

Moving Through Acknowledgement: Ways Towards Reparative Justice



Mama D. Ujuaje, communitycentredknowledge@gmail.com
Community Centred Knowledge

Abstract

The ways in which time and space have been constructed within a European imperial lens has created a knowledge system which elevates itself above all other ways of knowing. This elitism has taken effect primarily through repeated acts of violence upon bodies, minds and consciousness across the period named the Anthropocene. As a result, there is a need to resort to the wisdom of our somas, through sensing beyond vision and speech to do the work of liberating us from the hold of the partial and limited forms of colonial knowledge systems. We invite approaches to acknowledgement which can open us to processing the pain held within our minds and bodies. By doing so, we feel it will allow access to a pluriverse - a reality of many worlds co-operating within a single planet - of redemptive knowledges. This will entail acts of reparative justice which have the potential to heal the wounds of a violent and toxic colonial order. Recollections of connection which embody older knowledges and their deeper meanings, might lead the way towards self and collective reclamation. This will be a necessary precursor to any movement in the direction of a persistent and reparative justice. We feel access to this will be realised through profound and meaningful acknowledgements across the worlds which exist beyond the modern idea of a unitary world.

Keywords: Acknowledgement, Recognition, Reparative justice, Healing and repair, Pluriverse, Epistemic justice, Colonial, Trauma

CRedit (Contributor Roles Taxonomy)

Mama D. Ujuaje

Conceptualization; Writing – original draft

Sohail Jannesari

Writing – reviewing & editing (mentor)

Toslina Khatun

Writing – reviewing & editing (peer reviewer)

Nayim Patel

Writing – reviewing & editing (peer reviewer)

‘Knowledge is, in the end, based on acknowledgement’ - Ludwig Wittgenstein. On Certainty. April 29, 1951, Harper Torchbooks

Introduction

As water is to the marine inhabitants of the ocean, so are the different forms of knowledge which surround us, present, yet invisible to unintentional detection, wherever and whoever we are across the globe. It is a strange thing, therefore, that there is Knowledge, with a capital ‘K’ only to be found in elite institutions which trade in the stuff through erudite and hidden – from the public - transactions, and fiercely guarded by Peers. Peers who review knowledge thus produced are gatekeeping elites who have graduated in this system of Knowledge building and so safeguard it from most of the rest of us who get by with our diverse assemblages of lived experiences. Lived Experience,

however, is also marked by specialism, in that the kinds of experiences which are sought after by such Peers, are those lived within a narrow gaze, as if such lives would yield potentially treacherously conflicting aspects outside of the specialist gaze. It is such a specialist knowledge holder who decides if you possess ‘lived experience’ or not, according to their own trade. In the meantime, you subsist with your everyday knowledge as a basket of motley facts and opinions, assertions and experiences, which are considered too ordinary to warrant study. Such knowledges are framed by living within your culture, lineage, family and individual personality, until, one day, your life comes under the gaze of a specialist, or you decide for yourself to pursue institutional Knowledge seeking...



Las castas. Casta painting showing 16 racial groupings. Anonymous, 18th century, oil on canvas, 148×104 cm, Museo Nacional del Virreinato, Tepotzotlán, Mexico

I am such a Knowledge seeker, one who is also interested in the knowledges of the everyday. It is how, for me, the question of what could be meant by acknowledgement thus arose. Acknowledgement is used in a variety of ways in the English language, most popularly as meaning a form of acceptance as ‘a recognition of the state of things’. Yet I felt there were tensions and limitations in the way the word tends to be applied across the humanities and by activists, and it felt necessary to propose a reformed relationship between acknowledgement and ideas of reparations/reparative justice within public discourse. This paper speaks to all those who are purveyors of knowledge in any form. Are you a gatekeeper? Then this paper asks of you to reconsider some of your premises. Are you one who trades in the ‘vernacular’ knowledge systems of colonised spaces? Then it also speaks to how you might assert your calls for recognition and reparation. The context for the assertions made and the arguments which follow speaks to each of us at multiple levels, for we have

all been complicit in the maintenance of the hierarchies of knowledge. In this way we all can respond, in some way, to a call for acknowledgement at the level of policy making, knowledge building and relational knowledge sharing. We all stand to gain from reflecting upon the ways in which we trade in knowledges of the everyday, reinforcing elite or vernacular knowledges in our everyday exchanges. The question raised is, ‘Is your use and acknowledgement of knowledge reparative?’

Calls for reparations in recent times have been related to the need to meet the evident social, economic, political and all-round injustices occasioned by the lack of acknowledgement of the imperial history of the enslavement of all bodies: human, and the more than human, and its persistent afterlife in the current era. As such, the more specific call is for reparative justice – a call for rebalancing and restoration across several instances in which a progressive sense of personhood has been denied. Reparative justice might be thus seen as a form of acknowledgement – a clear indication that there is public recognition of the harms suffered and accrued and the need for these to be met through justice. It offers the possibility of every victim of injustice, past and present, to repossess their birth-right sense of home – as a place where fair play is enacted. Reparative justice is a reclamation of self at every level of being, individual, shared and collective. It might also be understood as systemic justice seeking, in that all systems are brought into the knowledge fold to be examined for their accountability over time and place - as to how they have fed into, or abstracted from, the practice of justice. It is not a simple thing to speak briefly on the nature and longevity of these intergenerational injustices which have created this call for reparations. It is perhaps safe to say that, in the main, various bodies have been presented as holding narratives of victimisation because of historical and ongoing violences. Such violences are shaped by specific narratives of race, class, gender and their intersections which themselves proliferated as both cause and effect of an imperial pursuit of capital, at any cost, through colonial endeavour. Manifestations of this were multiple, but reparation calls have had newsworthy attention around colonial slavery, settler colonialism and the consequent deprivations that these have resulted in and that they have been found to be both present and continuous. However, I would like to present another angle to this representation of who is a victim of colonial crimes, referencing Aimé Césaire[1] and his notion of the Boomerang Effect of colonial violence. In it he asserts that a critical effect of colonial violence is also a dehumanisation of the one committing the violence. As this effect is generally not acknowledged by the coloniser, it therefore leads to further perpetration of violence. Examples include the genocides committed in Nazi Germany (Woodman, 2020)[2] after its colonial mis/adventures in Africa and also how European imperialistic violences which took place overseas, through waves of colonial activity in the Americas, across Asia and Africa were brought back to control Europe’s own, white-native territories. Such control took place through processes of degradation and oppression of its proletariat who were marginalised and subjugated within the various European territories, before, during and beyond industrialisation. The denial of this refractory effect, operating at the level of individual and collective psyche of a people has the effect of making this attitude of violence invisible, not only in the systems and structures of social governance but also in their everyday, civil culture.

All of this constitutes the way in which modern life (fails to) translate its pasts and how these pasts become deposited in the knowledge building processes of society. When this knowledge creation within the ‘centre’ becomes universalised it then informs its ‘peripheries’ of what should constitute ‘proper’ as opposed to vernacular knowledge.

‘Vernacular knowledge is a realm of discourses and beliefs that challenge institutional authorities and official truths, defying regulation and eluding monovocal expressions of the status quo. Unlike monolithic ‘truths’, religious or secular, vernacular knowledge tends to be dynamic, fluid, ambivalent, controversial, appearing in multiple forms and open to alternatives.’

Bowman and Ulk. Vernacular Knowledge: Contesting Authority, Expressing Beliefs. 2022.

In this way the people of the peripheries – the post-colony – imbibe the values, structuring and content of the former coloniser, creating knowledge hegemonies amplified in the digital era (Marginson and Xu, 2019)[4]. There then arises a need to challenge the basis of this Knowledge that has become (mis)understood as universal and clearly identify what are regarded as its vernacular correlates, which constitute the valid K/knowledges of the people. This becomes necessary because of the kinds of contradictions in history and across geographies of the application of such colonising and universalising Knowledge forms. We speak here of forced Knowledges which have led to resistances, mass violence, environmental degradation and interdisciplinary tensions and more latterly to a counter-imperial demand for both decoloniality and reparative justice. Imperial Knowledge sovereignty is challenged by calls for acknowledgement of the need to apply different global knowledges, particularly those arising in and holding the context of different knowledge ecologies (Santos, Nunes and Meneses,[5] 2008). It is also a call for justice more generally when we apply the traditional adage, ‘Knowledge is Power’. This means that by drawing on a diversity of knowledges autonomies which capture the culture of the peripheries, we can support the realisation of more equitable and enabling processes, and thus greater justice for the diversity of earth’s inhabitants.

Defining Acknowledgement

‘Sometimes it’s not enough to know what things mean, sometimes you have to know what things don’t mean’ – Bob Dylan as Jack Fate, in Masked and Anonymous, 2003

“To accept one’s past – one’s history – is not the same thing as drowning in it; it is learning how to use it.” —James Baldwin, The Fire Next Time. 1963. Dial Press

How, then, does the way that acknowledgement is defined, in full and complete form, support our understanding of knowledge itself and how can gaining insight into both act as a pathway towards informed reparative justice? We are not fully addressing the more recent performative acknowledgements as apologies for the practice of slavery as elaborated by Ostiana,[6] concerning the Netherlands or the commencement of long discussions around the return of sacred items from museums (Kendall Adams, 2020).[7] We are asking about what kind of knowledge does acknowledgement represent and invite? I decided to first go to a modern rooting of the word through an etymological dictionary:

Acknowledgement, according to the online Cambridge dictionary[8] means:

‘the fact of accepting that something is true or right’

This appears together with the synonyms ‘acceptance’ and ‘recognition’. Alternative meanings are offered which speak to different applications of acknowledgements in practice, such as the piece of writing in which a writer offers thanks for support received, prefacing a book. It does not, in this dictionary, refer to the North American and Canadian practice of naming the first nation people as prior owners/occupants of the land, as a way of indicating recognition that settler colonialism is the basis of current land occupation. Nor does it imagine what

similar verbal ritual could be adopted by Europe in terms of an equivalent acknowledgement of colonial ‘occupation of bodies as labour’.

An online etymological source, etymonline.com^[9] has acknowledgement as meaning:

‘a token of due recognition’

and the verb acknowledge as the middle English derived meaning of:

‘to admit or show one’s knowledge’ derived from Old English, ‘understand, come to recognise’.

We can, therefore, take the word as a form of demonstrating that one possesses the knowledge of a thing – an act, a situation, a circumstance. Acknowledgement, then, is what evidences admission as a (true) knowledge of a thing or the state of things. The use of the word recognition or to recognise is very relevant here, also obtained from the same source:

‘early 15c., *recognisen*, “resume possession of land,” a back-formation from, or else from Old French *reconoiss-*, present-participle stem of *reconoistre* “to know again, identify, recognize,” from Latin *recognoscere* “acknowledge, recall to mind, know again; examine; certify,” from *re-* “again” (see) + *cognoscere* “to get to know, recognize” (se).

With ending assimilated to verbs in *-ise*, *-ize*. The meaning “know (the object) again, recall or recover the knowledge of, perceive an identity with something formerly known or felt” is recorded from 1530s. Related: *Recognized*; *recognizing*.’

To ‘re-cognise’ is to bring back to mind, or to experience something again using bodily senses, to re-member (to assemble the body again). Cognition, as commonly understood, is a mental processing of thought, experience and sensory information^[10]. It is more significantly associated with brain-based processing of the individual within a Euro-American, mainstream, scientific corpus. However, we might also understand, even by reflecting on our own lived experiences that the processing of experience and sensory information is also a more broadly somatic experience, at both a personal and collective level and so it sits in relation to how we inhabit our broader social, cultural, economic and physical ecologies. This is captured by the idea of the *exposome*, as articulated by Marya and Patel (2022)^[11] as the summation of impacts to which the body is exposed, understood as affecting individuals, but also part of the collectively transmitted history of environmental, political, social and cultural patterns. In this, cognition might be better understood as a supra-cognition, that which surpasses the individual brain, and accounts for the collective somatic experience of a people who share a -negative - cultural/historical impact beyond a shared sense of control. Using this framing we might understand that there are other facets to knowing beyond the individual brain and from this acknowledgement can be understood as making connections between much broader elements of what constitutes the truth, or facts - about a situation, condition, or environment.

Applications of Acknowledgement

‘Do not worry if others do not understand you. Instead worry if you do not understand others’. Confucius, Spring and Autumn period, 722 and 481 BCE

‘As social conditions change, so must the knowledge and practices designed to resist them’ — Patricia Hill Collins, in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2002, Taylor and Francis^[12]

Where are these other truths, facts or knowledges derived from, if not from our larger body of experience within the world?

When we acknowledge something, we understand ourselves to be in a state of recall or remembrance. We bring back to mind

something that might have been forgotten, or not admitted, and we show it to ourselves, or to another, in admission of this fact, or truth, recalled. There is a sense of identifying with something that we once knew to be true, if not within one’s own body, then within the collective body, or wider community. Who might that body or those bodies be, if not connected to the time and space of experiences which has always been a part of, even if not formally included, a global narrative? We can understand acknowledgement, then, as being connected to the recognition of a wider set of knowledges than is conventionally or formally accepted as being mainstream. Such knowledges might be considered idiosyncratic, traditional or vernacular in that they are not incorporated into the corpus of elite institutions which claim all Knowledge building and structuring. It might be because they are not translated into a colonial language, or because they are predominantly accrued through sensory data that is outside of the scope of what is deemed rational and normative to the Euro-American body of knowledge. As such the use of acknowledgement here draws attention to and is also connected to the assertion that it is not possible to have a colonial, and therefore partial, perspective of what constitutes Knowledge act as a judge and definition holder as to the validity of the knowledges it has otherised through the application of its own partial categories and definitions. Why such a quandary is not more mainstreamed may well be due to another lack of acknowledgement – the (non)recognition of internal wounding and vulnerabilities on the part of colonising knowledge holders as a result of the Boomerang effect referred to earlier and the somatic wounding, I will enlarge upon later. Hlabangane (2020)^[13] in her argument against the validity of Eurocentric academic ethics also makes a similar point, in speaking of colonisation as disguising itself as a civilising mission through the imposition of the European ‘colonial head’ of enlightenment reasoning, over colonised bodies via *Cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am) of Descartes. She also enlists the thinking behind the ‘Great Chain of Being’ and its hierarchies of the human and the imposition of colonial educational forms as *the* standard of academic learning across its colonies. At the same time, we witness how different the *sensing* of the world might be in comparison with the more limited, but dominant world *view* of the colonial. Oyèrónké (1997)^[14] although addressing gender discourse in Africa, speaks of ‘world-sensing’ as a means to employ the more varied and embodied ways of apprehending reality as a way to rescue and revive indigenous knowledge systems and to recapture the cultural variation in how knowledge is constructed across ‘worlds’. The difference in importance accorded to the sense of smell, for example, presents one of a number of different ways in which knowledge is accrued, as investigated in Ayakvan et al, 2020.^[15] Yet it is also true that our different sensory apparatus are all involved in our perception of the world through Fulkerson’s^[16] concept of sensory pluralism, which informs us that our cognitive interpretation of any one sense detection often involves subsidiary senses working in tandem. As such, even the dominance of the visual in western societies draws upon the lesser explored aspects of human sensibility, though this too is under-acknowledged by those who make primary the rationalist approaches of cerebral knowledge systems. Perhaps, however, this is slowly changing as more quantum-based ways of thinking and working are being slowly embraced.

In *Systems of Food and Systems of Violence*, Ujuaje and Chang (2020)^[17] summarise the work of decolonial scholars, who have written abundantly on epistemicide as the erasures and expropriation of knowledges of colonised worlds and peoples as part of an imperial rationale to control and extract material resources found in these localities. Where such scholars have been able to demonstrate pre-existing knowledge traditions in regions of the ‘global south’ then a wider acknowledgement of these traditions by the universalised academy is called for, as a first step, as constituting the

matter of proving antiquity, something more must be at stake. Museum collections, both on display and within their vast stores are ample evidence, if any were needed, of ancient knowledge and wisdom traditions; of civilisations stretching back to beyond the founding civilisations of Europe. That labelling of collections may not always attest to this might be a result of the idiosyncrasies of individual curators, but it might be a result of difficulties in personal, and institutionally collective, acknowledgement of the antiquity of cultures considered remote in colonial time. After all museums are sites of collection of the exotic ‘other’^[18] and it is this tendency towards ‘fetishisation’ and the making of the exotic and ‘oriental’, ‘curious’ and ‘not-human-like-us’ reflected in the curation (and storage) of stolen and looted items that then forms a significant basis for the justification of collection, curation and its role in ongoing mis-education. Such curation also helps to deflect the fact that many of such items are the result of thefts, pillaging and appropriation rooted in colonial epistemic violence, which is a way of speaking about the misadventurous plundering and erasures that took place to establish and maintain hierarchies of the human across the ‘long sixteenth centuries’. The curatorial activity, it seems to us, also deflects the deep-seated wounding associated with the embodied violence present in such collections, unaccounted for but in texts that aim to reflect such regret (Hicks, 2020)^[19].

Taking this into consideration, one becomes aware of the levels of vulnerability associated with acts of acknowledgement. There are consequences when one admits to a greater truth, or opens oneself to a greater contextual understanding of a thing, which might then cast what was once held as true into the shade. More importantly, however, it brings into question one’s knowledge building processes, something a former imperial culture must avoid at all cost! Not only would the act of acknowledgement call for a significant show of humility within a culture in which the primacy of colonial universalisation is still practiced, but it also requires there to be an increased capacity for openness to processing whatever arises from the admission of wrongdoing within that culture and their allies across disciplines and sectors. Satia (2020)^[20] recognises how particular historical recall of British imperial history can immunise it against any sense of regret. This means that when considering the case of the imperial past and the colonialities of knowledge imposed, the difficulties encountered in acknowledging past errors committed at institutional level – systemically – may militate against any form of admission and so tend to lead to a continuation of these errors into the present, and if not arrested, also into the future. This is why calls for reparative justice are so necessary at this time. Such calls can address issues which are systemic, meaning those colonial legacies which are institutionally persistent. They can create a need for acknowledgement which might ease the continued imposition of new colonial legacies and, therefore, the escalation of the levels of contrition required when they eventually have to stop. Understanding of such relationships between continued coloniality and a lack of recognition of its harms are, however, not common, and we might enquire as to why this is the case.

‘Lying is an occupation,

Used by all who mean to rise;

Politicians owe their station,

But to well concerted lies

Laetitia Pilkington (c1708-1750) in English Women’s Poetry, Elizabethan to Victorian (edited by R.E. Pritchard) (Fyfield Books, 1990)

The need for acknowledgement is an action that itself requires recognition. Whether it is to oneself or to another, an acknowledgement witnessed creates an expectation that there will be

follow through, and that the acknowledgement will have a consequence for anyone or anything that is its subject. I say this especially in the context of acknowledgements concerning the nature of colonialism and relating to calls for reparative justice. That such acceptances/admissions are well met at the level of both policy making within institutions as well as at research and teaching strata, and themselves acknowledged by all those functioning in such institutions might make them more likely to have follow through. How can such a context for acknowledgement be arrived at, so that it might stand the tests of time and circumstance and not be eroded by that which might create a desire to retreat or resist culpability? It is a question with great pertinence in the current environment. Would an individual politician, however brave, on the part of state leadership, set a tone which encourages admission and the associated humility of an acknowledgement process, knowing that such an effort would be both scorned, rejected and dismissed?

In the context of the foregoing then, it is perplexing that in relatively recent times land acknowledgements have become a form of ritual recognition of North American and Canadian settler colonialism, at least within the context of the occupation of colonised lands upon which various institutions are presently located. It is likely a testament to the persistence of movements of resistance by First Nations, at sites such as the Dakota pipeline protests at Standing Rock and many other revelations linking increased environmental awareness to improprieties against First Nation people across the length and breadth of *Abya Yala*. The land acknowledgment usually takes place in the form of a grave announcement being made prior to the beginning of an event or conference. The Amnesty In International (Canada) steps towards this are shared below:

Process for land acknowledgements

1. Name which Indigenous territories you are currently on.
2. Explain why you are acknowledging the land.
3. Address the relevance of Indigenous rights to the subject matter of your event or meeting or to your activist work in general.
4. Put the answers for the above questions together as a statement.

Example: “I would like to acknowledge the traditional, ancestral, unceded territory of the Musqueam, Tsleil-Waututh and Squamish First Nations on which we are learning, working and organizing today.

Written by: Ayendri Ishani Perera, Regional Activism Coordinator for Western Canada and the Territories (2017) Amnesty International Guide.^[21]

As a verbal recognition of settler colonialism, these statements represent an advance on the earlier silences, corruptions and distortions facing the First Nation people’s own prior claim to relationship with *Abya Yala/Turtle Island* (the G/Kuna and other indigenous people’s referencing for ‘the Americas’^[22]). Yet they still do not sufficiently advance the acknowledgement in practical terms, nor have become the basis of meaningful return of stolen territories or an admission of the violences involved in the removals, genocides and cruelties involved in the centuries of colonial occupation, such as is spoken about by Wang and Tuck’s (2012)^[23] much cited paper, ‘Decolonisation is not a Metaphor’. This paper, and others, such as that by Grundy, Jiang, and May, 2020,^[24] speaks of a range of ‘settler moves to innocence’ which are considered performative, insulting and undermining of the concept of solidarity. Such moves do not address the need for the more radical undoing of settler colonialism by repatriation: as a specific form of reparative justice invoking the restorations ly invoked by the term rematriation of stolen resources, chief of which both is occupied land and occupied bodies.

'The Indigenous concept of Rematriation refers to restoring a living material culture to its rightful place on Mother Earth; restoring a people to a spiritual way of life, in sacred relationship with their ancestral lands; and reclaiming ancestral remains, spirituality, culture, knowledge and resources.'

Stop the Maangamizi.com. 2016^[25]

These performative 'acknowledgements' do not encourage a 'leaning into settler guilt' or taking responsible action for settler – ongoing – violence. Yet the papers above do not differentiate between the various non-white groups located in the Americas/ Abya Yala/Turtle Island, or the conditions of their 'settlement' but scholars such as Forbes (1993)^[26] Lethabo King (2019)^[27] and Weaver (2008)^[28] paint a much more nuanced and historically detailed ethnography of relations between African and First Nation peoples, which gives rise to different types of knowledge shared between them and thus surfaces modes of acknowledgement which might more accurately represent their complex histories and relationships.

The foregoing is important if we would wish to consider what might constitute a set of acknowledgements in Europe for the colonisation it has participated in. On the one part there was an occupation of land declared '*terra nullius*' – unoccupied or empty earth-space - and in declaring it so the European claimed a right to occupy it. However, in other spaces and cases, the bodies of people, as labour, were also occupied, because they were held to be '*soma nullius*' – having no soul - to different extents, supported by anthropological and political theories held at institutional level to provide a justification for the waves of terror that accompanied these impositions. Having taken place in disparate regions of the Earth, the reconstruction of bodies – of land, of water, of air and of flesh as deformed socio-cultural and political entities, has meant that it is difficult to speak of an overarching narrative of European colonisation aside from it being marked by considerable violence, wherever it took place. The European nations participating in this, either directly or indirectly, have acted antagonistically towards each other, as well as collectively, to divide up the world in an attempt to gain authority over the process of extracting wealth from, exhibiting competitive patriarchal power over and obtaining conditions of subjugation over non-European peoples who make up a global majority. The question being raised is, in an era named post-colonial, how can the repressions of coloniality be collectively acknowledged in a way that is not performative but forms a basis for true decolonisation and decoloniality? Coloniality refers to an idea in which the various structures, systems and legacies of colonisation are embedded in the functional realities of governance of global south territories and constitute a system of continued exploitation and extraction for former colonial powers. How can these realities be considered in ways which in acknowledging the different 'possessions' as dis-embodiments, can harmonise our calls for reparative justice and true acknowledgement, not only between coloniser and colonised, but also between the colonised?

Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò, ^[29] in his book *Reconsidering Reparations*, makes an emphatic case for collective self-determination being the best basis for reparative justice. His case is comparable to the call of the UK *Stop the Maangamizi* ^[25] movement which emphasises the centrality of self-repair, quoting Nigerian author and philosopher, Chinweizu, on reparations,^[30] which are for the purpose of collective rehabilitation across the globe, including rematriation. Such rematriation involves invoking the body of the earth as a living being in relationship with those bodies that recognise that relationship. Rematriation thus involves the materiality of making those relationships whole by restoring the material and human thefts to come again into harmony.

This is regarded as a sacred and spiritual undertaking, strongly associated with invoking a matrilineal focus to healing and restoration.

What this essay can do is to suggest what might be considered basis for such a process, were we to more collectively push for the kind of acknowledgement which would underpin systemic, reparative acts of justice. This is not to say that movements towards reclaiming our birth-right status as authentic, indigenous, autonomous beings have not been taking place in every continent, ever since the onset of colonisation. Anti-colonial movements commenced with resistances to colonisation as it was taking place and have never ceased. Satia's (2020) ^[20] writings on empire and its processes, give some account of this in India and the 'Middle East' but there can be found many writings, performances, visual arts and music, too numerous to mention here which documents and applauds anti-colonial movements and decolonial traditions and initiatives around the globe. Both academic and community movements and traditions have been set up to celebrate the far-reaching consequences of the works of Walter Rodney, Frantz Fanon and Gayatri Spivak; the campaigning work of Claudia Jones, Dedan Kimathi and Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti; the revolutionary activism of The Black Panther Party for Self Defence, the Morant Bay Rebellion and the African National Congress and so many more.

In terms of more contemporary movements of liberation, how would the notion of acknowledgement be held by those who were formerly colonised? We would primarily need to recognise ourselves as being subject to coloniality and as such, part of a pluriverse. What this means would be recognition of belonging to a diversity of worlds systemically joined by a colonising imperative. As such it would require a reconsideration of the ways in which colonial time and colonial space have intersected to produce hierarchies of humanity inherent in many European centred, dominating ontologies of development. Such hierarchies position the human at the metropolitan centres of the global north considered the most advanced kind of human, holding not simply a culture, but *the* definitive type of culture and constitution. This then defines the humanity of those most remote from those same metropolises as being considered the least human and in some cases subhuman and needing to be set upon a trajectory of development to 'catch up' with the advanced forms of humanity. The concept of the pluriverse, further elaborated upon below, opposes such a linear and totalising structure, advancing the idea that, the diversity of cultures across the planet constitutes different actual and ontological worlds. Our interpretations of truth and beingness vary significantly enough to be considered by ourselves autonomous and therefore, not to be subsumed under a colonising imperative. A serious contemplation of reparative justice would have to consider the motions towards self-repair as those that address the conversations that we have between ourselves, as formerly colonised people, without giving pre-eminent status to particular locations vis-à-vis proximities to the polarity of whiteness or attachment to ongoing colonial relationships. Those conversations would be open to exploring and negotiating the different ways in which we hold ourselves, our cultures and cosmologies, paying serious attention to the distortions introduced by coloniality as the most pervasive mechanisms of control by a colonial mindset. Repair will also then mean taking into consideration the extents to which colonial thinking has infused our , our cultures and cosmologies, paying serious attention to the distortions introduced by coloniality as the most pervasive mechanisms of control by a colonial mindset. Repair will also then mean taking into consideration the extents to which colonial thinking has infused our cultures, our notions of law, equity and success and our manners of expression, making any form of repair a complex endeavour. Even so, there is need for an acknowledgement of that fact and a willingness to search for ways that can reclaim senses of ourselves that feel authentic as well as progressive; able to move us into a dynamic of self-possession which is redemptive and embracing of the unique configurations we bring

to the world. It would also need to acknowledge the potentials we hold for reconfiguring ideas of the world which hold justice, balance, peace and harmony aloft. It would need to identify the means to deal with resolving the injustices, imbalances, wars and violences and disharmonies that Euro-American imperialism has wrought. On account of the way coloniality was used as way of separating us in order to counter shared resistances, it becomes especially important for the matter of internecine and intercultural misunderstanding to be brought up, openly discussed and worked through.

If we were able to work through such difficulties, the next challenge would be for us to de-centre the politics of patriarchy either inherited or borrowed. The calls for rematriation, as sacred restoration of looted cultures, are based upon the idea that the feminine, as ‘mater’ holds a restorative approach to the disconnection between colonised humans and the Earth. So rematriation is a re-establishment of sacred connection with the Earth as a necessary precursor for a right relationship with our environments, something that has been cut off by paternalistic imperialism in the past and continues to the present day. Such sacred reconnection involves restoring both spiritual and cultural knowledge possibilities for a resumption of relationship with the earth, as both a direct return to places ones were estranged from as well as the return of artefacts and bodies to the parts of the earth from where they came.

Routes to recovery of ourselves, as people who were colonised in a variety of ways, remain the responsibility of our own hearts, hands and heads. Our whole bodies hold the power to repair our whole selves and environments, internal and external. Our acknowledgement of each other is tied to our self-acknowledgement, and the reverse is also true, which is why the concept of *Ubuntu*, the Nguni concept of interdependent reality between beings, is so critical to reparative justice. It is because it is based upon a deep knowing of ourselves in relationship to each other, across and within generations; across and within life forms, across and within living bodies and our ancestors and those to come. Knowledge of how this works within one’s own cosmological arrangement enables the power of self-determination through self-reclamation by the use of a conscientious process of repair. This is justice – reparative justice.

The Role of Embodied Emotions

Acknowledgement enables us to put forward a restoration of knowledges which hold human entanglements with each other and our environments (as the more than human) as critical and relevant and a powerful movement towards justice. As a mutual re-cognition, it also opens a possibility that we can hold some knowledges as co-constituted, not necessarily universal, but arrived at through genuine interaction of contributory truths based upon a coming together of a broader and more diverse articulations of what it means to be part of the planet. This produces a liberatory idea present in the decolonial concept of the *Pluriverse*.

Mercier (2019) ^[31] describes the pluriverse in the following way ‘In political terms, the discourse of the pluriverse presents itself as a strategic response to the violence of universalism. It advocates for a multiversal ethics, a pluriversal cosmopolitics based on interspecies and multi-natural kinships, one more aware of the multiplicity of: worlds and world-making practices that make up the post-globalization scene.’ (Mercier, 2019) ^[31]

The pluriverse is an aspiration for a world, or at least a context, in which all worlds make sense of each other. It is derived from the Zapatista expression of ‘*Un Mundo Donde Quepan Muchos Mundos*’ as a world within which many worlds fit^[32]. It is an idea in which mutual recognition of a wide range of cosmologies, diverse knowledges and a multiplicity of experiences have an optimally shared sense of each other, and thus can be open to

a shared sense making without over-riding each other’s sense of autonomy or jurisdiction.

What militates against this more relational aspiration in which acknowledgement might mean a more settled, secure meeting between cultures which might then potentialise a peace-filled encounter?

We consider in *Systems*^[17], the role of shame in coming to terms with the truth of violences perpetrated in the past and in some form, potentially ongoing. Mohammed^[33] reflects upon the nature of the perpetration of mass atrocities in Indonesia and the ways in which these are understood to affect both perpetrator and victim, as well as bystanders, as denial or non-admission. Shame, or guilt, which often go together can act as a block to acknowledgement as an embodied refusal. Frantz Fanon explored this in *A Dying Colonialism*^[34] and *Black Skin, White Masks*^[35] when he examined the tortured psyches of different bodies on the two sides of the Algerian war of independence. It is also well documented, by Kolk^[36] and many others that a constantly activated soma, without the possibility of settling itself, will respond by entering a state of psychosomatic destabilisation expressed as deep fear, sense of isolation or freezing referred to as a stress response, which, if not recovered from or deactivated, can lead to a state of trauma. Trauma has been described as a condition or process whereby the soma finds difficulty in regaining equilibrium and where, in the sympathetic nervous system, over-stimulation has led to mental and physiological pathologies and an inability or deep difficulty in finding a return path to wellness^[37]. Resmaa Menakem^[38] speaks about the hierarchy of trauma existing in bodies in relation:

‘Unhealed trauma acts like a rock thrown into a pond; it causes ripples that move outward, affecting many other bodies over time. After months or years, unhealed trauma can appear to become part of someone’s personality. Over even longer periods of time, as it is passed on and gets compounded through other bodies in a household, it can become a family norm. And if it gets transmitted and compounded through multiple families and generations, it can start to look like culture.’

Resmaa Menakem. *My Grandmother’s hands: Racialised Trauma and the Pathway to Mending our Hearts and Bodies*. 2017, Central Recovery Press. p39

Experiences of large-scale trauma and the situations that generate them are far too common in a world which considers itself to be ‘civil’, and are littered across the history of the globe up until the present. Trauma within these have arisen in the form of wars, colonial repressions and oppressions, which involve abuses of all kinds, forced isolations and segregations and dangerous migrations as well as a wide range of micro-aggressions, all of which pass under the radars of normativity. All of the foregoing has the potential to generate deep stresses within the systems that experience them which, in turn, unrecovered from and persistent, become embedded in the body system of each soma as trauma. The soma itself is a description of the body ‘in process’, an idea that confers a sense of more than just a physiological body. It is a body that responds, learns and adapts over time producing a whole-self personality. It is the soma which both detects and processes injury, harm or abuse – that which is generated or that which is received. It is not too far-fetched an idea, therefore, to suggest that recognition, as a part of an acknowledgement process, requires a healthy sensing ability of the soma of the self, be it human or more than human, over time and space, in order for the acknowledgement to be complete. Whatever happens to the soma, under severe stress has the potential to distort the balanced functioning of the body-system. Collectively, it has

the potential to distort the state of balance of a system of bodies, such as a family, a community or a society, producing a state of victimhood. A victim might be described as the one experiencing trauma, but as argued before and below, a victim might also be the one who generates the conditions or actions which creates victimhood. Such a victim may be unaware of the fact that doing so renders them a victim of this ignorance, or of their (uncontrolled) base desires or lack of full, somatic awareness of the longer-term implications of their behaviour. This latter experience makes a perpetrator also a victim. Using modern and western society as an example, there is a sense of an obvious victim of harm who is regarded as requiring treatment in some way (or guarded against, depending upon who is doing the pathologising). Such a victim might be labelled. Labels are many, persistent and devaluing of a person or collections of people. They create categories of people who then become segregated from the mainstream. These are such obvious victims, within a society structured by inequity, that aid of different sorts is usually directed towards members of those groups, although tending to be those more proximal to the colonial nature of the system in some readily identifiable way. Such aid might itself be pauperising, creating a self which rather than undergoing repair, instead becomes dependent upon the aid given. It might therefore be described as not reparative and therefore not in acknowledgement of the initial causes of trauma writ personal or collective.

Less clearly identified as victims, are those whose everyday lives are the *sources* of deprivation and oppression. I speak here of those who are the ‘disablers’ or ‘marginalisers’ because it is they, as people and institutions, who occupy the role of being part of the systems or structures of ‘normal’ society which is itself rooted in the legacies of imperial behaviour. I refer to these as victims because on one part, much of the harm that they generate might be programmed into the soma because of its deeply systemic nature. They have internalised the fact that the policies and legalities that they are part of generating, protecting or upholding creates, and is the reason behind, such misery. Having in this way denied their culpability, they experience this separation as normal/ised. The separation from ‘the other’ becoming normalised becomes part of the status quo and is reproduced in the different structures of the endemic colonial system: in educational curricula, in the health service policies, in the national and regional media – ultimately creating an intolerable environment for all – victim and perpetrator. As part of the creation of unjust, harsh and hostile environments, perpetrators face the consequences of living within environments which hold resentment; fear and hostilities potentially directed towards them and may be forced into positions of accountability for the social harm generation they represent. It is a case of Césaire’s^[1] boomerang effect, but writ local. With constructions such as these, acknowledgement of injustice may not be easily forthcoming because it calls for a disruption of the notion of privilege as an automatic entitlement and as a quality with purely positive ramifications and it also activates a contemplation of one’s own cruelty. The question arises, is privilege owned by the one who curtails the simpler privileges of others? Is it held by those who, because of their social positioning, may be then held accountable for the generations of capitalism’s ills, such as the financialisation of urban areas which affects the availability of social housing; the disproportionate ownership of capital resources, especially land, which ought to be more commonly held and accessed, or the perpetuation of fast fashion, and shopping malls, which hold an impoverished proletariat in thrall? To disrupt this notion of privilege and its effects might require deep psychological shifts which counter the very structuring of post-colonial social arrangements and the individuals and systems that gatekeep them and may cause guilt to arise. Associated with this guilt are the shadowlands of shame, the terrain of trauma, if dwelt in for long and persistently enough. Given all of this, acknowledgement becomes a highly contested move, difficult to contemplate, even more difficult to act upon, as rooted in so much ignorance and

states of denial. This is, in part, a consequence of the holding of the ‘wrong’ sort of knowledge: one that does not support the equanimity of the body or reconciliation of our collective bodies. It is the consequence of knowledge not rooted in an emancipatory sense of relationship.

Into this situation we also have to factor in that present day, modern lifestyles are anchored in the legacies of past decision making, policy making and legislature, all of which is inherited from past imperialisms. The Argentinian philosopher, Walter Mignolo,^[39] applies to this condition the phrase, ‘*Modernity is constituted by Coloniality*’. This means that many of the present-day ways which are felt to be universal and privileged are actually legacies of the standards, ideologies and systems that were established to violently establish and perpetuate controlled minds, bodies and the earth, in ways that enabled a capitalising order of being, along a trajectory of colonial time as elaborated by Wilk (1994)^[40]. More simply, in conclusion, as either abject or privileged, we are all victims of an imperial past in ways that pass as normal and form part of the structuring of the kinds of power that have the effect of holding trauma at bay, for now, at least insufficiently acknowledged.

As such, many acknowledgements that might be made which are supportive of reparative justice may be easily misconstrued and re-presented as illegitimate and extraordinary because they challenge the idea of what passes for ‘normal’. Their particular challenge lies in appearing not only as an anomaly to the status quo but in asking too much of the system in terms of change. This might be expressed institutionally as barriers to even raising a challenge or a call to justice, or even to advocate for acknowledgement in this sense. Such barriers may operate at the level of the everyday as micro-aggressions, in new forms of system monitoring and surveillance, or even by practices of ‘cancelling’ or more personal threats or barriers to ‘inclusion’ being erected. All of these have the overall effect of inhibiting the critical and reflective behaviour of individuals or in silencing particular social instruments which might be expected to otherwise offer a critique or opportunity to reflect, such as public form of media, education systems and judicial structures. Where discontinuities exist between the logic of the mind, the physiology of the body and one’s ecosystem, such as where evidence is to be found for significant deprivation, social repression and other sources of ongoing and frequent emotional activation, the greater the likelihood of psychosomatic disturbance occurring because of the proliferation of such barriers in such environments.

This then creates an atmosphere in which neither recognition of injustice, nor possibility of acknowledgement for harm, are likely to be forthcoming. It seems as though ambient socially, culturally and even politically held knowledge shapes how and if acknowledgement can be offered and/or received. Given the previous definitions of both acknowledgement and recognition which recall a sense of being open, with a settled body, with low or no activation, and with what Menakem^[41] calls the ability to process pain in a clean way – being accountable, responsible and reflective, we can understand that any acknowledgement would be the exception, rather than the rule. It is rare to witness or experience such a sense of self-possession as a kind of autonomous behaviour in whose company one might find a feeling of comfort and ease. Under the state of psychosomatic tension or unease, where many may feel frequently unsettled and activated there is little opportunity to consider that harm might be readily recognised and acknowledgement offered, in ways that are meaningfully followed through. Such circumstances might be accompanied by, or lead towards widespread individualism, and a tendency toward segregation. This might be coupled with a simultaneous loss of confidence in the ability to determine collective futures in which alternative notions of peace or ‘homecoming’ might be asserted and achieved.

Acknowledgement, in such situations may represent an undesirable weakness and labelled as backward or infantile. After all, with the logic of guilt and shame, as something to be avoided at all costs, who would wish to adopt the kinds of open, or receptive attitudes which might make it possible to consider the pro-activity of acknowledgement?

The Ways forward are the ways back?

This short jaunt through the notion of acknowledgement as connected to embodied and transactional knowledges is only the beginning of an unpacking of reflecting upon the social structuring of how we know and how that knowing is connected to how we feel and behave towards ourselves and to each other.

The trajectories of ‘development’ and ‘civilisation’ appear to be driven by a narrow, singular cultural frame with admissions of the existence of fragments of other(ised) cultures only where it can be folded into the general view in which economic growth is the primary agenda and engine of society. To be civilised is now to applaud a globalised framing-of-everything through universalised ways of knowing which are premised upon, and rooted in, colonisation of the worlds it refuses to admit into full play. It can barely help itself, being possessed of a knowledge which justifies its presence by a purported absence of other knowledges. These other knowledges it has either distorted or erased and continues to make less present, through techniques of invalidation and systems of marking and undone science^[42] within its institutions of knowing, which are themselves universalised. Epistemicide is a term that communicates not only the destruction of a particular set of cultural knowledges of worlds but also the social agents who are responsible for maintaining them, according to de Sousa Santos (2013)^[43]. However, trauma lurks always nearby, a shadowy, unadmitted recognition of an unadulterated blind pain. It fails to acknowledge that the power to rescue itself lies within itself: only the body which hosts it is able to get out of the bind in which it feels itself to be trapped.

A return path is an acceptance that the deep practice of acknowledgement is in service to truths, or states of knowing and being, that are beyond where so many are at present. It acknowledges that it is in a state of being transfixed within the restrictive or debilitating aspects of modernity. To return to wholeness requires in part that there is recognition, within all bodies, that to aspire towards the deep connections that interdependence - as *ubuntu* - corresponds to, is itself a movement towards a greater version of oneself. Our collective health demands that we step out of and away from the limiting knowledge of the imperial mindset and embrace the pluriversalism which is held lightly in a future world Arundhati Roy^[44] describes as ‘hearing breathe’?

Taking these ideas of acknowledgment a little further, they might be powerfully applied to many of the vexing discursive challenges of modern systems of thinking and doing. For example, would the university feel as hopeless as it does according to Richard Hall(2021),^[45] were it to seize the potential of the undercommons, presented by Moten and Harney (2013)?^[46] These are ways of thinking and doing which recognise the possibilities within the kinds of fugitive thinking and action which recognises ‘other worlds’ within the apparatus of the academy? Would the relentless hostility towards migrant populations with brown skins be tolerated so easily if we were all able to acknowledge the deeper histories of movement across the worlds and traumas that drives these hostilities? Could it ever be the case that ingrained into the fabric of the democratic ideal was also a sense of civic responsibility for creating the conditions from which migration arises? Why is it modern to travel ‘a line of progress’ and embrace a ‘single vision’ of a world in which humans are in sync with the machines they have created but it is backward to reflect upon a past of imperial intimacies with violence and its disconnections, there to discover the cause of the current trauma that perpetuates itself? The worlds which perpetuates itself? The

worlds which still practice an exclusionary intellectual elitism, corresponding to those which practice increased segregation of worlds along economic lines They act as if there is certainty that the very present ‘bodies of difference’, which might be one’s neighbours, are somehow more remote than the apocalyptic, imagined futures portrayed as shimmering visions upon the watched screens of modernity.

Deep acknowledgement, were it to be actively sought and pursued at every level of human existence can allow for the spirit of *being*, as opposed to relentlessly *doing* and *having* to be very much more present. It is to recognise the *temporalities* of people and places and feelings, including the very present *nowness*. In this later, it is to allow oneself to hear the sound of one’s breath as it moves within inspired breath and to release that breath as it finds its way into one’s surroundings and then to realise how deeply connected are these different forms of breath and of life. To hold this presence of self and connected knowing is a task to be undertaken within the very spirit of its meaning. To be in acknowledgement is a movement undertaken with openness and honesty but also interdependently, recognising how the breath reminds us of relationship and shared context. It is to recognise at all levels of the body and across bodies that we must work towards overcoming the difficult thresholds of this same embodied – and embattled - mind which may act as barrier to the full expression of the self and corresponding other. Acknowledgement can be a path towards justice and also its gatekeeper. It is within this notion that we recognise its opportunities and also its imitations.

We hope this essay, through offering further insights into acknowledgement, has contributed towards an opening of the ways in which truly sensed knowledge is not only a powerful space, full of potential, it is also a route to liberation. It is also about the nature of the human; its ability to transcend the limitations of the mind forged in an epoch of non-enlightenment and free its soma through a fuller recognition of the power of sensory connection. It also is about sitting with the limitations of that humanness and the ways in which difficult histories are etched across its body and bodies forming self-made restrictions towards more liberatory thinking and doing. The contest between trust in a vision beyond fear and fear itself is held within the bounds of flesh, blood and spirit and also in breath. As we enter the next dispensation of the human, boldly, for those who feel they hold its reigns, but with trepidation for the many, it would seem that there is a widespread holding of breath, rather than working with its potential to release toxins and repair connected bodies which can then engage in the potential for collective healing that acknowledgement can bring.

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