haley as less threatening; in my presence, she is perceived as less dangerous. Each of us shapes who the other is. This enmeshment of our identities exemplifies what I term "becoming in kind."[39]

[38] Ibid. p. 1.

[39] Weaver, H. 2013. *Becoming in kind: Race, class, gender, and nation in cultures of dog rescue and dog fighting*. American Quarterly, Volume 65, Number 3. p. 689.

Weaver goes further, arguing that "Becoming in kind provides an important way to think through the relationship among categories such as species, breed, race, class, and gender". [40] He argues that "[b]ecoming in kind speaks to the joint building of a sense of togetherness. A we, and the kind of beings we become".

Additionally, he states: "My use of kind indexes it as category and divider, as a taxonomy that shapes and is shaped by these connections".[41] And that "Instead of parallels or analogies, becoming in kind describes intersections".[42]

As a critique, therefore, aimed at Haraway, and by extension Weaver, Jack Halberstam in *Wild: The disorder of desire*, argues that the dog in these Human-animal relationships, is not an unequal player:

> She [Haraway] writes about kissing her dog and engages with many other narratives in which the dog is a human being's natural companion, but Haraway, like most other commentators on the dog, refuses the possibility that the human-animal bond is in any way erotic or in any way imposed on the animal. Ultimately, Haraway is unable to create a new entity out of the human-dog relation. What she describes as a companionate dynamic ultimately defaults to human logics, and the dog receives training, sleeps in a human bed, and guards the household.[43]

[40]Ibid. pp. 690-92.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid

[43] Halberstam, J. 2020. *Wild: The disorder of desire*. Duke University Press. p. 160.

Further, scholar, Colin Dayan, in *With Dogs at the Edge of Life,* also counter what Haraway asserts:

> For both of these writers their belief in the relationship between God and dog, which in English is embedded in the shared letters of the words, expresses an ineffable relation to spirit and relies on all kinds of Christian assumptions about human goodness, the fall, compassion, and the centrality of the human.[44]

Within the context of a meditation set out to explore antiblackness and the White supremacist uses of the dog, these critiques offered by Dayan and Halberstam are important in that they present the dog as a figure that cannot understand Human practices such as antiblackness. However, although the animal-Human relationships are inherently unequal, this does not negate the production of racially targeted violence. Understanding this is important because in White supremacist societies, as it is the case with South Africa, the relations of domination are predicated on violence. Meaning that the dog, as it is the case with the use of military power, language, and force, becomes rendered necessary for the system to maintain itself.

Having said all this, I put forward "Becoming with in antiblackness*"* to recognise the incapacity of the dog to appreciate Human concepts like antiblackness and racialised violence. And yet, this lack of understanding (based on the *being* of this animal) does not negate the possibilities for antiblackness to be carried out through its uses.

[44] Ibid. p. 161.

A note on method

Palesa, in these letters I am deliberately experimental. And this I do by opting for a personal, memoir-style of writing.

With the first letter, I suspend time and journey through several places: Rammolutsi, Johannesburg, Yeoville, Berea, and Cape Town – something I do in search of the dog. This search – which comes in the form of turning to the historical archives, the mainstream media archives, conversations with black women, the sonic (as a form of archiving everyday black life), reading, and writing – gave rise to this dance of words to which you bear witness.

The second letter is much more theoretical and is set in Cape Town. It is here where I explore the meaning of the Anthropocene as a framework, problematising it using Afro-Pessimism. I further go on to look into the histories of the dog in South Africa.

In the third letter, I explore antiblackness alongside gratuitous violence, focusing on the apartheid uses of the dog to police black people. I argue that in addition to the violence being rationalised using *swart gevaar,* it is out of these recorded acts of violence that the presence of the figure of the dog complicates memory-work, archiving, and the confronting of the colonial and apartheid legacies of antiblackness in ~~post-~~apartheid South Africa.[45]

In the fourth letter, I look at how the black political elite in ~~post-~~apartheid South Africa, within the country's political landscape and public discourses, perform forms of antiblackness using the figure of the dog. My interest here is to expand our understanding of the production of antiblackness: how this is not only left at the device of White people; that its production, even when done by black people, depends on the narratives that have been long crystalized by the antiblack settler colonialism and apartheid. Most importantly, my intervention is that the

[45] *Swart gevaar* was a production of the apartheid state, a perceived threat which the state operated with, that Black people were a threat to the system. This also applied to the White minority population.

black political elite' uses of the dog, contributes to the forms of alienation black people in South Africa encounter.

With the fifth letter, I look at the ~~post-~~apartheid uses of the dog within the homes of White people, with a specific focus on general dishonor. This letter is important given that it was from those instances where I saw black women walk White people's dogs in Cape Town's Southern suburbs, that I return(ed) home to inquire from our mother, Dimakatso, about her stories of the dog. Dimakatso, for years, had worked as a domestic worker.[46]

What comes out of these conversations with her – and Nonti, another black woman who also worked as a domestic worker – is that in their invocation of the dog when speaking about their mistreatment by White employers, black women do so with the sole purpose of highlighting the forms of antiblack violence they encounter(ed) at work. Here we get to appreciate how these accounts of violence do not render these black women incapable of extending forms of care towards the dog.

[46] Throughout this project, I interchangeably use German Shepherd with the Police dog – here although I appreciate that there were other breeds of dog used in policing during the apartheid era, there are specific meanings attached to the image of the Alsatian. This is simply because the mainstream recollection of dog uses and apartheid policing, tend to refer to the German Shepherd.

Letter One

Searching for the dog

Rammolutsi

"For over twenty years in South Africa, we find ourselves as black masses still suffering and fighting for our freedom and humanity". – *Iyeza/Zabalaza*, Thandiswa[47]

Dear Palesa, the only thing my father left me with is a name that never became mine. When Dimakatso went to register my birth at what is today known as the Department of Home Affairs, the officials who worked there at the time, changed it from Anthony to Antoon. I was left with a Dutch/Afrikaans version I grew to hate.

I did not like the name – not because of how odd it was for a black boy who grew up in a Sesotho-speaking township to be named that; after all, it is our mothers, their mothers, and those who came before them, who had to be misnamed to appease the colonial masters. I hated it because it signified a racist and gendered violation Dimakatso had undergone – and this is despite that this violence was not uncommon. Around the time when she went to register me with the Home Affairs – I was born on the 5th of May 1994 – the country had just transitioned into a democracy. This misnaming, spilling into the new dispensation served as a sign that the so-called "new era" would come with a re-elaboration of black suffering; that White supremacy could and was to restructure itself, finding new ways of operating.

[47] Mazwai, T. 2018. *Iyeza/Zabalaza: Thandiswa Mazwai.*

On the gender aspect of all this, we cannot ignore how black women, during the colonial and the apartheid eras, had been relegated to the lowest of all classes. They were made to appear as though they had no agency. And this is despite never having been people who sat on the side-lines as history was unfolding. Out of the feminist works of scholars such Asanda Benya, the late Lindiwe Makhunga, Athambile Masola, Simamkele Dlakavu, Pumla Dineo Qgola, and Busi Sibeko, we learn about how women's critical participation has always been present for as long as South Africa has been in existence, even in the male-dominated sectors such as mining, the literary space and in political organizing.[48]

To the apartheid system, and those who were responsible for overseeing and maintaining its logic(s), it had not mattered that Dimakatso days earlier, had stood in the line to vote for the first time. That she was now an equal member of society (as per the promises of the new dispensation), as was the case for everyone black. My name also taught me that to White Supremacy, time does not matter; that regardless of the grand social and political moments meant to signal change, violence targeted at black people is permanent.

The consequences of my dislike for the name, then, saw me only use it in official settings. I dreaded the days when I had to sign the class register in primary and high school. This, only using it officially, was made possible by the fact that Dimakatso, defying the instructions of my father (Thabang) who gave me the name Anthony, and those of a system which her memories of it would have engraved in Antoon, named me mpho instead.

I met my father for the first time – and the last time really – when I was eighteen years old. I remember this day very well. I had just come from an all-night prayer during Easter. That

[48] Benya, A. 2016. *Women in mining: Occupational culture and gendered identities in the making*; Dlakavu, S. 2018. *Asijiki: Black Women in the Economic Freedom Fighters, Owning Space, Building a Movement*; Masola, A. 2020. *Journeying home, exile and transnationalism in Noni Jabavu and Sisonke Msimang's memoirs*; Sibeko, B. 2021. *South Africa needs feminist economics, now*.

Saturday morning, I came rushing home, hoping to take a quick nap as I was tired from the night before. I entered the three-roomed shack only to find Dimakatso preparing food in the kitchen. The large family lunch during this time had become our tradition. And this is mostly because church was still very much part of our life back then. I greeted our mother and proceeded to make my way to her bedroom.

And because I was not paying much attention, I did not realise that she had followed me, going on to stand right between a curtain that separated the kitchen from her bedroom. I then was stuck between her and a brown wardrobe she had returned with from Kimberley in 1997. This furniture piece, whose two doors she had held together with a shoestring, was not the only thing that had been corroding throughout the years. My brother, Kagiso, and I had been breaking too, yearning for Thabang.

There was not much sunlight in this room, nor was there sufficient air to breathe. The entire room had one window, which in place of glass, our mother used corrugated iron. And if you were tall enough, like Dimakatso, standing up fully would see you bump your head against the roof. Bathing during hot summer days was even worse because not only did you have to work around not bumping your head against the roof. The more you positioned your body into the right posture, standing up fully, as we had been taught by her, the more you would go on to feel the effects of the sun-bathed roof. It was out of life experiences like this that I came to understand that black people are fucked. That our lives are nothing but a site of perpetual struggle. This was at the backdrop of encounters I had with White people at our multiracial church. By then, I had gone on to develop a friendship with our pastor's son, Jonathan. And would often be invited to their farm. Palesa, White people's material conditions were far better than what our everyday life represented.

Palesa, a strange man was seated on Dimakatso's bed. I wondered: why is this man seated there, and who is he? Dimakatso had always been upfront with us. Our mother had

taught us that she was an adult. And that motherhood did not negate women's sexual desires. Most importantly, the fact that our shack was small meant that she inherently lacked privacy. She was forced to tell us if she was to have company, so we did not invade her space. To then have that man seated there, without any prior warning, to me felt like an invasion of her space. During those few seconds, I felt bad. My feeling bad lasted until in our silence, our mother uttered the words: this is your father, Thabang. I became numb.

Palesa, our mother, even as a child, was forced to take up roles that were never meant for a child. The act of pushing beyond her weight would go on to inform the cause of her life: men who did as they pleased, using any available means to exert gendered violence. The man who sat on Dimakatso's bed that morning too had been one of the many perpetrators of violence in her life.

In December 2011, Dimakatso had taken it upon herself to go find Thabang. She, relying on memory, and the assistance of strangers she met along the way, found his family home in Galeshewe, Kimberley. Thabang's return to Rammolutsi did not happen according to his own volition.

Besides my yearnings, I am sure that Dimakatso, like some women in this country, wanted for her children to have their father in their lives. Palesa the same goes for you, Dimakatso wanted for you and our sister, Paballo, to have your father. Yet still, he, like Thabang, disappeared on you too. Beyond our needs as our mothers' children, men who disappear and deliberately evade fatherhood, dishonour accountability as an essence relationships. Today I find myself having the capacity to understand how our mother suffered at the hands of our fathers – this is in addition to the things I witnessed as a child.

Palesa, I grew up wanting my father's presence in my life. I will not speak on behalf of Kagiso. However, in so far as I am concerned, I will tell you that the school holidays were the hardest. I, after seeing Teboho and the relationship he had with his father, wanted Thabang to

lift me too and place me onto his shoulders. I wanted my father to take me away from the ground where older men and boys sexually violated me. It is odd to hope that my father would have protected me. I had never given room to the possibility that Thabang himself, could be antiqueer, especially because he was physically abusive to Dimakatso.

I remember how during the winter holidays, Teboho and myself would go on hunting trips with his father. The night before our trip, I would usually sacrifice going to watch television from our next-door neighbour, ko habo Lee-boy. This I did just so I could hear Teboho's father rev the bakkie, heating it in preparation for the 100 kilometres-long journey to a place where their cattle were housed. Sometimes I would miss the noise from the bakkie. Teboho would come knocking, and then our mother, shouting from across the other side of the room, would call for me: "Mphonyana tsoha, Teboho okantle." With not much time, I would quickly wash my face and brace for the cold. For we usually sat at the back of the bakkie. This we did so we could not be separated from Joy and Leo, our dogs. The bakkie, in front, could not accommodate all five of us, including Teboho's father.

One holiday, as winter neared the end, I, upon return, went and asked Dimakatso about Thabang's whereabouts. There was nothing she could do: "Your father knew where we moved, when Kagiso was a couple of months old, he did come visit but bothered thereafter", she said. And although I understood that no one could not be forced into anything, that did not stop the childhood yearning(s).

Palesa, our family has always been huge. And as was the case with Dimakatso and those who came before her, I grew up with many cousins. These are people I regarded as brothers

and sisters. We all stayed at Nkgono's place. Her daughters, my aunts, would often send their children to come to stay with us too. Bo Sellwane le Tshediso.

We were so many that whenever it was time to dish up during lunchtime, with the door wide open, the children on my street, knowing it was that time of the day, would gather around to giggle. After all, how could there be so many dishes that some of them had to be placed on the floor? And in a way, all this made sense – why were we so many?

Dimakatso had four brothers and three sisters. And this is only for those who did not die at childbirth. Her oldest brother, uncle Stoplight, when one of his haunting dogs gave birth, allocated me a puppy. I named her Joy. Stoplight was, at the time, the most respectable of all my uncles and his siblings in general. I now know that besides age, him being married, with a family he looked after, meant that Nkgono could grant him that honour. From there, after my unmarried uncles, the respect would begin to be distributed to the rest of my married aunts.[49] And as for Dimakatso, her being the oldest while her younger sisters were married and out of Nkgono's yard, meant that she came in last. Or was not even considered at all.

Among Nkgono's children, Dimakatso was not the only one who still lived in her yard. There was uncle Mpenda, who one evening, I found myself standing behind as he threw the weight of his body onto Dimakatso. He was strangling her, while at the same had her sandwiched between himself and the door. As he continued to relentlessly unleash his fists on her – as if he had decided that this night would be the last time she was to be seen alive – someone was banging the door from the outside. It was one of our cousins, Mangile. She was screaming, so loud that she surpassed the sound of the raging storm. "Bang, bang, bang," bula

[49] Among others, Dimakatso's life is rendered complex by the fact that it was counter narrative to the idea that male children carried out the responsibilities associated with caring for the family.

monyako, bula monyako, she instructed us to open the door. However, from the inside, none of us could do what she was wanted, no matter how hard we tried.

While all this was unfolding, the shack threatened to leave all of us exposed and wet. It would not have been the first time we became wet from the rain. We were never used to consenting to the cold after all. Whenever it rained, we would be forced to harvest the rainwater using big buckets and bowls often only reserved for more important occasions like mekete [traditional rituals and ceremonies].

Uncle Mpenda did not care. Even when he saw that Dimakatso was gasping for air, doing so while looking at him right in the face, begging for him to let go, remained committed to the physical attack. And when he eventually did let go, she would go on to utter the words, "ontja ya mokoto." Young as I was, Dimakatso describing uncle Mpenda as an abusive dog, remains with me up to this day. It was for the first time I learned that one could express anger and disdain using an animal such as a dog.

Following the events of this night, Joy went on to occupy another meaning in my life – beyond just being an animal with whom I had created forms of relating and care. I too, considering the violence I had encountered at the hands of uncle Mpenda, would go on to use the very same language to describe him. He was an abusive dog and remains one. Uncle Mpenda in every drunk state, upon returning from wherever he was coming from, early Saturday and Sunday mornings, would walk around Nkgono's yard. Screeches and bangs, we would lay awake. He would also be speaking to himself, as though he had on his hand a notepad, scratching off whatever discontent he registered on weekdays. He was always angry at Dimakatso. Here we had learned: his stocktaking felt like we had been rendered witnesses to an animal that was un-ready to be pounced on – except that there was no animal to be attacked.

Only another human, who because of the power dynamics and the rampant patriarchal abuse, was regularly violated. Nkgono would be so outraged the night all this happens; only to return the following morning vouching for her son. Dimakatso you cannot have your brother arrested, she would say. Our mother encountered abuse for so long that I lost count.

Eventually, Dimakatso would send Joy away. This she did during school hours while we, my cousins and I, were away. She had managed to convince an unknown man to take the dog. Telling him that Joy was good at hunting – meaning that she was a useful dog. The man came to Nkgono's, Joy was blindfolded, and loaded into a bakkie, I was told. And as I would later ask Dimakatso why she decided to do this, I would go on to learn that it was because we were too poor to afford to feed another mouth. I knew what she meant. And as such, I did not protest.

Most black people, together with the dog, live in conditions of squalor. The dog, like Joy, bears witness to the surviving blacks are forced to do.

I never had a dog thereafter.

Johannesburg

"Sihamba nzima, siyazama" – *Bantu Biko Street*, Simphiwe Dana

In 2014, I left Rammolutsi for Johannesburg. This I did in pursuit of my undergraduate studies at the University of the Witwatersrand. The move had been an anticipated one. So much that my classmates began getting tired of my telling them about a city I had never been to. I was excited and even knew what my plans would be, upon arrival: to study, explore sex, sexuality, and chase after pleasure. I wanted to be in community, to be with black queer people, and care

for them. And in turn, be cared for. I wanted to love jazz music, and the beautiful buildings in Yeoville and Hillbrow. Most importantly, I looked forward to living; to being unafraid.

In Rammolutsi I had always been forced to…or let me rather say: I choked on hyper-masculinity, and compulsory heterosexuality. And this is despite that I had always known that I was bisexual. For the people around me, the gendered nature of Bra Hugh Masekela's *Stimela* resonated well with what leaving for Johannesburg meant: the assumption was that I had come of age – which was true. But for them, poverty had rendered my leaving for the city the only logical basis for exiting the township at the time.

As the oldest of my mother's children, a boy at that, they understood this to be my turn to leave in search of our survival – for anyone black and poor, this rationalisation makes sense. As was the case in the life of Dimakatso, the antiblack, state-engineered conditions of lack, which had defined her growing up, saw me leave in search for a better life for us too.

Dimakatso left Rammolutsi for Kimberly in 1991. She, upon hearing that in Viljoenskroon, a visiting White couple from Kimberly was looking for a "maid" to take with to their home, left. This was largely because Dimakatso's brothers were not taking care of their mother, and her, as was culturally and patriarchally expected.

For her, the act of carrying the entire family on her shoulders was not anything new. Growing up as a young girl, with Nkgono being married to a man who refused for her to bring into their marriage her children from previous marriages – this meant that the duty of caring for her brothers and sisters was placed on Dimakatso. The aunts, her uncle's wives, argued that because she was the eldest of all the girls, this meant that she was the one to assume a motherly role – young as she was.

Dimakatso's arrival in Kimberly was a strange one. Yet not different from that of many black women who were often stationed at the backrooms of their White bosses' houses, only being able to go home once every Christmas – if they were lucky.

My gender identity was also a contributing factor to how different our stories were. For black girls, and black women, the chances of dying while men and boys survive, is a common phenomenon. You too, then my sister, are statistically likely to remain in poverty. Palesa, my sexuality was one of the factors that informed the decision to leave for Johannesburg in particular. Rammolutsi had forced me to keep in the dark parts of myself I cared about; queerness which was coded un-Christian and un-manly. I wanted to go far to a place where I could live freely – this to me, at the time, is what Johannesburg represented.

The first time I arrived in this city, I lived with Kuhle. Sellwane (whose mother was part of the same Stokvel as Dimakatso) had suggested I go live with her partner while I sorted out my enrolment-related issues with the university. This I was to do while I looked for a place of mine. Sellwane's family lived six houses before Nkgono's. And because she had just given birth to her second child, a girl, she was home and being looked after by her mother, Rakgadi.

The day I arrived in Johannesburg, I met Kuhle at Park Station. These were his instructions; that once I am inside Park, I should make my way to Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) where I will find him waiting. I did as he had asked. This was in addition to following our mother's advice: that older black women were the best people to ask help from. I found Kuhle waiting for me. He helped with my bags, and we made our way to the Metrorail terminals where we bought tickets and boarded a train to City Deep in the South of Johannesburg.

As the train stopped at each station, there were places whose names I recalled based on the books I had read in my grade 11 English literature class. When the train finally arrived at our station, in Karsene West, we had to get off and walk a distance close to a kilometre – still on the train tracks. This would become a journey I would get used to, joining much older black men every early morning. Some were making their way to work, while others were going to sell food inside the train(s).

Following our walk, we arrived at a hostel, barely looked after, with many units occupied by Metrorail workers.

The place felt as though I had stepped into a set of a television drama series like *A Place Called Home, Gazlam,* or *Home Affairs*, all of which aired on SABC1. Here precarity and attempts to survive poverty danced alongside blackness. I think a part of me was angry because these conditions were what I had known my entire life. The disappointment was more from a place of wanting to opt out of always having to survive blackness. And as had been the case in Rammolutsi, I quickly had to accept that perhaps the city did not represent much. That here too, I would have to struggle until university education yielded the results it promised, in so far as social mobility was concerned.

When we arrived, we had to go through a security checkpoint. Kuhle told the security guards on duty that I was his mchana from the Free State province; that he was my uncle, and that I had come to start university in the city. They let us in. And as we attempted to make our way into the unit, one of the guards spoke to me in isiZulu. At the time, I did not hear a word he was saying. I would later learn from Kuhle that the man was encouraging me to stay in school, because surviving South Africa, for black youth like me, is near impossible.

Inside the two-roomed unit as you entered was a kitchen. And as it had been the case in our mother's house, a curtain was used to cut the one room into two, with the other room used as the bedroom area. Kuhle showed me where to put my bags. From there, he went on to play on his record Judith Sephuma, a South African jazz artist whose work challenges the gendered constructions of motherhood, as was embodied in one of her songs, *Mme Motswadi*.[50] Kuhle appeared fond of Sephuma. The night came, and we went to sleep, with him on the bed and myself on the floor right next to him.

[50] Sephuma, J. 2005. *Mme Motswadi*. SBME Africa.

Palesa, it was in the act of waking up at 4 a.m., an hour before him, that I was putting into practice what I had planned the night before. I had decided that I will pretend to have overslept, so he can bathe first. I knew that he would wake up first: put on the kettle, bathe, and exit the bedroom area. For my survival, I was ready to be seen as the lazy oversleeping guest.

And this is the consequence of the rife speculations around my queerness while I was in high school, out of which every human interaction was always organised around the need to hide that I was queer. Without the existence of rapport between myself and Kuhle, I was afraid that sharing space like that, if he knew that I was queer, he would take this and center himself in my desires, assuming that I had been checking him out the entire time. The tiny space we had to share meant that I needed to find ways to create distance between us.

Our 5 a.m. walk was challenging, because of language differences. Added to this was my age. Inside the train were churchmen and women – people of the cloth.

Eventually, I did manage to find a place of my own. I went on to live at Melridge House, a student accommodation under the property management of a company known as SouthPoint, located in the Braamfontein area.

Braamfontein was largely full of students. However, there were people worked all types of jobs: in Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), the arts, advertising, marketing, and banking. On weekdays, this part of the city gave the impression that the majority of the people who were here had left their home(s), in search of ways to sustain their families' wellbeing.

Here too, I never saw dogs.

Instead, unhoused people were begging for money and food. They undid the cosmopolitan façade evidenced in the large gatherings that often took place on weekends and on first Thursdays. Braamfontein could be read in closeness to the *Economist*'s idea of "Africa

is rising".[51] That despite the bad that was embodied in the housing crisis, run-down buildings, and crime-infested downtown Johannesburg (whose decay was often blamed on black undocumented migrants from parts of the African continent), this part of the city, like Maboneng, was something to be positive about.[52]

Through mainstream media narratives (carried out via marketing and advertising), as well in the economic and social governance of the city – implemented by the past and present administrations – the City of Johannesburg attempted to play into the idea that Johannesburg was different from the rest of the African continent. And when thinking about the city's tagline "a world-class African city," urban scholar Marie Huchzermeyer argues that this signals to how city targets people which it regards as contradictory to this ideal: those who are often black, poor, working-class, unemployed, unhoused, undocumented, and form part of the migrant communities.[53]

And in efforts to attract Foreign Direct Investment, there had been campaigns such as operation Fiela-Reclaim, ran in collaboration with the South African Police Service's (SAPS) National Joint Operations and Intelligence Structure and the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Migration (IMC).[54] Here antiblack violence was targeted at poor and working-class people who

[51] The Economist. 2011. *Story of a Hopeful continent: Africa rising*.

[52] Huchzermeyer, M. 2014. *Invoking Lefebvre's 'right to the city' in South Africa today: A response to Walsh, City.*

[53] Huchzermeyer, M. 2014. *Humanism, creativity and rights: invoking Henri Lefebvre's right to the city in the tension presented by informal settlements in South Africa today. Inaugural lecture: Humanism, creativity and rights*; SERI. 2021. *Press Statement: Constitutional Court confirms Mashaba's inner city raids unconstitutional.*

[54] Nicolson, G. 2015. *Operation Fiela: Thousands of arrests, doubtful impact.*

worked in the informal food trading sector, too also comprising of black migrant communities. Palesa, the logic of this operation, as seen in the word “fiela” was that this category of people needed to be cleaned off the street, to achieve whatever the officials regarded a good city.

Braamfontein then, moving towards these goals the city set for itself, was a great story to tell, despite the gentrification, displacement, and the heightened costs of living.

This part of the city was the complete opposite to City Deep, by this I don’t mean that I ever encountered the dog. City Deep was archive-like, with its patches of dead mined land. Braamfontein’s high-rise buildings – for those of us who grew up seeing them on television – had ushered me into the popular narratives of the city I had always seen on television.

Six months into my living in Braamfontein, I left and went to reside at Berea, which sits between Hillbrow, Yeoville, and Parktown. This place had the normal black family life I had become accustomed to while growing up in Rammolutsi: women scolding their children, loud television sets, and the smell of home-cooked meals. I felt at home and was reminded of our mother.

The odd hours of the morning – a time during which the lights in my room will be off while my face stared at my dimly lit computer screen – can be remembered by sounds yelling strangers and their footsteps. These were people returning from what I assume was a heavy night of drinking.

Sunday, as I had come to learn, was one of the few days of the week people looked forward to. Standing on my fourth-floor located balcony, I would see people of different church denominations – among these *amaNazaretha*, abantu bakwaShembe, as well as *amaZayoni* [both these are people who followed the Nazareth Baptist Church, and the Zion Christian Church] – draped in their long robes: all white; white, and blue; as well as green and white. In Berea, there were a few people who were from West Africa, East Africa, and from the southern

parts of the continent. Unlike the Congolese, Ghanaians, and Nigerian Christians who attended charismatic churches, highly appreciative of print patterns, the people who attended Jehovah's Witness – located not far from where I lived – appeared to prefer formal wear. With pamphlets in their hands, evangelizing and calling for everyone to repent, the women and girls wore pleated skirts. Sometimes they wore gowns that made it seem as though a special occasion was taking place in the church. In both these instances, one thing was clear; that church mattered to them.

By this time, I had slowly started experiencing a shift in my relationship with the church, which came in the form of no longer attending Sunday services nor being interested to be in community with any of the people with whom I had develop friendships with upon my arrival in Johannesburg. This was long coming, given that I had felt, while growing up, an unresolvable contradiction birthed by the fact that I was queer. Palesa, at this point in my life, I was somewhat happy that the church no longer could be a site of my torment – despite the loss a sense of community this place had allowed me.

I lived in Berea for about two and half years, until I moved to Yeoville. *In Yeoville, too, there were no dogs I encountered*. Instead, whenever I shared with people that I lived there, such a revelation solicited pity. "You must be careful with your life", I was warned. In general, the narratives that defined Yeoville included crime and that black migrant communities had taken over the place.[55] Palesa, the truth is that I never, at any point while living there, felt unsafe.

[55] Mpofu, R. 2020. *Nigerians living in Yeoville are tired of being blamed for crime as foreign nationals embark on marches.*

I am also very much aware that being a black man in South Africa, how I experience space is informed by several factors, including my gender identity and self-expression.

I was masculine-presenting at the time. The only time when I was forced to take into consideration my queerness was when I started painting my nails black. I remember how one time when I went to the market not far from the Shoprite on Releigh and Bedford Road, with my tattoo of two men appearing to be intimately embracing one another – I gathered that there was a fascination of a sort. With my left forearm covered with clear plastic, given that I had gotten tattooed the previous day, I remember being approached by a man who wanted to have a look at it. I was reluctant. Instead, I came up with an excuse. It worked. And although I do not clearly remember how I managed to pull this off, I recall being full of fear, that if he saw it, I would be attacked. I vowed never to return to that place without wearing a long-sleeve t-shirt or with my nails painted.

Cape Town

From Yeoville, I moved to the Southern suburbs where the University of Cape Town was located. In this city, Cape Town, it is here where I would go on to encounter the dog for the first time in a while. This encounter is what led to a point where I decided to embark on this meditation. Palesa, I often say the moon knows our stories. That with only itself, us, owls delivering death notices, and sometimes barking dogs – depending on where you are – it is all an archive. Early into my arrival, knowing that the moon was there with me, this used to bring me mixed feelings. I would feel safe, a sense of comfort really. While the other times, depending on how excruciating the pain of wanting to die would be (at this point I was unaware that I was suffering from type II bipolar disorder), I would feel angry towards the moon. How

could it do nothing when my life was defined by a collection of acts of mending? I wondered. Each morning I would sigh, tired while my brain felt like popping out of my head. All the times I was by myself in my room, can be remembered by a perpetual state of suicidality. I wanted to:

sink, low.

see my life flesh before my eyes.

run out of breath while underwater.

lose myself, a bit.

then come back, slowly, or not.

Whenever people I knew asked me about my experience of being in this city, I would jokingly say "it feels like being always in your room, only leaving when you must go get food and water in the kitchen." By saying this I was hoping to be abstract, distancing myself from the very reality of my existence. In Cape Town I was lonely, and alone. Grief.

About ten days after my arrival in the city, a flatmate with whom I had lived in Yeoville, drowned at a local swimming pool not far from Shoprite. I could not attend Thuso's funeral. And because grief requires of us to be surrounded by people with whom we share it, I plunged into depression. It was true, what I had said to my friends. The only time I exited my room was when I attended classes. From there, I would hop into the bus, making my way back to my room in Wynberg.

In here a table was mounted onto white walls. Everything else was an embodiment of Cape Town's property market: tiny and expensive. The toilet was right there as I tried to eat. The chair, the bed, and the kitchen counter were all within reach. Each step in any direction saw me hit against something. I suspected that a property developer had taken what was initially

an office building, probably with cubicles, and turned it into a student residence. I hated everything but was not unfamiliar with living like that.

Cape Town was different from Rammolutsi, City Deep, Berea, Yeoville, and Braamfontein. Commuting with the university shuttles, the Jammies, looking outside, I would go on to see black women who worked as domestic workers. They were walking dogs. At first, this for me was confusing. I thought they owned these dogs, only to later learn that these animals belonged to their White employers. This they did while on other occasions, they looked after White babies, pushing them on strollers. And of course, it was not only black women who walked the dogs. Black men who worked as gardeners engaged in this activity too.

However, what stood out was how these black women reminded me of our mother. They were dressed in the same uniform Dimakatso left each morning wearing. The White men and women jogged at odd hours of the day, 12 p.m. Usually, this is a time around when everyone was generally expected to be at work; this too made me wonder. There were vast lands they occupied. Big houses I had never seen. It was their home.

This place produced an experience of race I had never had before. Although Braamfontein had interracial mingling, where White people mixed with black people in clubs, restaurants, and events, White people were coming into Braamfontein, as opposed to residing there. For Berea and Yeoville, these are places where black people lived. They left early in the morning to go toil for Whiteness. And came back in the afternoons where upon arrival they would do the usual: cook, eat, loiter, and commune. From there, the lights would go off. The following morning would see them fall back in line again, same patterns, chasing after survival. Given that I left Johannesburg for Cape Town, in pursuit of my graduate studies, I could not help but wonder about the experiences of black women and the dog. Especially our mother. During my upbringing, I had never thought about what happens at

work, except the usual. These dog encounters would be the experiences I took with to class. I was full of questions.

Letter Two

Searching for black(ness)

The Anthropocene

"We find our humanity on the other side of death and despair!"

– *What is History*, The Wretched[56]

> *"*We are left to burn because our lives count for nothing in this society. A society that does not recognise our lives as human lives, as lives that must count the same as all other lives, is an oppressive society that must be replaced." - *Thapelo Mohabi, Abahlali baseMjondolo.*[57]

Palesa, my sister, I received a scholarship that saw me become part of the 2018 MPhil cohort at the Environmental Humanities South, this is a researcher center whose work is described as follows:

> The environmental humanities is the term for a dynamic and growing field in universities across the world, one promoting interdisciplinary scholarship that explores how we understand the relations between humans and the environment in all areas of cultural production. Ranging from scientific modelling to government policy, from

[56] The Wretched. 2020. *What is history*.

[57] War on Want. 2017. *Shack fires are political: abahlali basemjondolo mount the death of a baby*.

> social justice movements to the creative arts, it examines questions of sustainability, human wellbeing and the environment in their broadest sense. In a 21st-century context of increasing pressure on the biosphere, the environmental humanities provide a vital intellectual space that enables researchers, students, artists, writers, scientists, policy-makers and practitioners to reflect critically on the concepts that underlie contemporary environmentalism.[58]

And based on how the programme was described, I took my being there as an opportunity to foreground the very questions concerning city spaces and being: how in this racialised act of having black women workers walk White people's dogs, there were connections we could draw around the construction of the urban space, labour, blackness, gender, and class inequality in contemporary South Africa. However, in the early days of being part of this programme, with each seminar session beginning with us seated around in a circle, communal-like, we were introduced to the term: the Anthropocene. Palesa, I mention this because this was a foundational concept around which the climate crisis facing planet earth was to be analysed by the programme.

My sister, to understand the genealogy of this term, the research contributions of scholars Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stormer are regarded critical. Stormer, according to Michael Simpson, coined the term in the 1980s, while Crutzen went on to popularise it around 2002.[59]With the Anthropocene, they describe a geological era in which the changes on planet earth's natural systems can be attributed to human impact. The Anthropocene was preceded by

[58] University of Cape Town. Center for Environmental Humanities.

[59] Crutzen, P. J., & Stormer, E. F. 2002. *The Anthropocene*. Global Change Newsletter. 41.; Simpson, M. 2020. The Anthropocene as a colonial discourse. Society and Space. p. 54.

the Holocene, and traces these noted changes on the earth's natural system back to around the late 18th century.[60]The use of this concept extends beyond the so-called hard sciences, as scholar Helmuth Tritschler, explains:

> Within a few years, the geological community began to investigate the scientific evidence for the concept and established the Anthropocene Working Group. While the Working Group has started to examine possible markers and periodizations of the new epoch, scholars from numerous other disciplines have taken up the Anthropocene as a cultural concept.[61]

Scholar Kathryn Yusoff, in *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, also notes that the Anthropocene as a concept, "has been taken up in the world, purposed, and put to work as a conceptual grab, materialist history, and cautionary tale of planetary predicament".[62]
It was at the center of this proposition that I found the beyond-class room encounters of the figure of the dog seeming to be at odds with the framing of humans as responsible for the crisis described. It was not that this was untrue, I simply wondered by the implication such a conclusion had/has on black people like myself.

I was questioning the concept's assumptive logic(s), that the planetary crisis results from "human" impact, meaning that everyone belongs in the category of the Human. By this,

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[60] Ibid.

[61] Tritschler, H. 2016. *The Anthropocene: A Challenge for the History of Science, Technology, and the Environment*. p. 309.

[62] Yusoff, K. 2018. *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

I mean that the term and its uses – especially in the context of South Africa as a country that is antiblack, with histories of racial slavery, settler colonialism, capitalism, and apartheid violence – assumes universal culpability and humanity. This I found strange. However, I had hoped that the more time I spent in the programme, at some point, there would be a critical point of discussion. I was wrong.

My sister, what happened instead, is that there were alternative scholarly strategies/approaches that were put forward in consideration of the so-called human-led destruction of the planet. Through the academic works of scholars such as Rosi Braidotti, Eduardo Kohn, Donna Haraway, and Anna Tsing, multispecies approaches; cross-species alliances; and transversal alliances were foregrounded to overcome and mitigate the effects of the Anthropocene.

Braidotti for example, argues: "I have proposed a relational ethics that values cross-species, transversal alliances with the productive and immanent force of *zoe*, or nonhuman life. The focus on the zoe or geo-centred ethical approach requires a mutation of our shared understanding of what it means to human".[63]

Braidotti advocates for posthumanism on the basis that anthropocentricism has led to the separation of "people" from "nature":

> My working definition of the posthuman predicament is the convergence, across the spectrum of cognitive capitalism, of posthumanism on the one hand and post-anthropocentrism on the other. The former focuses on the critique of the humanist ideal

[63] Braidotti, R. 2016. *Posthuman Critical Inquiry. Critical Posthumanism and Planetary Futures*.

> of 'Man' as the allegedly universal measure of all things, while the latter criticizes species hierarchy and human exceptionalism. [64]

Describing the history of post-humanism, scholar and theorist Zakiyyah Iman Jackson argues:

> With the full-fledged arrival of posthumanist theory in the 1990s, the epistemological integrity of "man" was subject to a heretical critique, as posthumanists challenged a range of conceptual pieties rooted in Enlightenment thought. Posthumanists attempted to reorient our understanding of human agency by underscoring human subjectivity's interdependency and porosity with respect to a world Enlightenment humanists often falsely claimed to control. Demonstrating a profound skepticism of subject/object distinctions and dominant ontologies, the first decades of posthumanism generated vital critical concepts, such as "cyborg," "autopoiesis," and "virtual body."[65]

She further notes that for post-humanists, "the problem is that "(Human) agency was reconceived as a network of relations between humans and nonhumans, replacing the figure of sovereignty with the process of enmeshment such that intentionality is de-ontologized".[66]

And to how there can be a shift away from human self-centredness, Kohn, in his book: *How Forests Think: Toward an anthropology beyond the human* was born, shares how one of the Indigenous people in the Amazon taught him about multi-species relations:

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[64] Ibid. p. 32.

[65] Jackson, Z. 2013. *Animal: New Directions in the Theorization of Race and Posthumanism.* Feminist Studies 39, no. 3. p. 670.

[66] Ibid. p. 671.

> Juanicu warned me, "Sleep faceup! If a jaguar comes he'll see you can look back at him and he won't bother you. If you sleep facedown he'll think you're aicha [prey; lit., "meat" in Quichua] and he'll attack." If, Juanicu was saying, a jaguar sees you as a being capable of looking back—a self like himself, a you—he'll leave you alone. But if he should come to see you as prey—an it—you may well become dead meat.[67]

For Kohn:

> [J]aguars represent the world does not mean that they necessarily do so as we do. And this too changes our understanding of the human. In that realm beyond the human, processes, such as representation, that we once thought we understood so well, that once seemed so familiar, suddenly begin to appear strange. So as not to become meat we must return the jaguar's gaze.[68]

Further related to multispecies thinking, there was also the contribution from Tsing, who with *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Line in Capitalist Ruins*, encourages the recognition of other beings on planet earth. Writing about the purpose of her book, Tsing argues:

[67] Kohn, E. 2013. *How Forests Think: toward an anthropology beyond the human*. Berkeley, California, and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

[68] Ibid.

> This book is not a critique of the dreams of modernization and progress that offered a vision of stability in the twentieth century; many analysts before me have dissected those dreams. Instead, I address the imaginative challenge of living without those handrails, which once made us think we knew, collectively, where we were going. If we open ourselves to their fungal attractions, matsutake can catapult us into the curiosity that seems to me the first requirement of collaborative survival in precarious times.[69]

Despite how well-meaning the programme may have been, I felt that there were several contradictions. Firstly, how could human-animal relationships, in the form of multi-species approaches, be the best way to deal with the so-called separation between "people" and "nature", because of the Anthropocene? Yet, not far from where the main campus of the University of Cape Town was located, black women were forced to walk White people's dogs, something they did as part of their efforts to earn a leaving?

Palesa, in the beginning of this letter, I invited in the words of Abahlali baseMjondolo's spokesperson because ~~post-~~apartheid South Africa sees poor black people relegated into the category of the unseen/undead: these are people who take up roles that are otherwise humiliating as an attempt to survive.[70]

In general, the figure of the dog and its relationship with black women in Cape Town, for me enabled the emergence of three inter-related problems that required some sort of an engagement: that the Anthropocene and its application in South Africa, potentially demanded a performance of racial blindness. That it operates with an assumption that world history is

[69] Tsing, A. 2015. *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Line in Capitalist Ruins.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

[70] Abahlali is a shack dwellers movement fighting for housing, land, and dignity of black, unemployed, and working-class people in the Kwazulu Natal province and beyond.

singular, something Dipesh Chakrabarty calls historicism, embodied of the singularity of human history as assumed to refer to European history, vice versa.[71] There was also a problem with the reading of world history, that such an exercise was only valid if done using the materialist logic.

The incoherence of blackness, being Human, and the Anthropocene

Palesa, blackness is incoherent to Western modernity and the making of the world as we know it. Denise Ferreira da Silva, in "1 (life) ÷ 0 (blackness) = ∞ − ∞ or ∞ / ∞: On Matter beyond the Equation of Value", argues:

> In the modern Western imagination, blackness has no value; it is nothing. As such, it marks an opposition that signals a negation, which does not refer to contradiction. For blackness refers to matter—as The Thing; it refers to that without form—it functions as a nullification of the whole signifying order that sustains value in both its economic and ethical scenes.[72]

Further, Zakiyyah Iman Jackson makes a similar point. Writing about what she hoped to achieve with her seminal book, *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiblack World*, Jackson argues: 'I demonstrate that Eurocentric humanism needs blackness as a prop in order to erect whiteness: to define its own limits and to designate humanity as an

[71] Chakrabarty, D. 2000. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. p. 30.

[72] Ferreira da Silva, D. 2017. *1 (life) ÷ 0 (blackness) = ∞ − ∞ or ∞ / ∞: On Matter beyond the Equation of Value.* e-flux, no. 79.

achievement as well as to give form to the category of "the animal."[73] The idea that blackness functions as a prop to the White symbolic order, is also further explored by political theorist Achille Mbembe, who in the *Critique of Black Reason,* argues:

> Blackness and race have played multiple roles in the imaginaries of European societies. Primary, loaded, burden-some, and unhinged, symbols of raw intensity and repulsion, the two have always occupied a central place—simultaneously, or at least in parallel—within modern knowledge and discourse about man (and therefore about humanism and humanity). Since the beginning of the eighteenth century, Blackness and race have constituted the (unacknowledged and often denied) foundation, what we might call the nuclear power plant, from which the modern project of knowledge—and of governance—has been deployed. Blackness and race, the one and the other, represent twin figures of the delirium produced by modernity.[74]

In general, in the exploration of how Western modernity conceives of what it means to be in the world, key contributions have emerged from thinkers such as Michel Foucault, who with *The Order of things* argues "—one can be certain that man is a recent invention within it…And that appearance . . . was the effect of a change in the fundamental arrangements of knowledge. . . If those arrangements were to disappear as they appeared . . . one can certainly wager that man would be erased.[75] Added to this is Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, and of course,

[73] Jackson, Z. I. 2020. *Becoming human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiblack World*. New York: New York University Press.

[74] Mbembe. A. 2017. *Critique of Black Reason*. Duke University Press. pp. 1-2.

[75] Foucault, M. 1966. *The order of things: An archaeology of human sciences.* London and New York: Routledge.

Sylvia Wynter. Wynter, in "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being / Power / Truth / Freedom: Toward the Human, after Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument" calls for alternative articulations of being human; that the European construction of the Human is overrepresented.[76]

Jackson too, with *Becoming Human*: *Matter and Meaning in an Antiblack World"* tries to demonstrate how European Hu(man) is not all there is to *being*: "Becoming Human argues that African diasporic cultural production does not coalesce into a unified tradition that merely seeks inclusion into liberal humanist conceptions of "the human"[77] However, despite these important contributions aimed at problematising Western conception of the Human, as I noted in the introduction, I find Afro-Pessimism to be the most useful analytic framework in that it does not argue that there are alternative ways of *being*, instead, the key argument that black people are socially dead allows us to understand blackness and being in a much more expanded fashion.

Afro-Pessimism and blackness

Palesa, the emergence of Afro-Pessimism is often credited to the interview that took place in 2003, between Frank Wilderson III and Saidiya Hartman, as part of *The Position of the*

[76] Wynter, S. 2003. *Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument*. The New Centennial Review, Volume 3. p. 260.

[77] Jackson, Z. I. 2020. *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiblack World*. New York: New York University Press.

Unthought.[78] However, scholarly debates around blackness and *being*, precede this period. Some of the key contributions have come out of the works of people such as Jared Saxton, Mbembe, Hortense Spillers, Patterson, and sometimes Fred Moten.[79] It matters to note that not all these scholars consider themselves Afro-Pessimists.

Critical to how Afro-Pessimism is constituted, I have already alluded, Orlando Patterson's work is highly important. In thinking about the figure of the dog, the racial intersection with labour, geography, the built environment, spatial politics, and blackness, in so far as the application of the Anthropocene is concerned, the central basis of the critique I advance in this meditation is the very fact that human relationships are predicated on power, a point Patterson raises in *Slavery and Social Order*.[80]

As a further expansion on how power is constituted, Patterson asserts:

> The power relation has three facets. The first is social and involves the use of threat of violence in the control of one person by another. The second is the psychological facet of influence, the capacity to persuade another person to change how the way he perceives his interests and his circumstances. And third is the cultural facet of authority, "the means of transforming force into right, and obedience into duty."[81]

[78] Hartman, V. S. & Wilderson, B. F. 2003. *The position of the unthought: An Interview with Saidiya V. Hartman Conducted by Frank B. Wilderson, III.* University of Nabraska Press.

[79] Nsele, Z. 2020. *Part I: Afropessimism and the Ritual of anti-blackness*.

[80] Patterson, O. 1982. *Slavery and Social Death*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Harvard University Press. p. 1.

[81] Ibid. pp. 1-2.

I mention power and its function because, from that Cape Town experience, it was clear to me that despite the assumption that these black women were workers who simply might be exercising what can be seen as a choice (playing out in a free and democratic society), this encounter exposes the limits of the notion of choice and how it relates to power in an antiblack world – this I will explore in the last letter.

Now, having considered blackness and social death, I want to note that the reference to universal humanity in South Africa, obscures the contributions of White Supremacy towards the capitalist, racist, and antiblack settler-colonial project. And by ignoring these histories and the ongoing practices of racialised (and gendered) exploitation, as was the case in those black women, this concept and its use effectively operates within the logic of Western liberal humanism.

Secondly, when we consider the three defining features around social death, the uses of the dog carry to out antiblackness – direct acts of violence – during the apartheid era, these can be understood as a form of gratuitous violence. Here I also want to further note that the social and political climate of apartheid – the governing of black people, which shapes how black people encounter and interact with the built environment (something I later look into) – performs varying forms of natal alienation (the very point Wilderson raises around the denial of narratives, as earlier noted in the interview with Nsele). All these happen despite that black people are native to the land on which these systems of domination are implemented and sustained.

During those seminar sessions then, the use of the Anthropocene as an analytic framework; that "we" contributed to this planetary crisis, felt strange – it was as though Whiteness was undergoing some sort of existential crisis. These feelings I had were not new.

Wilderson argues: "Blacks do not function as political subjects; instead, our flesh and energies are instrumentalized for postcolonial, immigrant, feminist, LGBTQ, transgender, and workers' agendas."[82]

And although this is how I felt – that black people become props to an analytic framework that still centres Whiteness as an assumed singular experience of the world – still, black people disproportionately bear the brunt of the very planetary crisis the programme grappled with. And by not accounting for blackness and our experience(s) of the world, such an injustice reaffirms social death. For those who are White and are on the left-side of politics – which tends to be the case with urban environmentalism in this country – the spaces they occupy, even within the academy, see them participate in the very acts of misnaming, misremembering, and amnesia. According to Wilderson, "These so-called allies are never *authorized* by Black agendas predicated on Black ethical dilemmas. A Black radical agenda is terrifying to most people on the Left because it emanates from a condition of suffering for which there is no imaginable strategy for redress—no narrative of redemption."[83]

One of the ways I rationalise this deliberate act of a disregard for blackness and our being, where ontology is concerned, is that blackness itself, for White academics and scholars, is deeply unsettling because it requires a meditation with the self.

I appreciate the point Fred Moten makes, on *In The Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*. That "Blackness—the extended movement of a specific upheaval, an

[82] Wilderson, B. F. 2020. *Afropessimism*. Liveright publishing corporation. p. 5.

[83] Wilderson, B. F. 2015. *Afro-Pessimism and the End of Redemption*.

ongoing irruption that anarranges every line—is a strain that pressures the assumption of the equivalence of personhood and subjectivity."[84]

And although I have said that mad is okay. I was, at the time, not mad for wandering about blackness and *being*: how this is linked to questions around nature, environment, the planet, and climate change, among others.

Palesa, the assumed equivalence of personhood within the Anthropocene is something black activists, scholars, and writers have been raising for a long time. Among these is Axelle Karera, who in "Blackness and the Pitfalls of Anthropocene Ethics*"*, argues:

> [A]pocalyptic sensibilities which have significantly monopolized Anthropocenean discourses are powerful in disavowing and erasing racial antagonisms. They foreclose "proper political framings" while, simultaneously, they continue to construct and maintain growing numbers of both new and old enemies along racial lines. Inspired by recent philosophical interventions in the area of critical Black Studies, I contend that the political Anthropocene (if there is or to ought be one) will remain an impossibility unless it is able to systematically grapple with the problem of black suffering.[85]

Another useful contribution comes from Kathryn Yusoff, who in *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, argues:

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[84] Moten, F. 2003. *In The Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

[85] Karera, A. 2019. *Blackness and the Pitfalls of Anthropocene Ethics*. Critical Philosophy of Race, Vol. 7, No. 1, Special Issue: Race and the Anthropocene, immigration, and refugees.

> [T]his planetary analytic [Anthropocene] has failed to do the work to properly identify its own histories of colonial earth-writing, to name the masters of broken earths, and to redress the legacy of racialized subjects that geology leaves in its wake. It has failed to grapple with the inheritance of violent dispossession of indigenous land under the auspices of a colonial geo-logics or to address the extractive grammars of geology that labour in the instrumentation and instrumentalization of dominant colonial narratives and their subjective, often subjugating registers that are an ongoing praxis of displacement.[86]

I earlier indicated that one of the three problems emerging out of the use of the Anthropocene as an analytic framework in South Africa is the overreliance on the material reading of the planetary crisis – as it relates to how this crisis emerged. As an expansion on that observation, it is my submission that by relying on materialism, by implication the Anthropocene assumes that black antagonism emerges only out of the system of capitalism.

This is something Afro-Pessimism counters. Wilderson in "Gramsci's Black Marx: Whither the Slave in Civil Society" argues that:

> the black subject reveals marxism's inability to think white supremacy as the base and, in so doing, calls into question marxism's claim to elaborate a comprehensive, or in the words of Antonio Gramsci, 'decisive' antagonism. Stated another way: Gramscian marxism is able to imagine the subject which transforms her/himself into a mass of antagonistic identity formations, formations which can precipitate a crisis in wage

[86] Yusoff, K. 2018. *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press

slavery, exploitation, and/or hegemony, but it is asleep at the wheel when asked to provide enabling antagonisms toward unwaged slavery, despotism, and/or terror.[87]

The value that comes with noting White Supremacy as a foundational source of antiblackness is that – something which materialism fails to do given that under capitalism everyone (black and White) is capable of subjugation by virtue of their worker status – we begin to understand that blackness is without analogue: "that black, though a sentient, is the only human in modern times defined as a disposable thing."[88]

For Wilderson, all positionalities, no matter how extreme the degree of suffering, are part of the archaeology of humanity – except black humanity.[89] He argues that, "The violence that turns the African into a thing is without analogue because it does not simply oppress the Black through tactile and empirical technologies of oppression, like the "little family quarrels" which for Fanon the Jewish Holocaust exemplifies".[90] The point here is that although there might be a social group that encounters violence, still, the particular nature of antiblackness in the world makes blackness different given its non-Human status.

In South Africa, for example, although Indian people might encounter forms of violence (which Wilderson regards as social discrimination, as opposed to structural violence), in so far

[87] Wilderson, B. F. 2003. *Gramsci's Black Marx: Whither the Slave in Civil Society?* Social Identities, Volume 9, Number 2.

[88] Benedicte, B. 2018. *Afro-dog: Blackness and the Animal Question.* New York: Columbia University Press. p. xvii.

[89] Ibid. p. xvii.

[90] Wilderson, B. F. 2010. *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms*. Durham: Duke University Press. p. 38.

as the environment question is concerned, their experiences differ from those of black people. Indian people, following the argument advanced by Wilderson, belong to a civil society. And with regards to civil society, Wilderson makes this important observation:

> The ruse of analogy erroneously locates Blacks in the world—a place where they have not been since the dawning of Blackness. This attempt to position the Black in the world by way of analogy is not only a mystification, and often erasure, of Blackness's grammar of suffering (accumulation and fungibility or the status of being non-Human) but simultaneously also a provision for civil society, promising an enabling modality for Human ethical dilemmas.[91]

Palesa, given that Indian people are simply non-White but remain Human, their encounter with social violence still sees their Human status remaining coherent: "Whereas Humans exist on some plane of being and thus can become existentially present through some struggle for, of, or through recognition, Blacks cannot reach this plane".[92] As an intervention, therefore, following from the disjuncture I noted with the Anthropocene and its application in South Africa – informed by the encountering of black women and the dog in the city – I found it necessary to further explore the animal-Human relationships in this country.

The dog as a living archive of antiblackness

Palesa, given that this meditation centers the figure of the dog, it matters that we pay attention to the history of this animal in South Africa. In general, geological research shows that the

[91] Ibid. p. 37.

[92]Ibid. p. 38.

ancestor to the domesticated dog (*Canis Familirias)*, according to scholars Lance van Sittert and Sandra Swart, is the grey wolf (*Canis Lupus*).[93] van Sittert and Swart further argue that the dog can be traced back to present-day Germany, 14 000 years BP.[94] This is corroborated by another scholar Peter Mitchell, who goes on to argue:

> there is agreement that dogs (*Canis lupus familiaris*) were first domesticated in Eurasia, spreading from there to other parts of the world. However, while that expansion already extended as far as Europe, China, and North America by the early Holocene, dogs spread into (and south of) the tropics only much later.[95]

Similarly, McCrindle, Gallant, Cornelius, and Schoeman argue that "domesticated dogs date back to the Iron Age (circa 1430 BP). Mainly of the sight hound type, they were traditionally used for hunting." [96] While there seems to be an agreement as to where the first dog is said to have originated from, it is equally important to note that the dates have been

[93] Swart, S., & van Sittert, L. 2003. *Canis Familiaris: A Dog History of South Africa.* South African Historical Journal, 48:1. p.139.

[94] Swart, S., & van Sittert, L. 2003. *Canis Familiaris: A Dog History of South Africa.* South African Historical Journal, 48:1. p. 139.

[95] Mitchell, P. 2017. *Disease: A Hitherto Unexplored Constraint on the Spread of Dogs (Canis lupus familiaris) in Pre-Columbian South America.* Journal of World Prehistory. p. 302.; Freedman, A. H., & Wayne, R. K. 2017. *Deciphering the origin of dogs: From fossils to genomes.* Annual Review of Animal Biosciences, 5. pp. 281–307.

[96] McCrindle, C., Gallant, J., Cornelius, S., & Schoeman, H. 2015. *Changing Roles of Dogs in Urban African Society: A South African Perspective*. A multidisciplinary journal of the interactions of people and animals. p. 157.

contested, something Mitchel also highlights.[97] Researchers, Skoglund, Ersmark, Palkopoulou, and Dalen in 2015, argued that "While molecular estimates of the time of origin of the dog lineage are contingent on principally unknown mutation rates and generation times, the most recent genomic estimates of the divergence between wolves and dogs date to 11,000 to 16, 000 years ago.[98] Further, they indicate that "These estimates are in considerable discord with reported archaeological evidence of dog-like canids from before the Last Glacial Maximum, which date as far back as 36,000 years before present (BP)".[99] Skoglund, Ersmark, Palkopoulou, and Dalen go on to argue that the relationship between humans and the dog began 27 000 years ago, and instead only developed into domestication of this animal 14 700 years ago.[100]

This is important considering that not only does it speak to the contested histories of the domesticated dog, what this contestation also does is to enable the appreciation of the fact that this animal has been present in human lives for much longer than previously argued.

In the domestication process of the dog, Mitchell argues that the hunter-gatherers played a pivotal role:

> Whatever view one takes regarding the date of their initial domestication, hunter-gatherers unquestionably kept dogs in northern China, Russia's Far East, Europe, and

[97] Mitchell, P. 2017. *Disease: A Hitherto Unexplored Constraint on the Spread of Dogs (Canis lupus familiaris) in Pre-Columbian South America*. Journal of World Prehistory. p. 302.

[98] Skoglund, P., Ersmark, E., Palkopoulou, E., & Dalen, L. 2015. *Ancient Wolf Genome Reveals an Early Divergence of Domestic Dog Ancestors and Admixture into High-Latitude Breeds*. Current Biology. p. 1.

[99] Ibid.

[100] Ibid.

> at least some parts of the Middle East prior to 10,000 years ago. They are documented in the Western and Midwestern United States only shortly thereafter, and in early pastoralist contexts in Egypt's Western Desert by around 6000 BC. This widespread late Pleistocene/early Holocene distribution is not, however, matched south of 20N. Instead, from Central and South America to sub-Saharan Africa to Southeast Asia (including southern China and Indochina) and Australasia, the archaeological records of four continents struggle to identify the dog beyond 5000 years ago.[101]

And speaking of the logic of domestication, scholars Luc Janssens, Liane Giemsch, Ralf Schmitz, Martin Street, and Stefan Van Dongen, argue that utilitarian reasons were previously understood to be the primary motivators for the domestication of the dog. However, through the discovery of the Bonn-Oberkassel dog in 1914 Germany, which is said to have had a tooth infection weeks leading to its death, Janssens, Gemsch, Schmitz, Street, and Van Dongen argue that "Since canine distemper has a three-week disease course with very high mortality, the dog must have been perniciously ill during the three disease bouts and between ages 19 and 23 weeks. Survival without intensive human assistance would have been unlikely. Before and during this period, the dog cannot have held any utilitarian use to humans".[102] A takeaway point here is that there may have been emotional bonds between the dog and humans, given that this dog survived, something that would have been impossible without human care.[103]

[101] Ibid.

[102] Janssens, L., Giemsch, L., Schmitz, R., Street, M., & Van Dongen, S. 2017. *A new look at an old dog: Bonn-Oberkassel reconsidered*. Journal of Archaeological Sciences.

[103] Ibid; Bates, M. 2018. *Prehistoric puppy may be the earliest evidence of pet-human bonding*.

When it comes to the traces of the figure of the dog in Africa, Mitchell argues that dogs "are not native to the African continent and appear to have been introduced there from the Middle East."[104] Further, he notes that "the oldest archaeological evidence for the dog in Africa comes from Neolithic contexts in Egypt and Sudan."[105] Linked to this question around the first trace of the dog in Africa, Swart and van Sittert in *Canis Africanis: A dog history in Southern Africa*, agree, arguing that "The first distinct and distinguishable dog 'breeds' date back to 3,000 to 4,000 BP in North Africa".[106]

And in the case of South(ern) Africa, McCrindle et al indicate that "the earliest archaeological evidence of the presence of domesticated dogs was found at an early Iron Age site at Diamant near the Botswana border."[107] Now, the problem with South Africa is that the history of the dog is not only generalised, but instead co-exists alongside accounts of antiblackness.

According to Swart, there are three dog breeds that originate from this part of the world: "the Rhodesian Ridgeback, the Boerboel and – more controversially – the 'Canis Africanis', previously dismissed as merely a 'kaffir dog' or 'a township special."[108] In colonial South Africa, "the township special," as a reference was used interchangeably with "Kaffir" dog.

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[104] Mitchell, P. 2015. *Did disease constrain the spread of domestic dogs (Canis familiaris) into Sub-Saharan Africa?* Azania: Archaeological Research in Africa, 50:1. p. 92.

[105] Ibid. p. 97.

[106] Swart, S. & van Sittert, L. 2008. *Canis familiaris: dog history of Southern Africa*. Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands. p. 15.

[107] McCrindle, C. Gallant, J. Cornelius, S. & Schoeman, H. 2015. *Changing Roles of Dogs in Urban African Society: A South African Perspective*. A multidisciplinary journal of the interactions of people and animals. p. 157.

[108] Swart, S. 2003. *Dogs and Dogma: A Discussion of the SocioPolitical Construction of Southern African Dog 'Breeds' as a Window on Social History*. South African Historical Journal, 48:1. p. 194.

Scholar, Gabeba Baderoon in "Animal Likeness", argues that "The word 'kaffir' has attained a unique meaning in South Africa as racial invective. It finds its origins in Islam, in which it meant 'non-Muslim', but the South African version is solely a racial insult and does not retain a religious meaning (indeed, this is proven by the fact that the imprecation is directed at Muslims as well)."[109]

And because words mean things, here the use of this language then – particularly the association of these breeds to black people – led to real consequences for the dog(s) too. According to Baderoon, "The label of 'kaffir dog' thus unleashed a concerted official effort to eliminate Africanis and, through the link between the dogs and their owners, engendered systematic violence against African people".[110]

Palesa, thinking about antiblackness and its implication on the dog, scholar, Jacob Tropp, argues that in the 1890s and 1900, there was, in Transkei (located in what today exists as Eastern Cape province), the mass killing of dogs owned by Africans:

> In the government's efforts to restrict African access to forest resources, one intervention in particular spawned repeated conflicts and controversies in African communities: the mass killing of Africans' dogs. For foresters, the systematic poisoning and shooting of African-owned dogs was promoted as essential to undermine African men's abilities to engage in hunting pursuits and thereby protect both local wildlife and European sport.[111]

[109] Baderoon, G. 2017. *Animal Likeness. Journal of African Cultural Studies*. p. 346.

[110] Ibid. p. 348.

[111] Tropp, J. 2002. *Dogs, poison and the meaning of colonial intervention in the Transkei, South Africa.* Journal of African History.

Further, when there was an outbreak of rabies in 1839, in what today exists as Port Elizabeth, dogs owned by African people were killed at a much higher rate: "The state resorted to widespread culling of dogs (two thousand were eventually killed) to control the outbreak. Lance van Sittert argues that this was a cover-up, out of which 2,000 dogs were killed.[112] Ironically, dogs brought from Europe were the likely carriers, but Africans were blamed and their dogs were disproportionately killed".[113]

The colonial practice of dog mass killing, according to Chambers, would go on to find its way into South Africa during the 1960s.[114] In addition to the mass killings of this animal, scholar, Jaime Chambers argues that there was also state-imposed taxation on black people who owned dogs.[115]

It is on this basis that I advance the position that the dog functions as an archive of antiblackness in what today exists as South Africa. In the next following letters, I explore how the uses of the dog-Human as a site of antiblackness.

[112] Swart, S., & van Sittert, L. 2008. *Canis familiaris: dog history of Southern Africa*. Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands. p. 15.

[113] Vivyan, 'Starving and wretched dogs' and M. Vane, 'Cropping dogs ears', *SAKUG.*

(Dec. 1946), 241.

[114] Chambers, J. 2020. *What Drives Illegal Hunting with Dogs? Traditional Practice in Contemporary South Africa.* Society of Ethnobiology.

[115] Ibid.

Letter Three

Becoming with in antiblackness: gratuitous violence, and the apartheid public

The present past(s)

"There are institutions, structures and reality as such, the reality of the antiblack world, that support the human." – Meditations the Dehumanisation of the Slave, Tendayi Sithole.[116]

Dear Palesa, on the 3rd of January 1998, four years into the new democratic dispensation, a a harrowing racist act took place. Here Nicolaas Kenneth Loubser and his co-accused: Jacobus Petrus Smith, Loodewyk Christiaan Koch, Robert Benjamin Henzen, and Eugene Werner Truter, all of whom formed part of the South African Police Services (SAPS)'s Benoni Dog Unit, recorded themselves setting Police dogs on three black undocumented migrants from Mozambique.[117]

In a video clip, first exposed by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC)'s *Special Assignment* in 2000, the police dogs can be seen attacking Gabriel Pedro Timane, Alexandre Pedro Timane, and Sylvester Cose. All this happens while these SAPS members cheer the animals.[118]

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[116] Sithole, T. 2021. *Meditations the Dehumanisation of the Slave*. p. 130. In Steyn, M. & Mpufu, W (ed). *Decolonising the Human: Reflections from Africa on difference and oppression*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.

[117] Special Assignment. 2014. *Benoni Dog Unit*.

[118] IOL. 2001. *Screams and tears as dog unit cops go to jail*.

Picked up from Springs in the East Rand, Johannesburg, Gabriel Pedro Timane, Alexandre Pedro Timane, and Sylvester Cose were reported to have been kidnapped and thrown into a minibus taxi, taken to an open field at an undisclosed location near Binoni. It is here where the SAPS members would deliberately have the dog bite them. From the video clip, the first man can be seen crying for help, pleading with the policemen to command the dogs to let him go. He tries to free himself; this is an act that sees him being repeatedly kicked by the policeman who tells him to let go of the dog: "*los die hond, los die hond*."

The policemen in the background can be heard rejoicing. They are bonding through violence. These animals, according to them, are doing an incredible job. The policemen also ask the wounded man to point to them where the dogs mauled him. For this is something to be proud of.

When they are done with this man, they take him back to the minibus taxi parked nearby. With a fresh victim fetched, the dogs, once again, perform with precision. And as for the attacked black man, the screaming, as was the case with the one who came before him, keeps getting louder and louder. Here too, crying does not stop the attack. In fact, in his case, the attack becomes heightened because the policeman shouts: "*Neem hom, neem hom* [Take him, take him]".

Amid these instructions and collective sense of joy from the policemen, the man pleads. Still, nothing happens. He, the attacked man, goes onto his knees: with his hands positioned as though he is praying, he asks the policeman to instruct the dogs to stop. Looking down at him, another policeman kicks him instead. And once again, amid all this, the dogs do what they are meant to do.

Like the first man, he is also taken back to the SAPS minibus. After taking out the third man, and following the same routine they have mastered, the policemen try something different: the third man is made to stand and withstand punches from the policemen. The dogs

attack still. In addition to punching him, the policemen also stomp. One of them, in an attempt to release a punch, falls to the ground. And in what looks like a moment of shame for him, he retaliates with more violence towards the man who was meant to graciously receive his targeted violence. How could it be that the target does not know its function, where violence is concerned?

Narrating this clip as part of *Special Assignment*, the presenter indicates that the very clip may have been edited to sanitise the extent to which Gabriel Pedro Timane, Alexandre Pedro Timane, and Sylvester Cose were violated. The White policemen, according to the presenter, had shared the clip with their friends at braais and parties they had held during the two years prior to it being leaked in 2000. Other members of SAPS are reported to have been in attendance during these gatherings.

Immigration status, national identity, and antiblackness

Palesa, there are several ways of making sense of this gratuitous violence. As a starting point, the legal status of these three black men, in addition to their blackness, rendered them an easy target. Scholars such as Michael Neocosmos, and Francis Nyamjoh, among others, have written extensively on the histories of targeted violence as it relates to people who are undocumented.[119] What emerges out of their works, is that this phenomenon precedes post-

[119] Neocosmos, M. 2010. *From 'Foreign Natives' to 'Native Foreigners.' Explaining Xenophobia in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. Dakar: Codesria; Nyamnjoh, F. B. 2006. *Insiders and Outsiders: Citizenship and Xenophobia in Contemporary Southern Africa*. Cordersia, in association with Zed Books; Nyamnjoh, F. B. 2016. *#RhodesMustFall: Nibbling at Resilient Colonialism in South Africa*. Cameroon: Langaa Research & Publishing CIG

1994 South Africa; that new South Africa produced specific forms of antiblackness targeted at black migrant communities.[120]

Pumla Dineo Gqola in "Defining people: Analysing power, language and representation in metaphors of the New South Africa" argues that early into the new democratic era, the objective during this time was to try and appeal to the collective psyche and construct the new.[121] This attempt to create a new social order (with blacks incorporated into it), among others, played out in the establishment of the TRC, promulgated in terms of Section 3, 4, 11, 20 of the Promotion of the National Unity and Reconciliation Act 34 of 1995.[122]

Soon after this, in 1996, there was the adoption of a newly drafted Constitution. Additionally, from the 1996 Soccer World Cup, with the contribution of the mainstream media images and narratives, we see how big events of this nature played a critical role in the production of South Africa as a united nation. [123]At the time, Desmond Tutu, who led the TRC, had invoked the so-called "rainbow nation of God." And although this notion was not entirely

[120] Palesa, the theorization of violence black migrants experience (especially in ~~post-~~apartheid South Africa) has often broadly been categorized as xenophobia. In this regard, I advance that there are nuances to this violence, that it is a form of antiblackness. Further, the closest term "Afrophobia" attempts to articulate the specificity of this violence, this is something scholars such as Gqola, and Andile Mnxitama have also advanced. In the case of the Benoni Dog Unit, we see citizenship, alongside with blackness, employed to render these three men subjects of violence.

[121] Gqola, P. Dineo. 2001. *Defining people: Analysing power, language and representation in metaphors of the New South Africa*. p. 95.

[122] Department of Justice and Constitutional Development. 1995. National Unity and Reconciliation Act 34 of 1995.

[123] Bannet, C. 1999. *Broadcasting the Rainbow nation: media, democracy, and nation-building in South Africa*. Blackwell publishers.

new, given that it was writer and journalist, Nat Nakasa who – according to writer and poet, Sandile Memela – coined the term.[124] In years to follow, however, Tutu's invocation would go on to dominate the narratives around reconciliation and nation-building. Palesa I remember how each night, with us seated around to watch *Generations* on SABC 1, every ad break preached to us: "simunye, we are one".

With this being the context of early post-1994 South Africa, therefore, a unified national identity, this form of nationalistic project inadvertently translated into migrants, especially those who at the time were undocumented, incapable of forming part of that ideal.

And because antiblackness is supported by various social, political, and economic structures and institutions (among these being the law, the economy, and policing), the violence targeted at Gabriel Pedro Timane, Alexandre Pedro Timane, and Sylvester Cose as black people who are undocumented, during this period was both a historical continuity and a result of how the new order also depended on citizenship and belonging, to mark South Africa as a rainbow nation.

These men being used as props to exercise White violent fantasies through the figure of the dog, as part of the policing system, at the time meant that 1994 did not mark the end of gratuitous violence as perpetrated via the system of policing. Palesa, when we think of what would go on to be known as SAPS, and its history, this attack contradicted the attempts to reimagine policing as reformed; that policing (with the incorporation of black people into a new society) no longer would perpetrate racialised violence.

[124] Patel, E. 2005. *The world of Nat Nakasa*. Picador Africa. p. vii

Apartheid policing of black people

Palesa, thinking about *swart gevaar*, it is my intervention that the apartheid system enabled the emergence of particular forms of animal-Human becoming; carried out by the state and White South Africans.

As a further exploration of these relationships, starting with the apartheid state, historical archival narratives give us a glimpse of this violence. Mark Mathabane, who left South Africa for the U.S in 1978, in his memoir, for example, speaks about the violence he, together with his family, encountered at the hands of the apartheid police force. Mathabane argues that when he was around the age of five, in the 1960s, soon after his father left for work, he was forced to come face to face with the Alexandra Police Squad, also known as the "peri urban police":

> I gasped and stiffened at the name of the dreaded Alexandra Police Squad. To me nothing, short of a white man, was more terrifying; not even a bogeyman…Memories of previous encounters with the police began to haunt me.[125]

Mathabane further notes:

> My mind blazed with questions. What was really going on outside? Were the barking dogs the police dog? Who was shooting whom? Were the Msomi gangs involved? I had often been told that police dogs ate black people when given order by people – were they eating people this time? Suppose my mother had been apprehended, would the

[125] Mathabane, M. 1986. Kaffir Boy: *The true story of coming of age in apartheid South Africa*. New York*:* Free Press. p. 8.

police dogs eat her up too? What was happening to my friends? I ached with curiosity and fear.[126]

Mathabane's experience reflects how there exists proximity between the black home in the township and what happens in towns (where black people predominantly went to work). However, when it comes to the town and the governing of black subjectivity, black people were in perpetual threats of violent attacks by dogs under the control of the apartheid Police force. The Legal Resources Center (LRC) in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s levelled cases aimed at various ministries of the apartheid state. Some of these cases involved instances where black people were mauled by dogs, at the control of the Police force and by private White citizens.

For example, the LRC represented George Mothopa Moichela, who on September 15, 1989, was "lawfully" walking on Claim Street, Johannesburg, when he was attacked by police dogs. Moichela had severe injuries because of the attack: pain; suffering; discomfort; contumelies.

The dog, according to the court records, was under the control of the Police officers. Interestingly, the defence used by the lawyers representing the Minister of Law and Order, whom the LRC was acting against, argued that the dog acted contrary to an animal of its class. Thinking of this, I posit that it was inconceivable to the apartheid system that the training of the dog, no matter the intended purpose, would always result in antiblack violence.

Moichela argued that the officers knew or ought to have reasonably known that the said dog was vicious, at times and likely to bite strangers.[127]As a further edition, my intervention is that not only was the issue the viciousness of the dog but also the context of the apartheid

[126] Ibid. p.13.

[127] Palesa, it is also interesting to think of the category of a "stranger" under apartheid system, more so as it relates to notions of order, and safety, could also be understood in line with anyone black.

system in relation to being black in a city such as Johannesburg. There are two points I want to raise in this regard: firstly, the use of the dog during the apartheid era, no matter the fact that there were laws that governed the system, was always intended to aid the policing of black people. Secondly, the training of dogs under this regime was to ensure such governance of black people. Therefore, the idea that the policemen were unaware of what the dog could do, to me seems illogical.

The intentions were always clear, hence, Moichela even goes on to indicate that the Police officers were negligent in that they failed to take any adequate steps to safeguard persons lawfully – following apartheid laws – in the vicinity from any possible attack on them by the said dog. This, if we were to operate within the logic of apartheid regulations, means that the policemen failed to execute their duties. In turn, then, Moichela through the LRC, was claiming R5000,00 against the Minister. And although Moichela had claimed R500,00, he ultimately could only settle for R1500.

In another case, involving Jacob Harry Maketla, with Glenn Chait as the defendant, we see similar circumstances play out. The difference here is that the case involves a White citizen and not the state.[128] In this case, Maketla was claiming damages worth R1000.00. It is argued that Maketla was walking on 3rd Road, Chartwell, towards Cedar Road, when he was attacked by two dogs. The affidavit notes the following:

> The breed of the dogs is unknown but appeared to be great Danes. The plaintiff sustained bites and injuries (a) a wound on the left hand (b) wound on the right hand (c) bite on left ear (d) bite on back of head (e) bite on nose in close proximity of the neck and (f) lacerations and bruises about the body.

[128] University of the Witwatersrand. Historical Papers Unit. 2019. AG3281, file D190.

Furthermore, the summons argues:

> The defendant deliberately set the dogs upon the plaintiff. The defendant opened gate of his property allowing the dogs uncontrolled access on the road to which members if the public had access to the road in the knowledge that the presence of the dogs constituted danger to members of the public.[129]

In a letter dated July 29, 1982. M, Zimerman of the Hoek Street Law Clinic, writes to Glen Chait, noting that he represented Jacob Maketla:

> It is alleged that on Sunday the 25th instant he was lawfully walking in a road in close proximity to your property. He states that he was aware that aware of the presence of the dog in your property but as the property was fenced it did not cause him concern, near the gate to your premises he was passed by a person on a motorcycle who entered the premises.

According to the court judgement "the plaintiff testified that he was walking past property of the defendant. He went through the fence through the adjoining vacant property when he was attacked by the dogs. The plaintiff stood by and did nothing to help him until a woman called that is enough when he called the dogs off".[130]

[129] Ibid.

[130] Ibid.

Here the woman is said to have said that it was enough (calling off the dogs), and this was the only time when the defendant called off the dogs. Further, on the case of the scooter and the person who went into the property, "the defendant and his witness, testified that they were having lunch when the dogs barked, and defendant followed by Joseph went outside to see why the dogs were barking in that fashion. They saw a black man running out of the defendant's property, leaving the gates open, the dogs caught up with plaintiff and attacked him on the adjoining property. Mr. Joseph further testified that he arrived at defendant's property between 10.00 and 10.30 a.m. and the gates were properly closed after he had entered the property. It is common cause that the defendant's property is properly fenced with Bonox mesh, barbed wire and iron standards." [131]

In the judgement, several matters are in dispute, the first one is whether the dogs acted contrary to their nature in attacking Mr. Maketla.[132] And whether he in fact voluntarily assumed the risk of being attacked by the dogs.[133]The third matter being disputed is whether the defendant, Glen Chait was negligent in any way, whether he deliberately set the dogs on Mr. Maketla, as well as the number of damages he suffered.

These accounts of gratuitous violence as experienced by Mathabane, Maketla, and Moichela, do not exist outside the logic of *swart gevaar,* as perpetrated by the state: "During

[131] Ibid.

[132] As I argued earlier, here too, even in a case that does not directly involve the apartheid Police Force, the attack of a black figure/person, was always a given considering the context of the apartheid system.

[133] I find this reasoning interesting in that it is similar to what was argued in the case of Moichela. And because the main argument I advance is that the dog-Human relationships always produce forms of antiblackness, these accounts of violence are important in that they highlight how in an antiblack world, like apartheid South Africa, it is impossible to think of these relationships as capable of not being prone to produce racialized violence.

apartheid, the government wielded the police like a club, using them to keep black South Africans in check and brutally extinguish any dissent."[134] The early 1970s up to the 1990s best highlight how policing was used to keep black people in check, a history which according to Norimitsu today sees a lack of trust in this institution.

And in order to ensure this control, the system was willing to use any means necessary; this we see in the TRC report, which argued:

> In the 1980's, when the state was in crisis, it became clear that law had run its course; that it could no longer do the job. The law had become ineffective, an apparent obstruction to the restoration of what government leaders, seemingly oblivious to the irony called 'law and order'. At this stage, real rule-making power shifted from Parliament and the Cabinet to a non-elected administrative body, the State Security Council (SSC) which operated beyond public scrutiny. Nominally a sub-organ of the Cabinet, in reality the SSC eclipsed it as the key locus of power and authority in matters relating to security.[135]

Still on how emboldened the apartheid state had become, researcher Hennie van Vuuren argues that "PW Botha famously defined the new logic of the state in 1978 as its preparedness for what he termed a psychological onslaught, an economic one, a diplomatic one, a military onslaught- a total onslaught".[136] van Vuuren further states that "Botha's strategy for arming the

[134] Onishi, N. 2016. *Police in South Africa struggle to gain trust after apartheid*.

[135] Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report. 1998. *The Law and Violence in South African history.* Chapter 2, subsection 8. p. 42

[136] van Vuuren, H. 2017. *Apartheid Guns and money: a tale of profit.* Jacana, Auckland Park. p. 27.

apartheid was based on the language of threat, total onslaught and resultant war".[137] He had imagined a situation of total war both at home and abroad, requiring a concomitant response. That "from 1985 onwards, the few spaces that existed to move and organise were increasingly curtailed by successive states of emergencies, which granted the executive even more power to suppress dissent and enforce NP rule".[138]

One of the clearest signs that those who oversaw the apartheid system were willing to do what it takes to ensure its survival, including by making use of the dog, is the Tsitsikamma Wolf Sanctuary. Located near Knysna, along the Garden Route in the Western Cape province, this place houses a hybrid of German Shepherds and the wolves. These hybrids came out of what would go on to be known as Project Coast.[139] Project Coast, according to research done by the United Nations, was a chemical and biological warfare programme of the apartheid state.[140] Housed at a military front company, Roodeplaat Research Laboratories, the common knowledge was that the Laboratories were conducting agriculture-based experiments, meanwhile, experiments were conducted on animals such as baboons, in order to ascertain how much toxin it would take to kill black people and those regarded to be the enemies of the apartheid state.[141] Further, there was also the breeding of wolves and German Shepherds, with the sole purpose of developing an effective hybrid that could be used in the state military and in policing.

[137] Ibid. p. 28.

[138] Ibid. p. 27.

[139] Gould, C. & Folb, P. 2002. *Project Coast: Apartheid's biological warfare programme*.

[140] United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research. 2002. *Project Coast: Apartheid's chemical and biological Warfare programme.*

[141] Institute for Security Studies. 2014. *The horrors of the apartheid state's biological warfare programme must not be forgotten: here's why.*

With the end of the "official" end to the apartheid system in 1994, the remaining dog-wolve hybrid went on to be housed at the Tsitsikamma Wolf Sanctuary.[142]According to scholar, Louis Green, this establishment aims to preserve "a healthy genetic strain of animal outside the wolf's natural habitat".[143] And this is primarily because the hybrid cannot return to the wild.

The implication of dog-uses to carry out racialised violence in the apartheid era sees particular narratives of violence tied to the figure of the dog today, especially where public memory-work is concerned. Palesa, there are other inter-related consequences of this act; that by appropriating the dog into this system of violence, questions around this animal's mundanity begin to emerge. By this, I mean that at a societal level, this animal goes on to have added social and political meanings related to South Africa's history of antiblackness. For people who directly were violently attacked, the memories remain too familiar – as notable in Mathabane's recollections. In a way, the presence of the dog in Mathabane's childhood memories ties to what Gobodo-Madikizela argues concerning the function of trauma.

Palesa, thinking about "becoming with in antiblackness", it is also interesting to me, that out of these archival records of violence I have shared with you, as I earlier argued about the dog-Human relations, the outcomes of this relationship are what matters, more so to the victims of violence.

Further, it is not an odd thing for non-Human figures to be archives of antiblackness. Out of the 2015 Rhodes Must Fall movement, for example, organised around the statue of British

[142] Green, L. 2016. *Apartheid wolves: political animals and animal politics*. p. 147.

[143] Ibid.

coloniser Cecil John Rhodes, at the University of Cape Town, there was also attention focused on how the violent histories of racialised violence are represented in objects and things.[144]

Palesa, the only difference with the dog, something we also see with Tsitsikamma Wolf Sanctuary, is that the dog, unlike the statues, cannot be shelved away from the everyday life of South Africa. Not only do people still visit the sanctuary, or that there are ongoing narratives of the dog as spoken about in everyday conversations, and in the media. Further, the dog as animal that lives with us, especially the German Shepherd, serves as a reminder of these pasts/presents.

[144] McCain, N. 2021. *SA Activists weigh in on call to remove Cecil John Rhodes statue at Oxford University*.

Letter Four

Becoming with the dog, in antiblackness: natal alienation in ~~post-~~apartheid South Africa

Dear Palesa, in ~~post-~~apartheid South Africa, the kind of *becoming* between black people and the dog does not produce racialised violence. However, this does not negate the fact black people's dog uses can lead to a production of gendered violence and reflect political violence.

With this letter, I want to focus the attention on the role of the black political elite in the production of forms of antiblackness. I am interested in thinking about how these dog uses signal to self-policing and alienation, beyond the direct settler-colonial and apartheid control.

As a starting point, let us for example take Jacob Zuma, who in the ~~post-~~apartheid era has had a very particular relationship with the spectacle of violence – and this we see in his capacity as state president, as a politician, and as an individual. It is important to appreciate that these roles are not necessarily removed from one another, and that they can capacitate each other, concerning violence.

Palesa, in 2006, Zuma was tried and acquitted for raping Fezokuhle Ntsukela Kuzwayo, who at the time went on to be publicly known as Kwezi. There are several black feminist scholars and writers whose work has been dedicated to giving nuance to the gender-based violence targeted at Kuzwayo. Among these is Mmatshilo Motsei with *Kanga and the Kangaroo Court: the trial of Jacob Zuma*; Redi Thlabi with *Kwezi*; as well as Pumla Dineo Gqola with *Rape: A South African Nightmare*.

According to Gqola, the gendered attack on Kuzwayo, reflected just how much violence of this nature had become entrenched in ~~post-~~apartheid South Africa: "It was a difficult moment in South Africa's post-transition period and one that questioned many assumptions about the

place of power, gender and sexuality in our society." There are multiple forms of violence Kuzwayo encountered. Firstly, the act of rape itself is a horrible thing for anyone to experience. Kuzwayo also encountered a patriarchal judicial attack from a judge who presided over this case – Judge Willem van der Merwe brought into question Kuzwayo's sexual history.[145]

Additionally, Kuzwayo was attacked by the supporters of Zuma, who in front of the court burned her images as if this was a form of a witch-hunt. The violence culminated in her being exiled from South Africa.[146]

During the trial, Zizi Kodwa, who at the time was the spokesperson of the ANC Youth League, defended Zuma. Kodwa argued: "Our criticism of the Scorpions is that we don't believe they are independent. We have always suspected they are just the messenger and I used the idiom that if you can't find the person who owns the dog you must hit the dog hard so the owner can come out".[147] In his defence of Zuma, Kodwa was appropriating the dog to target the National Prosecuting Agency (NPA), which he considered to be Zuma's political opponent. To his defence, he then came back and said that he was merely employing the figure of the dog as a metaphor. Here the NPA ended up threatening to lay charges against him, arguing that he was inciting violence against the institution.[148]

In another case that took place much later, Julius Malema (the current president of the Economic Freedom Fighters), who in 2006 too supported Zuma as the ANC Youth League President, in 2018 was reported to have called Pravin Gordhan (the current Minister of the Department of Public Enterprises) a dog.[149] During this time interestingly, as a political

[145] Horn, J. 2016. *Khwezi showed how to challenge rape culture – the rest is up to us.*

[146] Pumla, D. Q. 2015. *Rape: A South African Nightmare*. Melinda Ferguson Books.

[147] IOL. 2006. *It's dog eat dog in row about metaphor.*

[148] Ibid.

[149] Mkhabela, M. 2018. *EFF attacks on Gordhan inspired by classic Zuma tactics*.

commentator, Mpumelelo Mkhabela observes, Kodwa was one of the people who would go on to call out Malema, in defence of Gordhan.[150]

In the case of Kodwa in 2006, another person who was regarded Zuma's political enemy was Njabulo Ndebele, who then went on to write "Let us declare 2007 the year of the dog" following Kodwa's use of the dog.[151] Addressing Kodwa's appropriation of the dog, and the violent nature of the South African political discourses, Ndebele in his essay writes:

> Imagine that you are witnesses to the beating of a dog. Imagine that you are watching Zizi Kodwa, described in the newspapers as the 'spokesperson of the ANC Youth League', outside the court where Jacob Zuma was recently on trial. Kodwa was reported to have called for 'the dogs to be beaten until their owners and handlers emerge'. My name, according to reports, was one of four on a list of these 'dogs'.[1]

He argues for the reconceiving of the dog, and black people's relations with this animal, noting that the very metaphor for the dog had been used by the colonial and apartheid systems when exerting violence towards black people:

> Remember the Native Land Act of 1913 when tens of thousands of Africans were thrown out of their lands 'like dogs'? Many years later, influx control laws were passed and Bantustans were created; hundreds of thousands of African families were uprooted and moved around 'like dogs'. Today, there are farmers who, having exploited them

[150] Mkhabela, M. 2018. *Malema must respect dogs*.

[151] Ndebele, N. 2006. *Let us declare 2007 the year of the dog.*

> for decades, still throw out black families into the wilderness 'like dogs'. Remember 16 June 1976, when thousands of school children were shot at 'like dogs', And how, in turn, 'other dogs' from the hostels were sent by the State to attack township dwellers 'like dogs'? It all led to Boipatong, where balaclava-hooded men, bussed in, split the heads of babies with pangas 'like dogs'. We still bus in people 'like dogs' as 'voting fodder' or as 'demonstration fodder', sometimes just outside the court.

Reflecting on this essay by Ndebele, Baderoon argues: "As Ndebele's list demonstrates, this frightening legacy of 'righteous brutality' implicates both Blacks and whites, both apartheid's enforcers and those who opposed racial oppression."[1] How Ndebele writes about the dog is important given that it highlights White supremacist uses of this animal – although in this case, black political elites use the dog in a metaphorical way.

However, I find that Ndebele advances a false equivalence, that black people's uses of the dog in ~~post-~~apartheid South Africa can be comparable to the colonial and apartheid uses. The comparison to apartheid and all other systems of domination does not account for the very racialised violence produced by these systems but also what it means to be black, given the arguments advanced by Afro-Pessimism.

I must note, that while I disagree with Ndebele, his essay does a good job of showing how black people's relationships with the dog are shaped by the history of antiblackness. Not only is this evident in the references he makes about the apartheid's metaphoric comparison of black people to dogs. The fact that he makes a plea for us to love the dog shows how antiblackness produces distance/separation/ between black people and the dog: this is a form of natal alienation Afro-Pessimism argues to be central to how black social death is maintained.

Palesa, 2006/2007 was not the last time the figure of the dog would be employed and be linked to Zuma in the South African political landscape.

In 2012, while at a political event in Impendle, Kwazulu Natal province, Zuma argued that black people who buy dogs food, and take them to the vets, practice White culture: “Spending money on buying a dog, taking it to the vet and for walks belonged to white culture and was not the African way, which was to focus on the family”.[152]

In defence of Zuma, the then Presidency spokesperson, Mac Maharaj, in a news article published by the *Mail & Guardian* newspaper, argued the following:

> Zuma made the well-known example of people who sit with their dogs in front in a van [bakkie] or truck, with a worker at the back in pouring rain or extremely cold weather. Others do not hesitate to rush their dogs to veterinary surgeons for medical care when they are sick, while they ignore workers or relatives who are also sick in the same households”.[153]

According to Maharaj, Zuma was merely trying to decolonize the African mind.[154] Maharaj further argued that we should not “elevate our love for our animals above our love for other human beings."[155] That what Zuma was doing was to reiterate the need to "preserve that which is good in certain cultures, and avoid adopting practices that are detrimental to building a caring African society".[156]

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[152] Hans, B., & Moola, Y. 2012. *Pet dogs not for blacks – Zuma*.

[153] Mail & Guardian. 2012. *Zuma's dog comments meant to 'decolonise the African mind'*.

[154] IOL. 2012. *Maharaj defends Zuma’s dog comments*.

[155] Ibid.

[156] Ibid.

Despite how Maharaj rationalised Zuma's utterances, what was clear is that Zuma assumes blackness to be monolithic. Something he does while also discounting the colonial and apartheid histories that shaped black people's relationship with the dog. Further, he assumes that there exist no-precolonial relationships between black people and the dog. Palesa, this is incorrect.

And without the risk of being seen to be framing the black people's experiences as uniform and monolithic. Or seeing Africa as heterogenous, and romanticising pre-colonial Africa, the historical relations that black people have had with the dog are counternarrative to what Zuma was implying.

In his 2018 doctoral thesis, for example, legal scholar Tshepo Mandlingozi reminds us of what is embodied in the phrase, "ilizwe lifile" [the land is dead]. That following the settler colonial violence, black people engaged in processes of mourning:

> This cry sought to convey the sense that conquest and colonisation heralded dislocation on three planes of African belonging-in-the-world. First, conquered people experienced disharmony, racial subjugation and generalised mutual resentment in the *social world*. Second, they experienced land hunger, destitution and loss of ancient relation with non-human beings in the *material world*. Most importantly, *ilizwe lifile* was a cry to the gods because disorientation on the material and social planes were felt to have negatively affected both the inner and the inter-subjective *spiritual world*.[157]

[157] Madlingozi, T. 2018. *Mayibuye iAfrika? Disjunctive inclusions and Black strivings for constitution and belonging in 'South Africa*.

Palesa, the term *ilizwe lifile*, in Sesotho, you would understand as *lefatshe le shwele*. It signals to the death of historical social relations that black people had with the land. Meaning that out of settler-colonial violence emerges various articulations of natal alienation.

I invite Madlingozi into this meditation with the sole purpose of speaking to the fact that the dog as part of lefatshe, umhlaba, ilizwe, the land, precedes racialised violence. And this something we deeply understand when turning to African cosmology.

Cited in McCrindle et al., for example, Woodhouse indicates that dogs can be found in rock paintings of the Khoi and San people, this is in the early Iron Age.[158] Further, there is also the very earliest evidence of the presence of the dog in colonial South Africa, which ironically, can be found in the diaries of Vasco da Gama.[159] We also see the history of these relationships in totemism. Explaining totemism, scholar Mokgale Makgopa, argues:

> A specific totem is chosen by a group or clan for several reasons that are closely linked to the physical environment. Totems are by their nature metaphoric and a symbolic representation of the group or clan. The inner spiritual nature of a human being is clearly communicated using symbolism. The group or clan named after the totem believes itself to be closely connected with the animal. Therefore, the traits of the animal totem are symbiotically translated. This is evidenced by the presence of certain rules based on the conduct of the group or clan with respect to its totem.[160]

[158] McCrindle, C. Gallant, J. Cornelius, S. & Schoeman, H. 2015. *Changing Roles of Dogs in Urban African Society: A South African Perspective.* A multidisciplinary journal of the interactions of people and animals. p.157.

[159] Baderoon, G. 2017. *Animal Likeness.* Journal of African Cultural Studies.

[160] Mokgale, M. 2019. *Totemism: A symbolic representation of a clan with specific reference to the Basotho ba Leboa – An ethnographical approach*.

As a contribution to the relationships between black people and animals in general, essayist, Panashe Chigumadzi, in *Dominion: The Animal and the linguists*, a BBC podcast, notes that:

> Most of the totemic symbols are animals, when ruling dynasties were being found, that animal becomes the identity of the dynasty and the clan. The behaviour, the character, and its attributes, are the ones that influence the clan and the individuals.[161]

In recognition of the forms of alienation seen in the ~~post-~~apartheid narratives of the dog, which I think also reflects an intergenerational transfer of trauma, there are other thinkers who have attempted to advance alternative ways of relating to this animal. As an attempt to account for the effects of violence and the resulting alienation, political commentator Tinyiko Maluleke – when his dog died in 2015– wrote:

> Bruno was tall, brown and handsome. Without a fail, whenever I returned home Bruno would run to the gate to welcome me – for 10 glorious years. On the last Thursday of February 2015, Bruno died. And I did something that was very unAfrican: I cried for my dog Bruno.

In this essay, Maluleke references Zuma's 2012 utterances. In essence, his essay is aimed at acting as a counter-narrative to the idea that it is un-African for black people to extend forms of care towards the dog. Unfortunately, this kind of thinking remains deeply pervasive. Thinking about the writing done by Swart, Baderoon, and van Sittert, as it relates to dog breeds and their valuing, in addition to race, dog narratives in ~~post-~~apartheid South Africa also signal

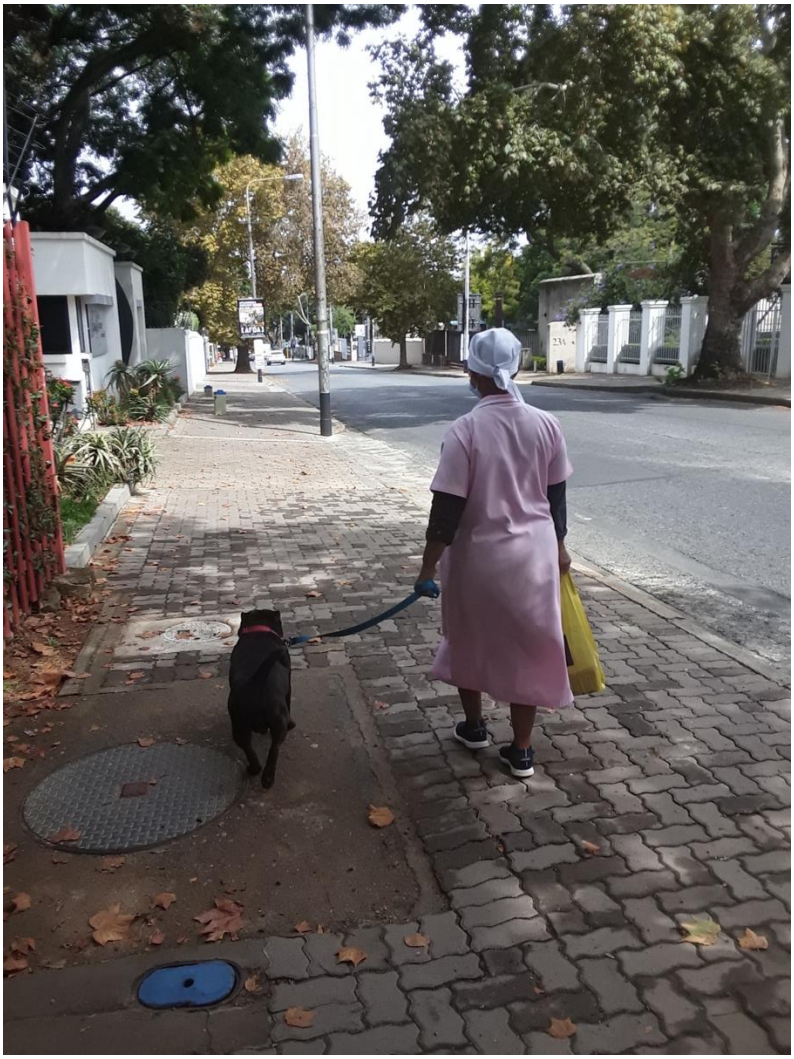
[161] Chigumadzi, P. 2019. Diminion: *The Animal and the linguists.* BBC World Service.

the class sensibilities people have. This is the case when it comes to the capacity for Canis Africanis/township dog to be desired. The expression of these historical narratives, in our everyday life, takes place in the form of statements of ridicule: boBobby are said to attend funerals and traditional ceremonies alike. Such statements do not only communicate the historical valuing of this animal concerning settler-colonial violence. They also speak to how the dog functions as an archive of the histories of black subjugation in South Africa.

I think more alternative approaches, as evident in Tinyiko Maluleke's writing, are necessary and effective when it comes to thinking about the narratives advanced by the likes of Zuma. However, this has no implication on blackness and *being* in the world.

Letter Five

Becoming with the dog, in antiblackness: black women, the dog, and the White home



Dear Palesa, as part of wandering, I went and inquired to our mother, about her experiences with the dog as a black woman who worked as a domestic worker. I had planned to return home in December 2018. I remember arriving in Rammolutsi on a Sunday. Palesa, upon return, I found Dimakatso thin. Her cheekbones looked as though they were trying to escape her face.

She felt sorry for herself: “mpho I look at other women, and they look motherly”, she would say. Here our mother referring to her extreme weight loss.

Our mother had been diagnosed with cancer of the esophagus. I hugged her, carefully this time. She looked and felt fragile. From there, she would, as had been always the case, go on to tell me all that has happened while I was gone. Palesa, Dimakatso told me that you slept with a bible placed above your head. That Paballo, whenever the three of you prayed night pretended to not have heard her say Amen. Only to start from scratch; this time around, she would use much more instructive language to plead with God to save her life. “They think I am going to die”, she said.

Once we both had settled down; seated in the shade, next to Nkgono’s house; we began talking about the dog. I asked her about how White people treated their dog(s), in comparison to her. In response, this is what she said: “They treated them like people”.[162] What she says is something she observed in most of the households she worked at. “It was shocking,” she shared.[163] According to her, the dog lived inside the main house, while she was relegated to a backroom or what they then used to call maid’s quarters:

> I lived outside [in the quarters]. They [the dogs] lived inside the house. They ate out of the same dishes used by everyone else, yet I was given an enamel dish. I was not even allowed to wash my dish in the same sink as them. The dishes used by dogs were washed in the same sink. Yet mine was only allowed to be in my room. I hated it.[164]

[162] Ndaba, D. 2019. Interview 1. p. 3.

[163] Ibid

[164] Ibid. pp. 2-3.

The fact that she had enamel dishes, which she had to bring inside the house whenever she was about to get food, and that it was not allowed for her to mix her cutlery with that of White employers, highlights how she felt unseen as a person. In his 2012 documentary film: *Inja Yomlungu: The white man's dog*, Sipho Singiswa explores several themes including the treatment of dogs by White people. Here an unnamed black woman also shares Dimakatso's experience: "White people will tell you not to mix your dishes with theirs and yet their dogs are welcome to sit on couches".[165]

Further, in my conversation with Nonti, she too shares similar experiences**:**

> They [White people] love their dogs, they even take them to the vet, they would put them on their lap, and so on. They love them more than they love us. I don't know, they do more for them than they do for me. My bosses do not even hug me, what they would rather do is tap me in the back and say, "get well." As opposed to touching me.[166]

On the issue of being badly treated at work, Nonti shares that she and the man who does her employer's garden are not allowed to use bathrooms located inside the main house:

> The toilet for us workers, including the gardener, is outside. To use the toilet located inside the house, one would have to do this when they [the employers] are not around. She [the employer] told me the first time when I got the job that I will not be using the inside toilet...And because she is a teacher, there are a number of white children who come to the house after school. And some of them are differently classed. And less rich

[165] Singiswa, S. 2012. *Inja yomlungu: the white man's dog*.

[166] Nonti, M. 2019. Interview. p. 2.

than employers, and I see how they treat them with respect regardless, she does not discriminate against them.[167]

She also has a similar experience around the use of separate cutlery: "The first time it happened, I wondered if they were disgusted at me or what. From there I concluded that that maybe White people work in that manner".[168]

The treatment of black workers, as evident in the case of Dimakatso, Nonti, and the unnamed black women who feature in Singiswa's documentary, in ~~post-~~apartheid South Africa, is a colonial and apartheid legacy.

The fact that in the case of Nonti, such a requirement was being made in ~~post-~~apartheid South Africa, highlights how colonial and apartheid practices did not die as the new dispensation came into effect. Thinking of *swart gevaar*, the apartheid logic of organising public spaces and governing black subjectivity was not limited to the state at the time. It extended to the private space. In the case of black workers, especially women who work as do workers, we see being extended into the ~~post-~~apartheid era.

The White home, in ~~post-~~apartheid South Africa, continues to be a gallery where such practices are installed. Leading to democratisation in 1994, the South African government in efforts to try and legally formalise this form of labour, put in place legislative changes:

> The post-apartheid South African state has established one of the most extensive efforts anywhere in the world to formalise and regulate paid domestic work. Key pieces of labour legislation were extended to include domestic workers, and others were introduced, to give domestic workers for the first time in South African history access

[167] Ibid.

[168] Ibid. p. 1.

> to the same rights as all other workers, including the right to organise into trade unions, a much-publicised national minimum wage, mandatory contracts of employment, state-legislated annual increases, as well as a world-first inclusion into unemployment insurance benefits, and even state-sponsored training.[169]

Shireen Ally, despite these efforts, argues that nothing much has changed: 'Despite the broad-ranging efforts to turn South African domestic "servants" into workers, the iconic apartheid live-in African woman "servant" attending to the lifestyles of white, middle-class suburbia, remains a recalcitrant reality in contemporary South Africa.'[170] I want to go further and argue that although Ally specifically focuses the attention on domestic work, the lack of change in the acts of antiblackness, reflects the very fact that with black ontological crisis of *being*, violence exists across time, despite political moments such as democratisation in 1994.

In 2020, the country's statistical service, Statistics South Africa, estimated that around 1 million people, mostly poor black women, worked as domestic workers.[171] And according to the International Labour Organization, "South Africa is the country with the highest number of domestic workers in the region. In 2010, 1.1 million domestic workers were working for private households."[172] They further argue:

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[169] Ally, S. 2008. *Domestic Worker Unionisation in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Demobilisation and Depoliticisation by the Democratic State*, Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies. p. 2.

[170] Ally, S. 2010. *From Servants to workers: South African domestic workers and the democratic state*. University of Kwazulu Natal Press. p. 7.

[171] Statistics South Africa. 2020. Quarterly labour force survey.

[172] International Labour Organization. *Domestic workers across the world: global and regional statistics and the extend of legal protection.* p. 49.

More than three-quarters of all domestic workers in South Africa are female, and the sector was the country's third largest employer for women in 2010, employing approximately 15.5 per cent of all women workers. The racial distribution of domestic workers is highly uneven, with the vast majority classified as "African/black" (91 per cent) and the remainder as "Coloured" (9 per cent).

Despite knowing that they are unregistered; that this is illegal; and that they are being shortchanged given poor pay while also lacking legal protections in instances where the employers decided to fire them or the job comes to an end, women like Dimakatso and Nonti remain(ed) in this precarious employment. For this is the way to sustain families. The conditions that define black living in South Africa, see black women put up with practices they otherwise would very much avoid:

MN: Do you share your experiences?

NM: Yeah, but we generally compare work experiences, something like the fact that I pay for a holiday?

MN: You pay for a holiday?

NM: Yes, I do. She told me that if it is a holiday on Monday, I have to come in on Tuesday to make up for the day on which the holiday was in. I think we are different, that other colleagues have more extreme experiences when we compare among ourselves.

MN: What about registration? With the department of labor?

NM: I cannot say I am certain; she is a teacher. But she prints my pay sleeps at school and comes and gives them to me. We had agreed with my colleagues that we will get together and go check with the department of labour at the regional office.[173]

Nonti further shares how she was violated at work:

Work is scarce. Especially when you are the one who is the sole breadwinner [as has been the case with her as a single parent]. I can stop working but the problem is that there is no other alternative. You then end up staying. They [the employers] do not care what time you knock off. They do not care whether you eat. Or have taken breaks. They cannot even give you days to rest and take leave. **** told me that she knows someone willing to take my place if I am unwilling to work. That there are plenty of people looking for work. And she tells me this when I complain that at the month that when she knows that she will be out of town, she must pay me in advance. She tended to leave on the day when she knows that the month has come to an end. I would wait, and it will even get dark outside. Still, I will be waiting for her to return from wherever she was coming from.[174]

Forms of care, black women, and the dog

Dogs being treated like babies as part of the reflections these black women share speaks to the deeper forms of care the employers extended the animal, in comparison to the black people who work(ed) for them. It is a question to do with expected decency instead.

[173] Mahlatsi, N. 2019. Interview. p. 1.

[174] Ndaba, D. 2019. Interview 1. p. 6.

Here, for example, we can think of the forms of relations these women had with the figure of the dog, outside of the presence of the White employer/home, and their implications on the kinds of antiblackness they encounter(ed) at work. Dimakatso, for example, shares that at first, she did not like dogs: "Initially, I did not like animals. But once I started working, I began being more open to the idea." She shares how while working in Kimberly, she liked one of her employer's dog: "ene e nrata kee rata, ene e kgona ho utlwa ha kee bitsa" [the dog loved me, it also listened to me whenever I called for it].[175]

It sounds as though the idea of an animal having a relationship with her, listening to her even when she spoke in a language she thought the animal would not understand, mattered to her. The relationship these black women have had with this animal, beyond the context of an environment that comprises of antiblack practices, signals the fact that regardless of violence they encounter(ed), still, there are ways in which they go on to cultivate practices of care towards the animal:

> MN: So why do you call it a child?
>
> DM: A child…I love it. And I love it because it loves me too. It looks at me with kindness. It knows Sesotho. It eats pap, it drinks soft porridge. It eats sweets. And drinks tea. It consumes everything I eat. It also eats apples. Everything I eat.

Dimakatso goes on to share more on the other kinds of relationships she developed, beyond her experiences in Kimberley. At the time of our conversation, she shares an experience related to her last employer's dog:

[175] Ibid.

DM: I will show you the picture on my phone. I have them on my other phone. It is a good dog. And when I arrive, although there is a net covering the fence, when I come, it knows. It even shakes its tail. It cannot survive without me. And when I speak in Sesotho, asking whether it wants biscuits, you will see it coming. Even when I say let us go, going to hang clothes at a washing line, it follows me. At the gate, when I find it, it goes looking for anything which it will bring to me. It wants me to play with it. It does not get enough, last time I found a towel, it took it and brought it to me. I also think it is jealous. When I call the cats, it goes mad. It harasses them. There is a black cat called Nina. When I say "Nina" it looks around and even wants to jump onto the tree to go after the cat.

Palesa, here it is important to understand that there is a particular way in which referring the dog to a child, allows for an emergence of these ethics of care. And although this might be read as anthropomorphism, seeing the dog as a being speaks to how people like Dimakatso believe the animal ought to be treated.

Secondly, we can also draw parallels between the history of black women who worked as domestic workers and raising White children: more specifically that there were bonds they were able to develop despite antiblack nature of their work environments:

"I make their beds every day. I wash their sheets every day. I wash their underwear every day. I answer their phone and take messages. I am there before they leave for work and argue. I am there when they come home and argue. I know everything about

> what's going on in their lives," explained Patricia Kubu. With this, she expresses how, as a domestic worker, she was intimately connected to the family she worked for.[176]

Based on experiences of this nature, Ally goes on to argue that "Employers have always used the inescapably intimate nature of paid domestic work as a practice of power".[177]

For Nonti, she opens up about how she found a way to have dogs as pets soon after she got married – something which her husband had been against for years:

> In the early 2000s, my husband did not like having dogs, but I went against it and got them. I grew up with dogs at home but could not come with them into my own marriage. So, I would instead say that my first-born child was running after other boys who had dogs, so we should get him a dog. That is how I justified getting a dog, meanwhile, I knew that I really love them.[178]

Palesa, at the start of this letter, I invited in the words of an unnamed black woman featured in Singiswa's documentary.[179] This I do because her statement offers room for us to explore what it then means for black workers, women especially, to point out how they are treated in relation to the dog. If this statement was to be read out at face value, the assumption

[176] Ally, S. 2010. *From Servants to workers: South African domestic workers and the democratic state*. University of Kwazulu Natal Press. p. 96.

[177] Ibid. p. 98.

[178] Nonti, M. 2019. Interview. p. 3.

[179] Singwisa, Sipho. 2012. *Inja Yomlungu: the white man's dog.*

would be that this woman hates the actual dog. And yet, this is not the case. What is happening, instead, is that the discontent is rather about how black workers are treated within the White household. In essence, we can come to an understanding that the invocation of the dog, as a reflection on how White people treat the animal, does not mean that black women believe this animal ought to be mistreated.

The aim is to highlight the inconsistencies of Whiteness: if White people's treatment of the dog is intended to construct themselves as virtuous/rational/Humans, their extension of care being only limited to the dog alone, reaffirms the place of black people in the world.

Palesa, I was recently watching an interview between John Berger and Susan Sontag, about storytelling. Here I was struck by something: how they both agree that most stories end in death.[180] My return to inquire about the dog, too, ends in Dimakatso's death:

Dimakatso seats on a sofa next to the window.

the window frame is covered with corrugated iron on the lower part its body.

dimakatso, through the lace, stares out into the streets.

she has mastered the art of positioning her body properly, melting it right into the sofa's softest spots.

Dimakatso and the sofa see each other — they have seen each other.

each day of the week, Dimakatso ties a towel onto her waist.

the towel knows how to not go too high up onto her waist: which parts to cover.

[180] Berger, J. & Sontag, S. 2017. *John Berger and Susan Sontag.*

Dimakatso knows how much tight the towel must be,

the waist knows the towel too.

Dimakatso seats holding wool of different colours, they know each other.

with her back pressed against the sofa, the strand of the wool is gently turned into a blanket.

knitting, the day goes by.

knitting, she continues.

black women clean their stoops, while listening to church music.

black men, black women, black queer people, black boys, black girls, black children, black people, pass on their way to work, school, and crèche — Dimakatso sees them, they don't see her.

the school bell rings, and suddenly, she returns to life — becoming aware that she had been knitting for far too long.

hush now, my daughters will be back from school, she says.

unlike before, Dimakatso seats there, knitting.

before she became sick with cancer, the school bell would have been ushered by the smell of freshly cooked lunch.

dimakatso feels bad that she cannot do things around the house no more.

perhaps knitting the girls a blanket is another way she expresses love; she thinks to her herself.

Dimakatso dies, the sofa is saddened,

the blanket, incomplete.

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