2015

An Ontological (re)Thinking: Ubuntu and Buddhism in Higher Education

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AN ONTOLOGICAL (RE)THINKING:
UBUNTU AND BUDDHISM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The School of Education
The Department of Education, Leadership, Research, & Counseling

by

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December 2015
This undertaking is dedicated to the giants on whose shoulders I stand and to the ancestors—genetically, spiritually, academically—who dreamt, hoped, and prayed me to this space/time.

Most especially, this dissertation is dedicated to my first teachers and perpetual guides: Josephine Wells Robinson, Jo Ann Robinson, and Shalonda B. Robinson. These women—my great-grandmother, grandmother, and mother—taught and continue to teach me everything worth knowing about life, about living with courage, growing with grace, and engaging with love all of the human family. My gratitude for them and of having been born of them overflows.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There is a proverb that states, “I come as a one, but I stand as ten thousand.” Truly, I come as a multitude of one, but I bring along with me everyone both living and dead who has loved me to this space/time, who has prayed me to this space/time, who has dreamt, thought, sacrificed, and hoped me to this space/time. I think on them all with gratitude and I carry them—the ten thousand—with me each and every day.

I could not have begun or continued on this journey without the love and support of my family. My mother, grandmother (Grand), and sister Delisha who have been for me a constant support. Their love and encouragement pushes me beyond limits once thought impossible to surpass. I love them and they me with a depth and breadth that will surely breach the great divide of time. Thank you. To my mother, thank you for your sacrifice, for your love, and your courage. To my Grand, the rock of the Robinson clan, thank you for modeling for all of us the courage to be and live in the face insurmountable obstacles. Thank you for modeling humanity for me—loving-kindness, compassion, forgiveness, courage, joy, acceptance, equality, and justice were learned at your feet. I am grateful for you and I thank you. To the Mays family, my great aunts Brenda and Laurie, the Brooks family, the Washington family, and all of my family and friends in Galveston—thank you.

I am immensely grateful for the guidance of my committee: Drs. Danielle Alsandor, Petra Hendry, Petra Robinson, and John Henderson. All of your advice, encouragement, and everything that I have learned from you will abide in me. You all have modeled for me what it means to be a being-human being-living-doing in the Academy. Thank you for your example, for listening to me, and your thought partnership.
My friends have been a constant support and a grounding refuge of laughter in a space/time consumed by reading-thinking. To my best friends: Tanjulan Holloway, Norma Miranda, Fr. Daniel Green, Shon and Charlie Baker, Malana Joseph, and the Mayor’s Office crew—thank you. Rashanda Booker Topp, Maria Wallace, Julie Thibodaux, Melissa Gulden, Kathy Jones, Josh Dean, Benterah Morton, Aariel Charbonnet, Brandi Roberts, Amaris Guzman, and too many more to name—thank you. You all have kept me grounded and encouraged throughout this journey; I could not have done this without you.

“Be with those who help your being,” says Rumi. I want to acknowledge my colleagues in the Higher Education and Curriculum Theory programs, the professors of the LSU School of Education, my friends and colleagues at Loyola University New Orleans, and all those I have come in contact with over the past few years. Thank you for being and helping my being-becoming. I am immensely grateful for the grounding of my undergraduate education at Loyola University New Orleans. It was in this space/time that the lessons regarding humanity learned at the feet of my Grand, mother, and great-grandmother were reinforced and where I was provided the tools to use in service of my vision. More importantly, it was where I, in a very real way, learned the importance of a being-ness and a world imbued with love.

Finally, to those on the other side who have guided me and interceded to the Universe on my behalf, I thank you. Josephine Wells Robinson, C.C. Robinson, Shirley A. Robinson, Charley Robinson, Lee Ester Marshall, Geneva Wells Jones, Sue Brooks Washington, Hattie Bluitt, Fr. Paul Banet, SSJ, Fr. Jerry Fagin, SJ, and all of the ancestors—I thank you. Wherever I go, I bring you with me. My cup runneth over with gratitude.
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ABSTRACT

Institutions of higher education, the nation’s ideological filters, shape our world and our very being-in-the-world. Given the current anthro-cultural state of affairs around the globe, this investigation posits institutions of higher education’s complicity in the proliferation of societal dis-ease and its responsibility in assisting to recalibrate the global moral compass. Following these assertions this inquiry is focused on the other-than-ness of higher education, and re-imagines both humanity and higher education to be what it is not yet, but must become. More specifically, through Buddhism and *Ubuntu*, this investigation (re)thinks institutions of higher education as transformational educative environments of human becoming rather than factories of knowledge acquisition and workforce deployment. Exploring the shift in the aim of higher education beginning in the latter half of the 20th and intensifying in the 21st century, this study theorizes the necessitation of an ontological revolution—a (re)turn to the equanimous privileging of ontology and epistemology—which opens up to the possibility of being differently in the world. Utilizing two non-Western knowledges/philosophies, the South African philosophy of *Ubuntu* and Eastern Buddhism, this inquiry de-centers Western ontological and epistemological positionalities. Asserting the inseparability of ontology and epistemology, this inquiry embarks on a re-conceptualization of the Western subject. The newly re-conceptualized Being-West sets the inquiry on a futural line of flight, (re)imagining an absent present-future in higher education bolstered by a new conception of self, and an onto-educational philosophy of higher education, which engenders being-becoming more human and an understanding our shared humanity. Finally, this conceptual inquiry offers no solutions, but provokes, encourages new lines of flight, which generate rhizomatic nodes of becoming, pregnant with the possibility of catalyzing a revolutionary human becoming.
“Writing for me is thinking, and it’s also a way to position myself in the world, particularly when I don’t like what’s going on.”

All writing is situated within the world, that is, history, reality (everyday lived experiences), and futurity are ever present—each word, phrase, and sentence is an amalgamation of a space/time trinitarian onto-epistemology intricately woven into the very matter of the communicatory medium (Derrida, 1972/1981). This inquiry is no exception. At the time of writing, the world seems to be in crisis, or perhaps my awareness\(^1\) of the physical, spiritual, ontological, and epistemological violence has been heightened as a result of the thinking and re-thinking inherent in becoming-PhD (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987); at any rate, it seems that we are besieged from all sides by anti-intellectualism, totalitarian political conservatism, partisan politics, and a complete disrespect for the personhood of every individual. Over the past year, this country has experienced what can only be described as a year of killing, which among other things reveals—no, necessitates a different way of being. I argue, the murders of unarmed people of color at the hands of American law enforcement officers—i.e. Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Walter Scott, Freddie Gray—the recent mass shootings in South Carolina and closer to home in Lafayette, Louisiana; the kidnappings and religious massacres in Nigeria, the attacks of September 11, genocide, slavery, racism, war, colonialism, sexism, xenophobia, poverty, and homophobia are all symptoms of the same “dis-ease” (P. Hendry, personal communication, May, 7, 2015). This “dis-ease” (P. Hendry, personal

\(^1\) Awareness, according to Kuhn (1962/2012), “is prerequisite to all acceptable changes of theory” (p. 67).
communication, May, 7, 2015), this crisis at its core is found the symptoms of a deficit in understanding our shared humanity or a failure in knowing we “are not, in fact, the ‘other’” (Toni Morrison, 1989, p. 9). These events “have a way of imposing themselves” (Waldron, 2003, p. 145); as we watch the nightly news, read the daily paper, and browse various digital news sites we are bombarded with images, “with the multiple faces of human evil and suffering” and one could speculate that each of us, unconsciously, fears “an inescapably inhumane reality” (Waldron, 2004, p. 145). Indeed, to quote Shakespeare (1611/2004), it may appear that “Hell is empty, /and All the devils are here” (1.2.214-215); however, understanding the universe as pantareic\(^2\) compels us toward radical hope (Lear, 2008), which sets in motion a new “being becoming” (Ramose, 2002, p. 233)–an onto-epistemological metamorphosis\(^3\), which will require not incremental adjustments to thinking and doing, but a serious transmutation of Western subjectivity, a new definition of self. The convergence of Buddhism from the East and Ubuntu from Africa ushers in a new way of thinking the Western subject, metamorphosing the Western subject into the re-conceptualized Being-West.

William Waldron (2003) writing on the possibility of combining the Buddhist notion of subjectivity with evolutionary science to understand the mess we now find ourselves in, posits, the ills of humanity are caused by a false human understanding of self–of the ‘I’ that ‘we’

\(^2\) A Greek philosophy of the universe, which holds that all things are in flux, ever-flowing. It also serves as the basis for the African philosophic conception of the universe, which holds that “order cannot be established and fixed for all time” (Ramose, 2002, p. 234). This concept undergirds chaos and complexity theory (Capra, 1996). Ramose (2002) uses the concept as justification of the inseparability of ontology and epistemology, of being and becoming.

\(^3\) Metamorphosis, derived from the Greek metamorphoun, is defined as “a change of form or nature of a thing or person into a completely different one, by natural or supernatural means” (Google online dictionary, n.d.). Following, Louw’s (2011) assertion regarding the use of the term transformation in the colonizing practices of Christian missionaries, metamorphosis or a derivative will be utilized in place of transformation where possible. Louw (2011) states, “Because nothing could be assimilated into the church, the buzzword was total transformation (transformation as engulfing and extinction) of indigenous culture without the possibility of any form of accommodation” (p. 186).
become. In consonant with Buddhist and Ubuntu\textsuperscript{4} thought, he argues human suffering is the result of the “construction of and a deep-seated attachment to our sense of a permanent identity, what we mistakenly take to be a unitary, autonomous entity, independent of and isolated from the dynamically changing and contingent world around us” (Waldron, 2003, p. 146). This dominant view of the self, the “I” that we speak in the West runs counter to the Buddhist perspective, which holds we are all “ever-changing conglomerates of processes (skandha) formed in self-organizing patterns that are ever open, like all organic processes, to change, growth and decay based upon the natural functions of assimilation, interpenetration and dissolution” (Waldron, 2003, p. 147). Similarly, Ubuntu notions of the subjectivity knocks the independent and autonomous Cartesian subject off kilter by reinforcing “[t]he ‘I am’ is not a rigid subject, but a dynamic self-constitution dependent on this otherness creation of relation and distance” (Eze, 2010, p. 191). In short, through Buddhism and Ubuntu, we come to understand that we are beings deeply interconnected, (re)created through and in dynamic interaction with the universe (and all it encompasses), and always in the process of being-becoming. Again, I argue, the West’s misguided understanding of self, our interconnectedness and interdependence is cause to the litany of inhumane effects that plague our existence.

We have failed, I argue, in the collective memory of humanity to remember our interconnectedness, our shared being as human (Waghid, 2014). We—the global ‘we’—desperately need a dialogue on humanity; we need a dialogue on what it means to be a human being. If Nelson Mandela’s much quoted assertion, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you

\textsuperscript{4} Ubuntu will be spelled in two ways throughout the entirety of the document. First, Ubuntu refers to the philosophical understanding or practice, which encompasses Ubuntugogical theories and ideologies utilized by African people to make sense of their lived experience. Ubuntu encompasses the spiritual, secular, contemporary, and global understanding of the philosophical construct. On the other hand, ubuntu refers to an ethical or cultural pratice through which a person becomes a human. In short, Ubuntu refers to the philosophy and ubuntu, the ethic of practice through which a particular type of human being is produced (Praeg, 2014).
can use to change the world” (Nobel Peace Prize, 1993) rings with any truth, then it is within the hallowed halls of the academy—the training ground of future educators, politicians, lawyers, doctors, religious, law enforcement officers, policy makers, and leaders of the world—that provides an opportune setting to dialogue on, to be, and to model our shared humanity. Educators, who perhaps are more powerful than armies, who by their example and sole utilization of the power of voice and pen, can set about building a community—a culture—that values individuals over machines, ideas over manufactured products, and the needs of the community over our own narrow self-interest (Slattery, 2013). What, then, is the role of higher education institutions—professors, administrators, and student affairs professionals—in providing a rich educative environment conducive for human being-becoming? In this context, being-becoming can be defined as the rhizomatic formation of self, whereby the multiplicity of self in communion with other selves is always perpetually caught up in lines of flight through and emerging from ruptures and fissures created under the influence and pressures of socio-cultural, spiritual, and biological variables (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Tanaka, 2012).

Education, like life, is complex and chaotic; “…the slightest perturbation has a significant impact on future patterns” (Slattery, 2013, p. 271). At the same time, education or rather the act of and reflection on being educated allows us to recognize just how unique and special we really are, which causes us to both bemoan that we are different only to then eventually celebrate our differences and those of others. “It is the disequilibrium [of schooling] itself that provides opportunities for creative tension and self-reflection” (Slattery, 2013, p. 271); this “creative tension” between the ‘what is’ and ‘what can yet be’ is the naissance of true education. What, then, is the goal of education in a complex, chaotic and ever-evolving world rife with competing interests and global strife? Dewey (1902) asserts, “[n]ot knowledge or information, but self-
realization, is the goal. To possess all the world of knowledge and lose one’s own self is as awful a fate in education as in religion” (p. 9). In the postmodern viewpoint, education should bring humanity into the fullness of itself and in right relationship with one another through an interrogation of power and discourse. More importantly, education should assist in developing the tools through which we are thereby able to fully express our soul’s purpose (Dewey, 1902; Slattery, 2013). Moreover, the endeavor of education “encourages chaos, nonrationality, and zones of uncertainty because [of] the complex order existing here in the place where critical thinking, reflective intuition, and global problem solving will flourish” (Slattery, 2013, p. 272). Education given its permeability, flux, chaos, and complexity “can improve in the midst of turmoil” (Slattery, 2013, p. 273); much like the universe it is “engaged in endless motion and activity; in a continual cosmic dance of energy” (Capra, 1975 as citied in Slattery, 2013, p. 275). Education should both enhance and value the human experience, while seeking to globally improve the human condition.

**Background**

American institutions are experiencing an erosion of the public trust including institutions of higher education that have espoused egalitarian American principles and practice, in theory, the ideals of equity. Yet, even within the hallowed halls of the academy the juxtaposition of what is spoken and the "operational realities of racism, discrimination, and prejudice have trumped articulations of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" (Harvey, 2011, p. 3). This tension between the promises of equality and equity for all men and our national history of exclusion and segregation has been at the core of this great experiment called American democracy since its inception. The struggle between the ideals of freedom and epistemological confinement are felt no greater than in American institutions of higher education, heralded as "ethically-rooted
laboratory[ies] of inquiry where the initiates pursue truth and enlightenment, without regard to ideology, and with unadulterated objectivity" (Harvey, 2011, p. 5); however, in actuality are held captive by the ideological shackles of the “hidden curriculum” that dominates them at every turn (Pinar et al., 2008, p. 248).

Historically, institutions of higher education have been complicit in de facto and de jure segregation and other systems of exclusion, and given the nature of the historical role of higher education within American society, have served as evangelists of the white and male supremacy–institutionalized ‘othering’ (Harvey, 2011). Harvey (2011), in agreement with Dewey (1916) regarding the role of education and democratic citizenry, argues that universities function as ideological filters due to their ability to produce knowledge. In the recent history of the country, higher education has utilized this function and its prominent role in society to promulgate the assertion that people of color and women hold inferior societal status. Today, in both society and within every level of the educational system, we continue to experience the effects of higher education's past cowardice to traverse the terrain of moral injustice (Harvey, 2011); namely, a deficient understanding of our humanity as a mutual act of creation.

Over the course of the nation's history and the maturation of higher education, these institutions emerged as the gatekeepers and authenticators of information, and “enjoyed the consequences of the societal maxim which proclaims that knowledge is power” (Harvey, 2011, p. 5). As the procurers and purveyors of knowledge, members of the academy maintained positional authority that allowed them to intellectually justify and rationalize practices that might otherwise be deemed inappropriate or inhumane. “This capability to establish significant qualifying and sorting concepts for the larger society–determining the "natural order", creating hierarchy, and assigning place, for example–became comfortably lodged in the ivory tower”
(Harvey, 2011, p. 5). From their literal ivory tower, institutions composed solely of white academics utilized knowledge–biology and historical facts–to reinforce the doctrine of Western and white supremacy through obviously flawed scholarship. Colleges and universities, as a result of the “ivory tower” posture, took no responsibility and did not engage in social problems, especially not racial segregation but rather reinforced institutionalized racism (Harvey, 2011).

Experiencing a shift over the last 50 years, the academy has languidly progressed from an overwhelming "ivory tower" ideological stance to one that recognizes an obligation for higher education institutions to actively engage in resolving the intellectual, financial, and technological problems of our time. Harvey (2011) posits that the commitment to resolving social problems is lacking, namely with respect to the education of minorities and the un-education of the so-called majority, "there exists some moral responsibility [of the academy] to see that minorities [and all the marginalized of the society] take their rightful places in an educated society. [The academy is] failing on that social objective, failing badly" (Tierney, 1991, as cited in Harvey, 2001, p. 10). In the long view of history, we have progressed much; however, given the current socio-political cultural milieu (the unabashed institutional and societal assault of black and brown bodies) it is clear we are feeling the tremors and lasting effects of the deeply ingrained stereotypes accepted and promoted by the nation’s ideological filters. Therefore, Harvey (2011) argues:

The higher education community has an obligation to help continue the forward movement toward a less racially prejudiced society, and it should seize the opportunity to help the nation progress toward fuller implementation of some of its most cherished goals. The responsibility to help implement positive change is also rooted in two inherent dimensions that coexist within the academy: ethical responsibility and practical responsibility. (p. 10)

There is an overarching ideology that institutions of higher education are bastions of ethical and moral fortitude (Harvey, 2011). Higher education institutions must comprehend and accept their responsibility to create a positive future for society. Rather than just serving as an institution that
sorts, certifies, and concentrates power within certain classes of the population, higher education must foster a diverse, racially and culturally sensitive society (Harvey, 2011).

Recognizing our nation’s troubled past and present, the complicity of institutions of higher education, and the fact that the demographic composition is rapidly shifting—by 2050 no single racial group will be a majority of the country’s population—the importance of an ontological recalibration within colleges and universities takes on not only a moral importance, but the importance of nation building and futural global socio-anthropological paradigm shifting (Harvey, 2011; Kuhn, 1962/2012). Higher education institutions, stress Harvey (2011), have a moral obligation to recalibrate the moral compass of the academy and recognize the need for “increased diversity within the higher education community as a means of generating principled, constructive…positive changes in the larger society” (p. 9). Offering practical solutions for higher educational institutions to transform their hollow words into solid action, Harvey (2011) suggests:

First, [institutions of higher education] must identify, cultivate, enroll, support, and graduate substantially larger numbers of students from the underserved communities and prepare them to go forward to exercise leadership both within their respective groups and the larger society. Second, they must create meaningful academic and social opportunities for white students to engage and interact with their peers of color. The successful deracialization of American society is contingent on an informed acceptance by these students that in an evolving social order, their race offers them an equal, rather than favored, role for participation and advancement. Third, faculty members from underrepresented groups must be present in numbers that extend beyond mere tokenism so that a clear message is conveyed to all students that members of all races have the intellectual capability to hold such positions, and fourth, curricula must be broadened to debunk the myth that only people of European ancestry have been architects of and contributors to the development of American society, and acknowledge that there are antecedents to this civilization in various locations around the globe, not simply in Western Europe. (p.12)

In agreement with Harvey (2011), Eric Ashby contends higher education institutions “must be sufficiently stable to sustain the ideal which gave it birth and sufficiently responsive to remain
relevant to the society which it supports” (Altback, Gumport, & Berdahl, 2001, p. 4). While Harvey (2011) offers curricular and policy solutions to make right historical wrongs, Ruthanne Kurth-Schai (1992) argues “the primary barriers on the path to equity [are] philosophical rather than material or technical in nature” (p. 147 as cited in Pinar et al., 2008, p. 288). In that spirit, we turn to the philosophical questions of human subjectivity, of humanness, and the role of higher education institutions in bringing to conscious awareness our shared humanity (Kincheloe, 2004).

**Why higher education?** A university, proclaims Barnett (2011), “has *being* [emphasis in original]” (p. 13). He continues, “A university has possibilities; and they are infinite. It has multiple options. Each university could be other than it is” (Barnett, 2011, p. 13). It is the possibilities of this *other-than-ness* of higher education that begs to question what it might become. Following Harvey (2011) and Barnett’s (2011) assertions, if higher education serves an ideological filter that (re)produces dominant ideology through the “silenc[ing] and marginalization of ideas and voices,” (Pinar et al., 2008, p. 249) then it also contains the possibility and the ability to be differently—to resist oppressive ideology, to usher in a new order (Pinar et al., 2008). Further, Giroux asserts that curriculum and ideology, in particular, structures the unconscious of students (Pinar et al., 2008) and Apple (2013) holds that we are the result of ideology and even now we are under its spell. If the logic holds true, then it is on this battleground of American higher education, where education—the hidden curriculum—most deeply impacts “the unconscious…the site where social meanings and practices are negotiated *prior to and simultaneously with* any activity of the unconscious agent [emphasis my own]” (Pinar, et al., 2008, p. 282). It is not only within the hallowed halls of the academy, but the ruckus and clamoring of the student union, the exuberance of the athletic facilities, and the
torporific acumen of the boardroom where we can begin to resist the imprisonment of modernist, neo-liberal ideology that dominates the educational landscape (Apple, 2013). The impacts of such a resistance are best exemplified in Kuhnian discourse regarding paradigm shifts, in which Kuhn (1962/2012) asserts that paradigms shifts are revolutions catalyzed and maintained by agents of change. Redistributing Kuhn’s discourse from scientific revolutions to the context of an intended ontological revolution, we glean,

> when paradigms change, the world itself changes with them. Led by a new paradigm, scientists adopt new instruments and look in new places. Even more important, during revolutions scientists see new and different things when looking with familiar instruments in places they have looked before. [...] we may want to say that after a revolution scientists are responding to a different world. (Kuhn, 1962/2012, p. 111)

Similarly, in an ontological revolution, we may say that humans are being-becoming differently in the world. The resistance inherent in the perturbation of philosophical inquiry provides the energy necessary to initiate the paradigm shift within higher education discourse and practice. I argue, ideas precede action, so it is through the dialogical engagement of discourse (the idea) from which an ontological and epistemological metamorphosis will proceed (Kuhn, 1969/2012; Freire, 1970/2000). Through a collective and intentional praxis\(^5\) of “a pedagogy of possibility,” one which is ‘not yet but could be if we change in the simultaneous struggle to change both our circumstances and ourselves’” (Simon, 1987, p. 382 as cited in Pinar et al., 2008, p. 263), higher education institutions can begin to change the world as it itself is being changed.

**Statement of Problem**

Dewey (1938/1997) contends, “The history of educational theory is marked by opposition between the idea that education is development from within and that it is formation from

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\(^5\) Praxis generally implies putting theoretical knowledge in to practice through the cyclic process of experience, action, and reflection; however, praxis is utilized here in the Freirian conception of the term as awareness, reflection, and action towards transformation of oppressive structures (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Praxis_(process), 2015; Freire, 1970/2000).
without” (p. 17). Adding to Dewey’s (1938/1997) debate within educational theory, the debate on the nature and purpose of American higher education has raged on from the founding of Harvard in 1636 to the modern day founding of online colleges and universities (Thelin, 2011). However, the ideas espoused in this study regarding education as an endeavor of human edification, what some term liberal education, suffered a new attack in 1967 (Barrett, 2015). On February 28, 1967, then-Governor Ronald Reagan forever altered the discourse of American public higher education. Dan Berrett (2015) recalls:

California still boasted a system of public higher education that was the envy of the world. And on February 28, 1967, a month into his term, the Republican governor assured people that he wouldn’t do anything to harm it. "But," he added, "we do believe that there are certain intellectual luxuries that perhaps we could do without," for a little while at least.

"Governor," a reporter asked, "what is an intellectual luxury?"
Reagan described a four-credit course at the University of California at Davis on organizing demonstrations. "I figure that carrying a picket sign is sort of like, oh, a lot of things you pick up naturally," he said, "like learning how to swim by falling off the end of a dock."

Whole academic programs in California and across the country he found similarly suspect. Taxpayers, he said, shouldn’t be "subsidizing intellectual curiosity." (para. 3-5) Reagan’s ‘Intellectual curiosity’ comment was a direct blow to liberal education and the belief that education within American universities and colleges, in particular, served not a job training institutions, but environments for the purpose of intellectual development—the place for the better making of men and women, the advancement of democratic citizenship (Berrett, 2015).

Reagan’s presidency in the 1980’s bound with a national economic crisis would see the obtainment of education shift from intellectual pursuit to technical mastery in pursuit of a job (Berrett, 2015). Berrett (2015) writes similar to our current educational discourse, “Free market ideas permeated higher education” (para. 17). According to the Freshman Survey conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California at Los Angeles, roughly
72 percent of the freshmen in 1971 surveyed indicated they pursued a college degree to ‘develop
a meaningful philosophy of life’ as compared to 44.8 percent of the freshman surveyed in 2013
(Berrett, 2015). Conversely, in 2013, 82 percent of the freshman surveyed indicated their pursuit
of a college degree was catalyzed by ‘being very well off financially’ (Berrett, 2015). These
numbers alone indicate a societal shift regarding the pursuit of education, and the view of the
university as a marketplace or a “…supermarket where students are shoppers and professors are
merchants of learning” (AAC, 1985 as cited in Berrett, 2015, para. 41).

Moreover, this shift demonstrates the market-driven educational discourse that shapes
and restricts our thinking (Bacchi, 2000). Illustrating the active implementation of policy as
establishing assumptions until no one remembers thinking differently. This is how that happened
to liberal education” (para. 13).

**The Necessitation of an Ontological Turn**

Higher education is “now an epistemological regime characterized by fear” (Barnett,
2011, p. 25). Dall’Alba and Barnacle (2007), arguing ontological considerations are subordinate
to epistemological concerns, explore the necessitation of an ontological turn within higher
education. The assertion of the privileging of epistemology at the expense of ontology is very
much in keeping with the arguments present by Berrett (2015) regarding the state of higher
education post-Reagan. More specifically, Dall’Alba and Barnacle (2007) reinforce the critiques
of higher education proffered by Heidegger, “who questioned the way in which we ‘increasingly
instrumentalize, professionalize, vocationalize, corporatize, and ultimately technologize
education’ [emphasis in the original]” (Thomson, 2001, p. 244 as cited in Dall’Alba & Barnacle,
2007). This critique was expressed by Harvey (2011) in his assertion that institutions of higher
education are merely socio-economic sorting mechanism. The conception of university as solely a vehicle of knowledge and skill acquisition that can be decoupled from its practical context exemplifies the flawed epistemological notions, which undergirds the mission of many colleges and universities (Dall’Alba & Barnacle, 2007; Barnett, 2011). Universities with their primary focus on knowledge acquisition have come to treat learning as unproblematic; more explicitly, Dall’Alba and Barnacle (2007) argue, “A focus on knowledge acquisition leaves students to the difficult task of integrating such knowledge into practice” (p. 680). Given these practices within higher education, Dall’Alba and Barnacle (2007) arrive at the conclusion the issues encountered within higher education are ontological. Utilizing Heidegger’s position, they posit, “there is an essential link between education and ontology, in that our approach to the later will be reflected in how we treat the former: ‘When our understanding of what beings are changes historically, our understanding of what “education” is transforms as well’ [emphasis in original]” (Thomson, 2001, p. 248 as cited by Dall’Alba & Barnacle, 2007, p. 681).

Heidegger utilizes phenomenology or our everyday being in the world, to reveal “that our mode of being in the world is that of dwelling with and amongst things and others” (Dall’Alba & Barnacle, 2007, p. 681). These are also key insights of Ubuntu and Buddhism. In other words, knowing and being are interdependent. This understanding of the interdependency of knowing and being “requires that we are open to the possibilities of things” (Dall’Alba & Barnacle, 2007, p. 681); our situatedness (Heidegger, 1978/1993) indicates that we are ‘always already’ open to the possibilities of being (Dall’Alba & Barnacle, 2007, p. 681). Therefore, our knowing arises out of or as a result of being in the world, or situated within a certain historical, socio-cultural context. “In other words, what is–including how things become what they are–and what we know are mutually dependent: ontology and epistemology are inseparable” (Dall’Alba &
Our very ‘being-in-the-world’ is shaped by knowledge we pursue, uncover, and embody. [There is] a troubling sense in which it seems that we cannot help practicing what we know, since we are ‘always already’ implicitly shaped by our guiding metaphysical presuppositions. (Thomson, 2001, p. 250 as cited in Dall’Alba & Barnacle, 2007, p. 682)

Knowing is so intertwined with our being that we cannot escape from it; however, we can be transformed by it (Dall’Alba & Barnacle, 2007; Barnett, 2011, 1993). Knowing has the potential to alter our being and vice versa.

**The (re)Turn.** In agreement with St. Pierre (2014), what has been referred to as the ontological turn in the ‘post’ analyses is really just a *return to*, but a return to what? Possibly a return to what Barnett (2011) classifies as the “the metaphysical university” (p. 11). The metaphysical university, the ancient Greek (and concurrently, Persian, Indian, and Chinese) foundation upon which the idea of the university is built upon, deemed “a full encounter with knowledge was felt to open up new forms of human being” (Barnett, 2011, p. 11). More cogent to the arguments offered in the inquiry, the metaphysical university “came to be understood as an institution through which individuals could come to stand in a new and surer relationship with the world” (Barnett, 2011, p. 11) and one another. This is not the reality of most contemporary universities; again, the focus is primarily on knowledge acquisition for economic benefit (Barrett, 2015; Barnett, 2001, 1993; Dall’Alba & Barnacle, 2007). So, then how can a university be differently?

St. Pierre (2014) argues the conception of being inherited from Descartes, which we have now come to believe as natural is not so. Foucault (1984/1997) argues for a re-evaluation of the knowing subject. Striking a similar tone, Dall’Alba & Barnacle (2007) insist not on a rethinking of the ‘knowing subject’, but of knowledge as it relates to learning (Foucault, 1984/1997). In their rethinking, knowledge continues to hold a place of importance, but has shifted its focus
from transfer to creation, enactment, and embodiment (Dall’Alba & Barnacle, 2007). “In other words, the question for students would be not only what they know, but also who they are becoming…learning becomes understood as the development of embodied ways of knowing or…ways of being” (Dall’Alba & Barnacle, 2007, p. 683). Heidegger’s ontological perspective of being-in-the-world coupled with Dall’Alba and Barnacle’s (2007) aim of learning in the post-secondary environment, mandates an understanding that education is not merely pouring knowledge into the unprepared soul [or mind] as if it were some container held out empty and waiting. On the contrary real education lays hold of the soul itself and transforms it in its entirety by first of all leading us to the place of our essential being and accustoming us to it. (Heidegger, 1967/1998, p. 167 as cited in Dall’Alba & Barnacle, 2007, p. 684)

It must be noted, our essential being is not the static subject of Cartesian thought, but fluid and ever-changing. Education, in the Heideggerian sense, should lead us to the place of our fundamental being, which “refers to how we are rather than what we are [emphasis added]” (Dall’Alba & Barnacle, 2007, p. 685). In the same spirit, Palmer, Zajonc, and Scribner (2010) advocate for a “re-ensou[ing]” of education (p. 3), that is, the provision of an education that allows both students and teachers to bring all of themselves into the learning environment. It is no doubt that we are a multiplicity; simultaneously, teacher and learner, intellectual and emotional, object and subject. As a start, higher education institutions can “encourage, foster, and assist students, faculty and administration in finding their own authentic way to an undivided life where meaning and purpose are tightly interwoven with intellect and action, where compassion and care are infused with insight and knowledge” (Palmer, Zajonc, & Scribner, 2010, p. 56).

In agreement with Dall’Alba and Barnacle (2007), I call for institutions of higher education to provide an environment for “students to encounter the familiar in unfamiliar ways”
this creation of strangeness allows students to “engage with difference: the possibility that things could be otherwise” (p. 685). To clarify, problematizing taken-for-granted notions leads to new imaginings, new of understandings of how to be and live in the world. Barnett (2005) submits, “the only way, amid strangeness, to become fully human, to achieve agency and authenticity, is to have the capacity to go on producing strangeness by and for oneself” (p. 794).

Amid the myriad of theorizations regarding the necessitation of an ontological turn within higher education, Foucault (1984) insists on the consideration of a “critical ontology of ourselves” (p. 50), not as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them. (Foucault, 1984, p. 50)

I theorize an institutional being-becoming, an ontological turn within higher education is necessary; however, it must occur in tandem with a reconceptualization of the self. Even while I advocate for and theorize the necessity of an ontological turn within higher education, I understand that at an institutional level there must remain an operational gap between evangelization of ideals and their realization for the university “in-itself” (Barnett, 2011, p. 19) is too a Being-in-the-world. Recognizing this current reality, it could be that the new being-becoming—the ontological turn—must first occur within each human being, then as a community of beings, who are being-doing-thinking differently in the world, institutions of higher education left without a choice are obliged to make the turn—of and with the world.

The impetus of this study in part is an attempt through discourse to “as the Buddhists would say, ‘turn [our current] reality on its head” (Waldron, 2003, p. 146). In agreement with Hahn (1999) and Waldron (2003),
Our task then, our moral imperative, is as urgent today as it was when Albert Camus (1971, 11) expressed it nearly fifty years ago, just as many millions of murders ago: “One might think that a period which, within fifty years, uproots, enslaves, or kills seventy million human beings, should only, and forthwith, be condemned. But its guilt must be understood.” …Human beings make war and kill each other in a way that no other species does, that no other species could, that no other species would. Somehow, we must make sense of it all. (Waldron, 2003, p. 145)

Yes, if possible, we must make sense of it all, but more importantly, we must disrupt Western meta-narratives, turnover and aerate the soil of the educational landscape, so that the seeds of a new being-becoming and new onto-epistemological understandings are provided the best possible conditions to take root.

Given the magnitude of such a metamorphosis, where do we begin? Beginning at site of traditional knowledge production, this inquiry represents an attempt to turn our current reality on its head, that is, to reimage institutions of higher education mired in the muck of today’s inhumane reality into the fertile ground of interbeing (Hanh, 1999), interconnectedness (Eze, 2004, Waghid, 2014), and a place where cura personalis in community (care of the whole person) (Ganss, 1991) flourishes and reproduces in the world. Christopher Lasch argues Americans have become presentistic, so self-involved in surviving the present that, for us: “To live for the moment is the prevailing passion–to live for yourself, not for our predecessors or posterity” (Lasch, 1978, p. 5 as cited in Pinar, 2012, p. 4). How can higher education institutions, microcosms of society, begin to shift the presentistic, individualistic paradigm that plagues our understanding of humanity? In the “contested terrain” (Aguirre & Martinez, 2006, p. 55) of higher education, how do we begin to employ “a pedagogy of possibility” (Simon, 1987, p. 382 as cited in Pinar et al., 2008, p. 263)—breaking open the physical, intellectual, and heart space to fully experience and sift through the messiness of our humanness (Pinar, 1975)?

This inquiry refocuses our gaze toward understanding the depth of our humanity, looks
critically at the systems and power structures of this world, seeks to always disrupt hegemonic relationships through the practices of self-reflection and introspection, and actively works toward an education that does justice, which I argue is critical to our time (Kincheloe, 1993; Pinar et al., 2008). For too long we have been transfixed by the Western imperialist gaze and controlled by knowledge production that perpetuates our oppression (Foucault, 1977; Kaplan, 1997; Said, 1978; Apple, 2013). It is time for a new philosophical and pedagogical onto-epistemological perspective that advocates for justice, equity, and the liberation of the bodies and minds of the planet’s peoples through a focus first on human becoming. This inquiry employs pedagogies of hope, of the oppressed, of difference, of possibility, of interruption, and social transformation encompassed within the philosophical frameworks of Buddhism and *Ubuntu* to create a new understanding of humanness, humanity, and human potentiality (Pinar et al., 2008; Freire, 1970/2007; Biesta, 2014; Kincheloe, 2008). The journey toward a new understanding or paradigmic shift, I argue, necessitates an ontological turn within higher education—a new way being and a new way of proceeding.

**Philosophical Frameworks**

In agreement with Derrida (1991), “This question of the subject and the living ‘who’ is at the heart of the most pressing concerns of modern societies” (p.115). I theorize that a reconceptualization or de-centering of the Western subject must precede an ontological turn within institutions of higher education. *Ubuntu* and Buddhism, with their generous and generative onto-epistemologies, offer an opportune framework through which we can (re)think the Western subject anew. Additionally, these once denigrated indigenous philosophical frameworks provide the necessary tools to disrupt current higher education discourse and serve as a starting point for re-imagining the American higher education milieu. We now turn to a
general exploration of each philosophical notion.

*Ubuntu* or humanness is central to South African philosophy of life (Waghid, 2004; Ramose, 2002; Eze, 2008, 2010). According to Eze (2010), *Ubuntu* can best be explained as:

'A person is a person through other people' [which] strikes an affirmation of one’s humanity through recognition of an ‘other’ in his or her uniqueness and difference. It is a demand for a creative intersubjective formation in which the ‘other’ becomes a mirror (but only a mirror) for my subjectivity. This idealism suggests to us that humanity is not embedded in my person solely as an individual; my humanity is co-substantively bestowed upon the other and me. Humanity is a quality we owe to each other. We create each other and need to sustain this otherness creation. And if we belong to each other, we participate in our creations: we are because you are, and since you are, definitely I am. The ‘I am’ is not a rigid subject, but a dynamic self-constitution dependent on this otherness creation of relation and distance. (p. 190-191)

The concept and embodied practice of *Ubuntu* contains within its philosophical bailiwick the possibility to “…engender dignified and humane action, evoke the potentialities of people, and cultivate a community of shared face” (Waghid, 2004, p. 70). Correspondingly, Venter (2004) offers:

The philosophy of Botho/ubuntu could create an awareness of purpose and meaning in life. It is not merely a reference to humanity or personhood, but an indication of human conduct in relation to others…a positive ethical/moral way of going/being in relation with other. (Venter, 2004, p. 152)

With respect to schools and education, Waghid (2004) asserts that African educational philosophy; more specifically the ethic of *ubuntu* has the ability to harness a culture of humanity and responsibility in schools and can contribute to the nurturing of a politics of humanity.

Buddhism provides a means through which the self, or the non-self, can become consciously aware (Hahn, 1999). Hahn (1999) reminds “[o]nce the door of awareness has been opened, you cannot close it (p. 5). Focusing on bringing forth that which is already born in all of humanity, the Buddha illuminates the notion of “interbeing, nonself” (Hahn, 1999, p. 125), a notion of (inter)subjectivity that suggests the interconnectedness of all things. The teachings of
the Buddha, in transformative practice, allow us to “penetrate the soil of consciousness” (Hahn, 1999, p. 12), to awaken and re-awaken to the possibilities of peace, love, and tranquility. More specifically, the exploration of Buddhist philosophy opens the heart space for healing the ontological and epistemological violence imposed through the (un)hidden curriculum of traditional schooling (Pinar, 2008). Again, I argue, in a world that is increasingly technology and market-driven, it appears we have forgotten the essence of our humanity, the tie that binds all of us together; we have forgotten hope, peace, and the most powerful source of the human soul—love (Hahn, 1999).

Nurturing a politics of humanity and shared responsibility through dignity, respect, love, and harmony is central to an Ubuntu-Buddhist philosophy of education. The focus of education in an Ubuntu and Buddhistic view results in an onto-epistemological shift; more specifically, the focus is not on what one does, but one who one becomes – as an individual and as a community – in the world. These two notions are explored in more detail in Chapters 2 and 3, respectively.

**Research Questions**

Utilizing the philosophical frameworks of Ubuntu and Buddhism, this inquiry seeks to theorize or re-imagine what American higher education (and by extension society) might look like if education was engaged first as an endeavor of human being-becoming. More specifically, what might the world/planet become if institutions of higher education served as fertile wombs of (inter)subjectivity that bring all under its shadow into the fullness of their humanity and in deeper understanding of our shared being as human rather than schools of technical mastery driven by market demands. Breathing in deeply the hope of a new human and educational way of proceeding, the following research questions will guide this inquiry’s (re)thinking:

- Given the socio-political milieu, how is ontology shaped in higher education
In what ways might, non-Western ways of knowing—Ubuntu from South Africa and Buddhism from the East—inform our understanding of what it means to be a human being and notions of humanness?

**Significance of the Study**

This inquiry engages two non-Western philosophical notions, Ubuntu and Buddhism, to de-center Western knowledges and philosophies. More specifically, the researcher’s investigation yielded no similar studies, which combined these two seemingly disparate philosophical notions to both reconceptualize Western notions of subjectivity and utilize the virtues encapsulated in the philosophical perspectives to (re)think the role and purpose of American higher education as a space for/of human being-becoming over market-driven knowledge acquisition. Further, in keeping with the theme of privileging the non-Western and/or de-centering Western ways of knowing, the researcher rejects traditional qualitative epistemological methodologies and sets out on a (non)methodological path of provocation—interrogating and problematizing toward an absent present-future.

**Concluding Thoughts**

As a postmodernist, engaged in (re)imagining the metamorphosis of what is into what could be, and thinking about ontology differently, I am haunted by Spivak’s (1993) statement that “what I cannot imagine stands guard over everything that I must/can do, think, live” (p. 22, as cited in St. Pierre, 2014, p. 16). Toiling toward and indeed achieving this new understanding, I theorize, necessitates an ontological turn in higher education. Further, privileging once denigrated African (Ubuntu) and Eastern (Buddhist) ways of being-knowing, I employ their wisdom in the creation of “intensive, futural concepts…[that] open things up, [help] us think new
modes of being” (St. Pierre, 2014, p. 14). Thinking with Ubuntu and Buddhism, I attempt to “debunk the myth that only people of European ancestry have been [and can only be] architects of and contributors to the development of American society” (Harvey, 2011, p. 12). Bernstein (1991) encourages:

> It is precisely in and through an understanding of alien cultures that we can come to a more sensitive and critical understanding of our cultures and of those prejudices that may lie hidden from us. We will see that this theme, which Gadamer relates to dialogue, questioning, and conversation, stands at the very center of Gadamer’s philosophic hermeneutic. For him this is the type of practical wisdom that is characteristic of the ongoing interpretation of our own tradition. (p. 36)


At a time, when education functions as a business and every “governor ha[s] bad news” (Berrett, 2015, para. 1) and every headline reads: “The state budget [is] in crisis and everyone need[s] to tighten their belts” (Berrett, 2015, para. 1); this inquiry examines and (re)thinks for what purpose does education exist. Re-imagining higher education and troubling the waters of modern educational discourse, which promulgate the American college and university as a source of national economic viability via job training (Berrett, 2015), I (re)think higher education as institutions of being-becoming, who are more concerned with who their students become rather than what their students do. Moreover, I utilize the generative philosophies and philoso-praxises of Ubuntu and Buddhism, to reconceptualize the Western subject and (re)imagine the higher education milieu as an intersubjective onto-epistemological-machinic assemblage—a
rhizomatic womb of intersubjectivity, of becoming-more human (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987)⁶.

**Looking ahead.** With the focus of the inquiry clearly stated, Chapter 2 focuses on solely on the great gift of Africa, *Ubuntu* (Biko, 1978). Given the notions centrality to the investigation, Chapter 2 defines *ubuntu*, provides an explication of the philosophical concepts of *Ubuntu*, explores the evolution of *Ubuntu* within written discourses, and finally, discusses the potential of *Ubuntu* beyond the geo-cultural political boundaries of the African continent.

Chapter 3 exposes the wisdom of the Buddha as per the teachings of renowned Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh. Reinforcing my assertion that all writing is historically situated in the world, I briefly discussion of the history and origins of Buddhism, and the central tenets. More specifically, I focus on the central teachings of Four Noble Truths, Noble Eightfold Path, and the Four Immeasurable Minds. I posit the seeds contained within each of these flowers can be spread on the field of education to blossom students who become more human through the endeavor of education. Finally, I discuss Hanh’s notion of Engaged Buddhism as means to utilize the philosophy and spirituality of Buddhism to bring about meaningful social change. The uniqueness of Buddhism is two fold: (1) it can be practiced along side one’s primary religion, and (2) it encourages engagement with and in the world (Hanh, 1999). Buddhism, I suggest, transcends religious practice and is thus applicable in all arenas as a catalyst for metamorphosis.

In Chapter 4, I present an untraditional (non)methodological approach–(re)thinking as (non)method. Pushing qualitative methodological paradigmic boundaries and subverting restrictive traditional Western epistemological methodologies, I offer (re)thinking as

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⁶ The concepts of machinic assemblage, rhizome, and becomings are derived from Deleuze and Guattari’s [D&G] (1987), *A Thousand Plateaus*, in which D&G offer a collection of pragmatic concepts—a philosophical and ethical toolkit—that can be plugged into to other understandings to yield new understandings, new ontological insights. The university as a multiplicitous intersubjective machanic assemblage reorients the university from ‘bricks and mortar ‘(which it is as well) to an intensity of *Bodies without Organs* (BwO)—beings interconnected, interdependent, and intersubjective (involved in the creation of one another) (Malins, 2004; St. Pierre, 2014).
(non)method, which is simply an engagement in thinking. More specifically, I theorize, (re)thinking as (non)method as the cognitive process by which we take what we know, what we have experienced, and the intention of the endeavor we are pursuing—what I call assemblages of knowing—and process them through the abstract machine called the mind (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). (re)Thinking as (non)method, I argue, releases (as much as possible) the researcher from the cage of Cartesian thought and sets off on a creative cognitive journey of (re)imagining an absent present-future (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2015).

Ubuntu and Buddhism are pregnant with African and Eastern notions of subjectivity, respectfully. Chapter 5 will birth each of these onto-epistemological notions of subjectivity and (re)think the Western subject. This (re)thinking of Western subjectivity through Ubuntu and Buddhism has yielded an Ubun-hist subject-west or, what I term, the new Being-West.

Given the birth of an equal ontologically and epistemologically privileging Being-West, I argue, both the method and aims for which we educate must be thought anew. Chapter 6 explores the philosophies of education flowing from both Ubuntu and Buddhism, and ontologically (re)thinks higher education. To reiterate, the Being-West’s new way of being-doing, I theorize, mandates a shift in higher education, which then like a river flows into society writ large. As Hanh (1999) reminds, this is not an either/or proposition or a temporally sequential process—both transformations inter-are and must occur simultaneously, incrementally.

Finally, Chapter 7 provides not conclusions, but new lines of flight, new rhizomatic knots of discussion. Additionally, I provide examples of possible practical and policy implications that can begin to set higher education on a course toward an onto-epistemological metamorphosis—an equal focus on who their students become and not just what they do. Finally, it calls for the revolutionary practice of onto-courage to transform our current epistemological regime of fear.
“... [Western society] seems to be very concerned with perfecting their technological know-how while losing out on their spiritual dimension. We believe that in the long run the special contribution to the world by Africa will be in this field of human relationship. The great powers of the world may have done wonders in giving the world an industrial and military look, but the great gift still has to come from Africa—giving the world a more human face.”

- Steve Biko -

Echoing the words of South African liberation fighter Steve Biko (1978), Archbishop Desmond Tutu proclaims *Ubuntu* is ‘the gift that Africa will give the world’ and, along with others, has called for its wider application well beyond Africa” (Bolden, 2014, p. 2). *Ubuntu* is widely translated as ‘I am because you are’; ‘a person is a person through other people’ or humanness (Eze, 2010, 2012; Waghid, 2014; Bolden, 2014; Forster, 2010; Louw, 2011; Gade, 2011, 2012; LeGrange, 2011; Letseka, 2012; Shutte, 1995; Ncube, 2010; Ramose, 2002; Broodryk, 2006). Further, in defining *Ubuntu*, Tutu offers:

A person is a person through other persons. None of us comes into the world fully formed. We would not know how to think, or walk, or speak, or behave as human beings unless we have learned it from other human beings. We need other human beings in order to be human. (Tutu, 2004, p. 25)

*Ubuntu*, a word from the Nguni7 language of Southern Africa meaning humanness, is an African philosophy and culture of life that places a primacy on the promotion of the common good of a

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7 The Nguni languages are spoken in the southern part of Africa. Lutz Marten explains: ‘The Nguni group (S40) is divided into Zunda varieties and Tekela varieties. Among the Zunda varieties are Xhosa, Zulu, and Zimbabwean Ndebele. Xhosa includes a number of different varieties. Zulu, with around 10.7 million speakers, and Xhosa, with around 7.2 million speakers, are official languages of South Africa.

Zimbabwean Ndebele has official status in Zimbabwe. The Tekela varieties include Swati, South African Ndebele, and the smaller languages Phuthi and Lala (Lala-Bisa). Swati has around 1.6 million speakers and is an official language both in Swaziland and South Africa. The southern variety of South African Ndebele is an official language in South Africa, spoken by around 0.6 million speakers’ (Marten 2006: 596 as cited in Gade, 2012, p. 486).
society or community over that of the individual; however, not at the expense of the individual (Nafukho, 2006; Eze, 2008; Venter, 2004). Eze (2008) avers, “The individual and the community are not radically opposed in the sense of priority but engaged in a contemporaneous formation” (p. 386). The two are co-creators, interdependent, and mutually sustaining. The philosophy of Ubuntu and praxis of ubuntu-thinking, with its strength in African communalism and humanism, run counter to Western ways of being and knowing (Venter, 2004; Louw, 2011; Gade, 2011; Bolden, 2014).

Referring to Africa, it is important to note, that I do not assume homogeneity of inhabitants or cultures. Africa is a vast continent and referring to a term, philosophy, or worldview as African contains a multiplicity of cultures, cosmological perspectives, and worldviews. Letseka (2011), reminiscing on the great diversity of continent, reminds us:

> the central cultural fact of Africa’s life remains not the sameness of Africa’s cultures, but their enormous diversity. Appiah argues that long before Charlemagne was crowned, the ancestors of the San people of southern Africa were living as free of rulers, in nomadic family groups. But African kingship in Egypt was millennia old. When the American republic began, there were matrilineal kingdoms in Asante and patrilineal kingdoms in Yorubaland. There were female regiments in Dahomey, and high-born Hausa women living in enclosed Moslem households in Kano in what is now upper Nigeria; cats were food for the Mossi in West Africa and taboo for the Asante; and the range of clothing cross the continent included most of the forms of dress (and undress) that the human species has known. (Appiah, 1997, p. 47 as cited in Letseka, 2011, pp. 48-49)

The point here is not to boast of Africa’s history, although it is the cradle of civilization, but to illuminate the heterogeneity of the continent and to dispel any notion of the Africa so often presented in the writings of modern colonizers. Africa is a continent steeped in history, rich with culture, and progressive well before it was subjected to the brutality of Western colonizers.

In agreement with Biko (1979) and Tutu (2004), the potential of Ubuntu beyond the geo-cultural boundaries of the African continent are immense. The potential of an ubuntu saturated philosophy of life and education, I argue, in the West can revolutionize our being-doing and
engender social harmony through “good human relationships [, an…] increase [in] human value, trust and dignity” (Le Roux, 2000, p. 43). This inquiry encompasses an attempt to apply the philosophy of Ubuntu beyond the continent of Africa and the situatedness of the African culture toward a reconceptualization of Western subjectivity and the creation of an ubuntu-hued American philosophy of education. As such this review of relevant literature will encompass a compilation of attempts to define ubuntu, a brief exploration of African philosophy, an historical analysis of the evolution of Ubuntu within written discourses, and Ubuntu as an African onto-epistemological cosmo-cultural philosophical notion. Finally, I will discuss the potential of Ubuntu beyond the geographical and cultural boundaries of the African continent.

Ubuntu Defined

What is Ubuntu? Ubuntu is defined as “an old philosophy of life that has for many centuries sustained the African communities in South Africa in particular and Africa as a whole” (Mnyaka & Motlhabi, 2005, p. 215). This ancient philosophy or worldview is deeply anchored in African life (Ramose, 2002; Eze, 2010; Venter, 2004) and is defined as the “art of being a human being” (Behengu, 1996, p. 10 as cited in Broodryk, 2006, p. 2). Blakenberg (1999) defines Ubuntu as a “philosophy and an ideal circulating primarily through orality and tradition and associated with no particular authoritative text…” (p. 43) and is therefore open to interpretation. Taking a philosophical approach to the term ubuntu, Ramose (2002) argues ubuntu is actually two words and should be utilized as a hyphenated word, "ubu-ntu" (p. 230). It consists of the prefix ubu- and the stem -ntu. Similarly, Forster (2010) argues:

Linguistically, Mfenyana asserts that for one to fully understand the meaning of the word ‘ubuntu’ it is necessary to separate the prefix ‘ubu’ from the root ‘-ntu’ (1986:2). This is because the word ‘ubuntu’ qualifies the noun umuntu (meaning the human person). These words are common in many southern African languages, for example, ‘in isiXhosa it is Umuntu, in isiZulu it is umuntu’ (Mcunu 2004:30, original emphasis). In terms of the
word ‘ubuntu’, ubu refers to the abstract, whereas -ntu is a reference to the ancestor who spawned human society and gave human beings their way of life. (p. 8)

Forster concludes, therefore, “[i]t is a communal way of life which deems that society must be run for the sake of all, requiring cooperation as well as sharing and charity...Ubuntu consequently, is the quality of being human [emphasis added]” (Broodryk, 2002, p. 13 as cited in Forster, 2010, p. 8). *Ubuntu* is about being (Mnyaka, 2005).

Confounded by language and devoid of much explanation, many Africanist scholars define *Ubuntu* as the foundation of African humanism and translate its meaning through the use of African proverbs (Eze, 2010; Forster, 2010). The English language being what it is, the difficulty lies in translating what Ramose (2002) identifies as “the wellspring flowing with African ontology and epistemology” (p. 230). Additionally, Eze (2010) asserts definitions of *ubuntu* are “projected to us in a rather hegemonic format” (p. 93); he continues, it is “by way of an appeal to an unanimous past through which we may begin to understand the sociocultural imaginary of the ‘African’ people before the violence of colonialism...” (p. 93). Eze (2010) declares: “ubuntu is in fact, essentially what it means to be an African [emphasis in original]” (p. 93). Reinforcing both Ramose’s (2002) assertion and Eze’s (2010) declaration, Saule (1996) states:

Ubuntu is something that springs from within oneself or better still, within society [...] Ubuntu could be viewed as a sum total of human behaviors inculcated in the individual by society through established traditional institutions over a period of time. (pp. 83-85)

Adopting an undertone of religious essentialism, Mnyaka (2003) contends:

Ubuntu is not merely positive human qualities, but the very essence itself, which ‘lures’ and enables human beings to become abantu or humanized beings, living in daily self-expressive works of love and efforts to create harmonious relationships in the community and the world beyond. (p. 143)
In the same vein, Eze (2010) utilizing Broodyrk (2002) extends Mnyaka’s (2003) view to conceptualize Ubuntu as

[a] comprehensive ancient world view based on the values of intense humanness, caring, sharing, respect, compassion and associated values, ensuring a happy and qualitative human community life in a spirit of family. Ubuntu determines and influences everything a person thinks, says and does. (Broodryk, 2002, pp. 13-14 as cited in Eze, 2010, pp. 91-92)

Moving away from and in an attempt to overcome his essentialist definition (Eze, 2010), Saule (1996) admits:

It stands to reason therefore that a synthetic definition of ubuntu would always be inadequate. In their definitions scholars address those characteristics of the concept of Ubuntu that mostly appeal to them… (Saule, 1996, p. 85 as cited in Eze, 2010, p. 93)


Defining an idea like “ubuntu” is akin to trying to give a definition of “time.” Everybody seems to know what “time” is until they are asked to define it or detail its essential characteristics without which “time” could not be “time.” This is based on the notion that ubuntu is something abstract, [a] non-perceptible quality or attribute of human acts the presence or absence of which can only be intuited by the human mind. (Mnyaka, 2005, p. 217)

Ubuntu is comparative to Black Americans recognizing ‘soul’ in other Black Americans, it is deeply felt, marginally describable, and imperceptible to those in which it is not contained.

Ubuntu is at once a philosophy and an embodied knowing. With these assertions in mind, I will provide a landscape of the definitions of ubuntu circulating in the written discourses on the topic. The following section will provide a historical analysis of the term in written text from 1846 to present day.

**Common definitions.** Ubuntu is most commonly understood as a Zulu/Xhosa word meaning humanness, personhood, or morality (Broodryk, 2006; Forster, 2010; Waghid, 2014; Letseka, 2011). Given Ubuntu’s lack of a true definition, Mbiti’s (1971) phrase: “I am because
we are; and since we are, therefore I am” (Letseka, 2011, p. 48) is often utilized as the closest English translation of the Afro-cultural significance of the term. To reiterate, Archbishop Desmond Tutu describes *ubuntu* as:

> A person is a person through other persons. None of us comes into the world fully formed. We would not know how to think, or walk, or speak, or behave as human beings unless we learned it from other human beings. We need other human beings in order to be human. (Tutu, 2004, p. 25)

In resonance with Tutu (2004), Eze (2010) asserts, *Ubuntu* can best be explained as:

> ‘A person is a person through other people’ strikes an affirmation of one’s humanity through recognition of an ‘other’ in his or her uniqueness and difference. It is a demand for a creative intersubjective formation in which the ‘other’ becomes a mirror (but only a mirror) for my subjectivity. This idealism suggests to us that humanity is not embedded in my person solely as an individual; my humanity is co-substantively bestowed upon the other and me. Humanity is a quality we owe to each other. We create each other and need to sustain this otherness creation. And if we belong to each other, we participate in our creations: we are because you are, and since you are, definitely I am. The ‘I am’ is not a rigid subject, but a dynamic self-constitution dependent on this otherness creation of relation and distance. (Eze, 2010, p. 190-191)

As evidenced by Tutu (2004) and Eze (2010), *ubuntu* is “best conveyed by the Nguni expression ‘umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu’, which means ‘a person is a person through other people”” (Bolden, 2014, p. 1).

Again, as Broodyrk (2006) asserts it is difficult to define *ubuntu* or pinpoint one definition of *ubuntu* because it flows from the (South) African approach to life; however, for the purposes of this study Eze’s (2010) conception of *Ubuntu* will be utilized as the primary understanding of the term/philosophy/ethic.

**Ubuntu Across the Continent(s).** Finding its conceptual origins in the Bantu people of eastern Africa as *omundu/muntu, ubuntu* or a closely related iteration meaning humanity or humanness is shared across much of the African continent (Letseka, 2000, Mbiti, 1991; Nafukho, 2006). Roederer and Mollendorf (2004) trace the roots of *ubuntu* to small communities and pre-
colonial Africa, and argue its notion of communalism and human interdependence are the very foundation of every indigenous culture in Africa. For example, the information in Figure 1 below provides the word equivalents of *Ubuntu* throughout southern Africa.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language/Ethic Group</th>
<th>Equivalent Word/Conception</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zulu</td>
<td>Ubuntu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sesotho</td>
<td>Botho</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akan (Ghana)</td>
<td>Biakoye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoruba</td>
<td>Ajobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shangaan</td>
<td>Numunhu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Venda</td>
<td>Vhuthu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tsonga</td>
<td>Bunhu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xhosa (Transkei)</td>
<td>Umuntu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shona (Zimbabwe)</td>
<td>Nunhu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swahili (Kenya)</td>
<td>Utu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiswahili (Tanzania)</td>
<td>Ujamaa</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ugandan</td>
<td>Abantu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cape Afrikaans</td>
<td>Manslikgeit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


> This philosophy is encapsulated in all the philosophies of the world, though it might be articulated and actualized differently. Effectively, therefore, it would be ethnocentric and, indeed, silly to suggest that the [Ubuntu/]Botho ethics is uniquely African. The mere fact

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8 Source: Broodryk (2006, pp. 3-4)
that the tenets that underpin this philosophy are intensely expressed by Africans, do not make those exclusively African. (p. 4)

Maintaining Ubuntu as the root of African philosophy, Bolden (2014) concurs similar concepts exist in other societies. For example, “the Chinese philosophy of Jên (pronounced ren), the Filipino philosophy of Loob and the Russian concept of Obschina” (p. 1) are similar conceptions. The Confucian concept of Jên is a direct Eastern parallel to the southern African notion of Ubuntu (Bell & Metz, 2011). More specifically, similar to Ubuntu in southern Africa, Chan (1955) argues Jên is “one of the most important in Chinese thought” (p. 295). Jên is Ubuntu of the East and is translated as “benevolence, love, altruism, kindness, charity, compassion, magnanimity perfect virtue, goodness, true manhood, manhood at its best, human-heartedness, humanness, humanity, ‘hominity,’[and] man-to-manness” (Chan, 1955, p. 295). In a striking parallel to Ubuntu, Chinese Confucianist understands the concept to explain the manner in which we are made human in relationship with others (Bell & Metz, 2011; Chan, 1955). Given the humanistic nature of Ubuntu philosophy, there is no doubt that the essence of ubuntu is also illustrated in the writings of European philosophers Emmanuel Levinas and Paul Ricouer (Bolden, 2014). However, the primary concern of this study is the South African understanding of the philosophy.

**South African understanding of Ubuntu.** Motivated by the fact that South Africa is the only country to utilize Ubuntu as the foundation of its modern constitution, Gade (2012) conducted a study to understand the South African conception of Ubuntu. Analyzing a collection of written documents and oral testimonies of South African leaders and common citizens, Gade (2012) in true Western reductionist fashion, attempts to elucidate the essence of Ubuntu. Gade’s (2012) research yielded two common understandings of Ubuntu: first, a moral quality or attributes of personhood (ubuntu); and second, as a phenomenon through which humans are
interconnected—“...a philosophy, an ethic, African humanism, or a worldview” (p. 484). It is these two clusters of the South African understanding of *Ubuntu* that will be discussed in detail.

Gade (2012) elaborates on the understanding of *ubuntu* as a moral quality by utilizing the words of Mfunisewela John Bhengu, an author on *ubuntu* and former Inkatha Freedom Party member of parliament, who “describes *ubuntu* as a kind of ‘soul force’” (p. 489). To clarify, Bhengu continues:

Gandhi gave India the spiritual concept of ‘soul force’ (*satyagraha*), a capacity to sustain and transcend physical discomfort in a triumph of concentration and restraint. Why should we Africans not give South Africa that soul force (*ubuntu*). (Bhengu, 1996, p. 19 as cited in Gade, 2012, p. 489)

In a later interview with Gade (2012), Bhengu conceptualizes *ubuntu* as a crystallization of the divine; he states, “There is God in a human being. […] That is *ubuntu*” (interview on 17 December 2009 as cited in Gade, 2012, p. 489). Equally, Bangura (2005) articulates *ubuntu* as the spiritual foundation of African societies. The moral quality of *ubuntu* is often expressed as behavior or a practice. Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, a former member of the Human Rights Violations Committee of South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), provides a poignant example of the soul practice of *ubuntu*:

Its essence is about the capacity for empathy with another person. You see, that is the essence of *ubuntu*: that capacity which I think is something we ought to have as human beings, and which is present in all of us, that capacity to connect with another human being, to be touched, to be moved by another human being. That is *ubuntu*. If I walk down the street, and I see someone…I can see something in his face that says that this person is going through a difficult moment. I do not have time but I turn to him and say: ‘How are you today?’ That is *ubuntu* because I am connecting to how he seems to be feeling at the moment, and I am reaching out, and I am acknowledging that I see his pain and want to leave him with some kindness as I walk past him (interview on 27 August 2008). (Gade, 2012, pp. 489-490)

A person who is said to have *ubuntu* is highly praised. Tutu explains that a person with *ubuntu* is “generous, hospitable, friendly, caring and compassionate” (Tutu, 1999, p. 34 as cited in Gade,
Gobodo-Madikizela’s explanation requires one to be both present in the ordinariness of everyday life and attentive in the recognition of another’s humanness.

*Ubuntu* as a philosophy, worldview, African humanism, or as an ethic is best reinforced in illustrative quotes. For example, Makgoba (1999) describes *ubuntu* as “a social ethic, a unifying vision enshrined in the Zulu maxim ‘umuntu ngumuntu ngabye’ (‘one is a person through others’)” (p. 153 as cited in Gade, 2012, p. 492). Others describe *ubuntu* as an atmosphere from which African humanism emanates (Buthelezi, 2004), and Ngcoya (2009) expresses *ubuntu* as “worldview [which] advocates a profound sense of interdependence and emphasizes that our true human potential can only be realized in partnership with others” (p. 1 as cited in Gade, 2012, p. 492). As a philosophy, ethic, and worldview *ubuntu* provides a firm foundation upon which African humanism or the philosophy of *Ubuntu* is built and its tenets practiced.

Gade’s (2012) two definitional clusters ground the South African understanding of *ubuntu* as both a moral quality and philosophy or ethic. As both and deeply engrained in the culture of South Africans, *ubuntu* permeates one’s very being; however, how did a notion so complex come to be reduced to two complimentary clusters of thought? Now, turning to a historical analysis of *ubuntu* in written discourse, the dichotomous reduction is explained.

**The Evolution of Ubuntu: A Historical Analysis of Written Discourses**

*Ubuntu* is an ancient African philosophy that spans “…from the Nubian dessert to the Cape of Good Hope and from Senegal to Zanzibar” (De Tejada, 1979, p. 304 as cited in Ramose, 2002, p. 230). Given its historicity as both a “philosophy and an ideal circulating primarily through orality and tradition and associated with no particular authoritative text, *ubuntu* is open to interpretation, especially in view of its application to contemporary South African society”
(Blakenberg, 1999, p. 43 as cited in Venter, 2004, p. 149). Gade (2011) provides an historical analysis of *ubuntu* in written discourses; namely, in the social transformation movements of postcolonial Africa. Finding the first textual mention of the word in 1846, Gade (2011) traces the evolution of the meaning of *ubuntu* through the 2000s. *Ubuntu*, in written discourses, has been defined as a human quality, a philosophy, ethic, African humanism, and a worldview, and is associated with the proverb “*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (people are people through other people)” (Gade, 2011, p. 318). It is important to note that the authors of the written discourses were white colonizers and it was not until 1956 that African priest and philosopher Alexis Kagame published a text containing the word (Gade, 2012). Finally, Gade (2011) explores the use of *Ubuntu* in postcolonial Africa’s narratives of return, and within the transitory periods of migration toward Black rule in Zimbabwe and post-apartheid South Africa. As Ramose (2002) and Venter (2004) contend, *Ubuntu* is the basis of African philosophy and the very core of an African philosophy of life; therefore, a genealogical analysis of the notion is imperative in understanding the historical and socio-political situatedness of this important African foundational philosophical notion.

**Ubuntu: 1846-1980.** Gade (2011) contends that no evidence exists of the term ‘*ubuntu*’ appearing in writing before the second half of the 20th century; however, he has “discovered as many as 31 texts from before 1950, which contain the term ‘*ubuntu*’, the oldest of which is from 1846” (p. 306), which refers to the qualities of *ubuntu*, but never mentions the term specifically. In 1956, “Alexis Kagame, a Rwandese historian, philosopher, and Catholic priest from the Tutsi group, was the first African to publish a text containing the term ‘*ubuntu*’” (Gade, 2012, p. 488). Prior to 1956, *ubuntu* lay prey to interpretation of the Western colonizer and academic discourse,
which was dominated by an Eurocentric interpretation of an African socio-cultural embodied term. During this period, Gade (2011, p. 307) found *ubuntu* was described as:

- ‘*Human nature*’ (Appleyard 1850: 106; Perrin 1855: 120; Colenso 1855: 7; Colenso 1861: 354; Roberts 1880: 107; Grout 1893: 290; Roberts 1895: 133; McLaren 1955: 25; Bryant 1963: 232; Callaway 1969: 22).


Additionally, Gade’s (2011, pp. 307-308) research revealed that prior to 1980, *ubuntu* is described as:


- ‘*Goodness of nature*’ (Colenso 1861: 354).

- ‘*Good moral disposition*’ (Colenso 1861: 354).

- ‘*Virtue*’ (McLaren 1918: 332).

- ‘*The sense of common humanity*’ (Barnes 1935: 46).

- ‘*True humanity*’ (Callaway *et al.* 1945: 11).

- ‘*True good fellowship and sympathy in joy and in sorrow*’ (Callaway *et al.* 1945: 11).
• ‘Reverence for human nature’ (Callaway et al. 1945: 29).
• ‘Essential humanity’ (Shepherd & Paver 1947: 41).
• ‘The kindly simple feeling for persons as persons’ (Brookes 1953: 20).
• ‘Manliness’ (Van Sembeek 1955: 42; Callaway 1969: 22).
• ‘Liberality’ (Kagame 1956: 53).
• ‘A person’s own human nature’ (Read 1959: 149; Read 1968: 80).
• ‘Generosity’ (Kimenyi 1979: 75).
• ‘Human feeling’ (Jabavu 1960: 4).
• ‘Good disposition’ (Nyembezi 1963: 47).
• ‘Good moral nature’ (Nyembezi 1963: 47).
• ‘Personhood’ (Reader 1966: 175).
• ‘Politeness’ (Rodegem 1967: 129).
• ‘Real humanity’ (Sabra Study Group of Fort Hare 1971: 121).
• ‘Humanity (benevolence)’ (South African Department of Bantu Education 1972a: 129).
• ‘Personality’ (South African Department of Bantu Education 1972b: 153).
• ‘Human kindness’ (Jordan 1973: 228).
• ‘The characteristic of being truly human’ (Pauw 1975: 117).
• ‘Greatness of soul’ (Thompson & Butler 1975: 213).
Prior to 1980, as is evidenced from the list above, ubuntu in written discourse is identified as a positive attribute or quality that one possesses. Further, some authors have identified ubuntu as a quality only possessed by a specific group—African people (Gade, 2011; Gade, 2012). The author writes “ubuntu is described as an ‘excellent African quality’ (Davis et al. 1936: 142), a quality among ‘the admirable qualities of the Bantu’ (Smith 1950: 18), and ‘an essentially Native quality’ (Southern Rhodesian Department of Native Affairs 1950: 34)” (Gade, 2011, p. 308).

Going a step further, Gade (2011) argues that some Africans believe “ubuntu is a quality that blacks possess and whites lack” (Jabavu 1960: 4; Thompson & Butler 1975: 158 as cited in Gade, 2011, p. 308). Additionally, another author explains, “Initiation is a ladder to humanity (ubuntu) and respect” (Pauw 1973: 89 as cited in Gade, 2011, p. 308) of which whites have not partaken. Citing the atrocities of apartheid committed at the hands of whites, some Africans believed that whites did not possess ubuntu; therefore, were not abantu (human) (Gade, 2011, 2012). Given the later conception of ubuntu as humanness, Gade (2012) later explores the concept of personhood in relation to South Africans’ understanding of ubuntu and inquires: who counts as a person? This question is interrogated in detail in the (re)thinking of the Western subject in Chapter 5.

**Elevation to philosophy.** During this same period, in the 1970s, Ubuntu begins to emerge in the text as “African humanism” (Africa Institute of South Africa 1975: 177; Breytenbach 1975: 177; Ngubane 1979: 261 as cited in Gade, 2011, p. 308); while the term is not directly defined it is interpreted as a distinction to ubuntu as a quality. The elevation of ubuntu from a
quality to a philosophy or ethic is reinforced in the works of Ngubane (1963, 1979): *An African Explains Apartheid* and *In Conflicts of Minds*, respectively. Ngubane (1963) writes:

> Supreme virtue lay in being humane, in accepting the human being as a part of yourself, with a right to be denied nothing that you possessed. It was inhuman to drive the hungry stranger from your door, for your neighbour’s sorrow was yours. This code constituted a philosophy of life, and the great Sutu-nguni family (Bantu has political connotations that the Africans resent) called it, significantly, *ubuntu* or *botho* – pronounced *butu* – the practice of being humane. (p. 76)


> the occurrence of the same ideas through the whole spectrum of Blacks from the least educated, leaves no doubt that the main source was in African philosophy, in the concept of *ubuntu* which is associated with kindness, gentleness, humility, respect and love. (Mayer, 1980, p. 70 as cited in Gade, 2011, p. 309)

As evidenced by Gade’s (2011) historical analysis, it was during the 1846-1980 period that *Ubuntu* moved from cultural oral transmission to a quality one possesses, and finally to the elevation of a philosophical concept in the Western categorization–as written discourse.

**The search for African dignity: 1950-1960.** Chris Vervliet avers, “ubuntu is rooted in a search towards African dignity” (Vervliet, 2009, p. 20). Gade (2011), in agreement, contends the literary evidence of this search for African dignity appeared well before Zimbabwe and South Africa’s transition to Black rule. According to his research, the search for African dignity is reflected in the calls for Africanization, and the attempt “to formulate a foundation of politics
that consists of traditional African humanis[m] or socialis[m]” (Gade, 2011, p. 304) reflected in the political thinking of prominent postcolonial African leaders, such as: Kwame Nkrumah, Léopold Senghor, Julius Nyerere, Obafemi Awolowo, Kenneth Kaunda, and Ahmed Sékou Toure (Gade, 2011). During the years of decolonization, following the gaining of their independence in the second half of the 1950s through the 1960s, these leaders utilized narrative or stories to restore African dignity in their respective colonies (Gade, 2011). These stories “can be characterized as narratives of return, since they contain the idea that a return to something African (for instance traditional African socialism or humanism) is necessary in order for society to prosper [emphasis in original]” (Gade, 2011, p. 304). It is this utilization of the philosophy of Ubuntu within narratives of returns that situates the notion as catalyst for social transformation that I will explore further.

Narratives of return, rooted in the idea of social transformation, called for the identification of native values—i.e. those values not introduced or forced upon the indigenous population by the oppressive colonizers—that can serve as a guiding force in both life and politics in the future of the society (Gade, 2011). Utilizing the work of Julius Nyerere, who in 1962 was the “president of the newly independent Republic of Tanganyika” (now the United Republic of Tanzania) (Gade, 2011, p. 305), Gade (2011) provides a fitting example of narratives of return in praxis. Nyerere (1966), in his book Freedom and Unity, evangelized Africanization following independence through “a return to ujamaa, which he described as a

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1 Gade (2011, p. 304) reminds in a paper about social philosophy in postcolonial Africa, Kwasi Wiredu explains that: ‘The leaders in question [Kwame Nkrumah, Léopold Senghor, Julius Nyerere, Obafemi Awolowo, Kenneth Kaunda, and Ahmed Sékou Touré] had an equally strong sense of the importance of cultural self-identity. Colonialism had in varying degrees scored African culture. Now after independence they needed to reassert their own culture, and not just cosmetically. National reconstruction is a cultural enterprise of the highest kind. At independence the easy option was to stick by the systems in which the colonial powers left us. These were copies, imperfect copies, to be sure, of what were in place in the colonialist countries. These leaders did not go for that easy option. They understood that the colonial systems needed to be reviewed from an African standpoint’ (Wiredu 2008: 332).
The push for Africanization, later known as the Pan-African movement, served to counter what Nyerere (1966) contends are: Years of Arab slave raiding, and later years of European domination, [which] had caused our people to have grave doubt about their own abilities. This was no accident; any dominating group seeks to destroy the confidence of those they dominate because this helps them to maintain their position, and the oppressors in Tanganyika were no exception (p. 3).

The years following his election as president of Tanganyika (later the United Republic of Tanzania), Nyerere (1966) described the Africanization movement as revolution: “…a revolution with a purpose, and that purpose is the extension to all African citizens the requirements on human dignity” (p. 22). The revolution could fulfill its purpose only “if society returned to its traditional socialism” (Gade, 2011, p. 305), which he identified as *ujamaa*. Nyerere (1966) contended *ujamaa* differed greatly from the European socialism. He writes:

European socialism was born of the Agrarian Revolution and the Industrial Revolution[, which followed it. The former created the “landed” and the “landless” classes in society; the later produced the modern capitalist and the industrial proletariat. These two revolutions planted the seeds of conflict within society, and not only was European socialism born of that conflict, but its apostles sanctified the conflict itself into a philosophy. Civil war was no longer looked upon as something evil, or something unfortunate, but as something good and necessary. As prayer is to Christianity or to Islam, so civil war (which they called “class war”) is to the European version of socialism – a means inseparable from the end. (Nyerere 1966, p. 169)

On the other hand, Nyerere’s *ujamaa*, “the true African social[ism] does not consider one class of men as his brethren and another as his enemies…but rather regards all human beings as members of an extended family” (Gade, 2011, p. 305). The end result is societal harmony.

Nyerere’s conception of a return to *ujamaa* and thus a return to recognizing the interconnectedness of all human beings resonates deeply with the universal conception of *ubuntu*. Throwing off the shackles of colonization and Western domination, Nyerere (1966) further explains:
“Ujamaa”, then, or “familyhood”, describes our socialism [“ujamaa” is a Swahili word meaning “familyhood”]. It is opposed to capitalism, which seeks to build a happy society on the basis of the exploitation of man by man; and it is equally opposed to doctrinaire socialism which seeks to build its happy society on a philosophy of inevitable conflict between man and man. We, in Africa, have no more need of being “converted” to socialism than we have of being “taught” democracy. Both are rooted in our own past – in the traditional society which produced us. (Nyerere, 1966, p. 170)

Similarly, in the political arena, Ghanian President Kwame Nkrumah promulgated “the philosophy of conscientism, which he believed was congruent with the original humanist principle of Africa (Gade, 2011). Lastly, Senegalese President Léopold Senghor (1962) argued that socialism in Senegal should “be inspired by négritude, which he identified as the totality of traditional civilizing values of the Negro world” (Gade, 2011, p. 306).

Ubuntuism: A Political Philosophy. Gade (2011) maintains the first book written solely about Ubuntu is Hunhuism or Ubuntuism: A Zimbabwe Indigenous Political Philosophy (Samkange & Samkange, 1980). “‘Hunhu’ is a term from the Shona languages, which according to the Samkanges has the same meaning of the term ‘ubuntu’ from the Nguni languages” (Gade, 2011, p. 309). More explicitly, hunhu is defined as: “the attention one human being gives to another: the kindness, courtesy, consideration and friendliness in the relationship between people; a code of behaviour, an attitude to other people and to life, is embodied in hunhu or ubuntu” (Samkange & Samkange, 1980, p. 39). Linking Hunhuism or Ubuntuism to political philosophy, the Samkanges utilized it as an indigenous political philosophy during the Zimbabwean transition from minority to majority rule (Gade, 2011) and declared, “It is our business to distill this philosophy and set it out for the whole world to see” (Samkange & Samkange, 1980, p. 9).

Summing up the book, Gade (2011) points to the Samkanges (1980) political and policy implications of a new Zimbabwe government constructed through the lens of Hunhusim or
Ubuntuism. The implications, while theorized were never realized; there exist no evidence that Zimbabwe utilized Hunhusim or Ubuntuism as political philosophy. However, in 2009, Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe utilized the term *ubuntu* in a national celebratory article, thus continuing the discourse.

**Ubuntu and Mandela Uniting a Broken South Africa: 1980-2011.** February 11, 1990, was a historic day for South Africa, President Willem de Klerk, after months of secret meetings declared Nelson Mandela would be released from prison after decades of imprisonment. This announcement amid the growing concern of the international community to end South African apartheid ushered in “the ratification of the Interim Constitution on 18 November 1993 and to South Africa’s first democratic election on 27 April 1994” (Gade, 2011, p. 311). The interim constitution, was a transitional document that sought to provide

> a historic bridge between the past of a deeply divided society characterised by strife, conflict, untold suffering and injustice, and a future founded on the recognition of human rights, democracy and peaceful co-existence and development opportunities for all South Africans, irrespective of colour, race, class, belief or sex’ (*Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, Act 200 of 1993, Epilogue after Section 251).

Further, Gade (2011) posits:

The last quotation is from the Epilogue of the Interim Constitution, which defined the nature of the chosen ‘bridge’ away from apartheid by stating that in addressing the divisions and strife of the past, ‘there is a need for understanding but not for vengeance, a need for reparation but not for retaliation, a need for *ubuntu* but not for victimization’ (*Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, Act 200 of 1993: Epilogue after Section 251). (p. 311)

The appearance of *ubuntu* in the Interim Constitution is no mistake and permeates the whole of the Constitution (*S v Makwanyane and Another*, 1995: § 237 as cited in Gade, 2011). Utilizing post-apartheid court rulings as evidentiary data, Gade (2011) surmises, “Historically it [*Ubuntu*] was foundation to the spirit of reconciliation and bridge-building that enabled our deeply
traumatized society to overcome and transcend the divisions of the past” (Dikoko v Mokhatla, 2006: § 113 as cited in Gade, 2011, p. 312).

**Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu.** While the interim Constitution uses the term and *ubuntu* is permeated throughout, it fails to define *ubuntu*. Gade (2011) avers between 1993 and 1995 the term became associated with and/or defined by the proverb ‘*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*’ and in 1997 *Ubuntu* was being defined as “…a person becomes a person through other person” (Lötter 1997: 46 as cited in Gade, 2011, p. 313). The 2000s brought about similar iterations:

*Ubuntu* is the short-form of a widespread isiXhosa proverb in Southern Africa: *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, which means “A human being is a human being only through its relationships to other human beings” (Marx 2002: 52); ‘The last term, the African traditional notion of *ubuntu*, means roughly “a person is a person through other persons”’ (Holkeboer, 2004: 155); ‘*Ubuntu* is an African word that, literally translated, means “people are people through other people”’ (Ronaldson 2005: 153); ‘*Ubuntu* literally translated means “I am because we are; I can only be a person through others”’ (Van den Heuvel *et al.* 2006: 45 as cited in Gade, 2011, p. 313).

A key text in proselytizing this particular definition of *ubuntu* is August Shutte’s (1995), *Philosophy for Africa*. The foreword states:

South Africa is world-famous for apartheid – that unique racist philosophy and system constructed over the last fifty years. Because of apartheid (which means “separateness”) another feature of South African life has been hidden from the world for all that time. But now the apartheid era has ended and our recent treasure has been revealed to the world by our president, Nelson Mandela, by public figures like Bishop Tutu and by events like the recent elections, the inauguration of the president, and the World Cup of Rugby. It is called *ubuntu* (which means “humanity”). We feel it is something of great value we can offer to the rest of the world. This is what this book is about. (Shutte, 1995, p. v)

Connecting *Ubuntu* with the proverb, Shutte (1995) explains:

Central to my book is the conception of humanity embodied in the traditional African proverb *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (a person is a person through persons). This understanding of human nature has its counterpart in the moral sphere in the idea of *ubuntu*. In English this is equivalent to humanity, understood as a moral notion referring to a general quality of character, or attitude or behaviour or way of life. (Shutte, 1995, p. vi)
This genealogical analysis of *Ubuntu* from an orally transmitted cultural virtue to a written philosophical and political discourse provides a glimpse of the causal effects of space/time with respect to language. More directly, the social and political milieu greatly effects the meaning, usage, and linkages of a particular term over time. Gade (2011, 2012) conveys the evolution of meaning given the space/time in which the discourse was constructed. Further, it stands to reason that the current conception of *Ubuntu* as human interconnectedness or that a ‘person is a person through other people’ is a political mechanism arising in resistance to segregationist ideology of the apartheid regime (Gade, 2012; Praeg, 2014). It must also be noted that the English language is limiting in its ability to aptly translate non-Western words into comprehensible Western definitions. The translation of *Ubuntu*, upon which the “be-ing of an African in the universe is inseparably anchored” (Ramose, 2002, p. 230) is only comprehensible through an embodied knowing—no translation, no interpretation can truly grasp the fullness of its meaning.

In accord with Eze (2010), Shutte (1995) provides the working definition of *ubuntu* that I employ throughout the study to problematize and re-conceptualize Western subjectivity. The conception of *ubuntu* as philosophy or ethic will be further examined when utilized as the foundation for the re-conceptualization of a philosophy of education.

**The Philosophy of Ubuntu**

Defining the individual in the context of relationship to others, *Ubuntu* is both a philosophical and religious conception with the potential to engender harmony, respect, and compassion not only for other human beings but all sentient beings (Louw, 2011). Yes, *Ubuntu* is identified as African humanism (Gade, 2011); however, African humanism is distinctly different than the Western conception of humanism. Humanism in the African context is cosmological and encapsulates the “…traditional way of living in Africa, which was peaceful
and harmonious. Respect was shown not only to other human beings, but also to the communal environment, animals, nature and the supernatural” (Broodryk, 2006, p. 4). *Ubuntu* as a philosophy of African humanism does not necessarily center the human, but recognizes the human as one component in the larger order of the Cosmos. As Broodryk (2006) so aptly states, “philosophy is about the love of wisdom and to be wise, is to possess the skill to make mature statements, judgments about the use of human knowledge in the context of daily life” (Presbey, 1997, p. 3 as cited in Broodryk, 2006, p. 5). More generally, Venter (2004) asserts, “philosophy is a conceptual response to basic human problems and an analysis of human experience” (p. 152). Philosophy encourages and requires new ways of (re)thinking and being in response to issues and problems (Venter, 2004; Letseka, 2011; Louw, 2011). *Ubuntu*, according to Ramose (2002), is understood to be “the root of African philosophy” (p. 203); so much so, he exclaims, “the being of an African in the universe is inseparably anchored upon *ubuntu*” (p. 230). In agreement, Makuhudu (1993) affirms:

> Every facet of African life is shaped to embrace Ubuntu as a process and philosophy[.], which reflects the African heritage, traditions, culture, customs, beliefs, value system and the extended family structures. (Makuhudu, 1993, p. 40 as cited in Forster, 2010, p. 7)

*Ubuntu* is both the abstract and concrete manifestation of human interdependence and interconnectedness that defines the culture and lives of southern Africans.

**The inseparability of Ubu- and –ntu: Ubuntu as onto-epistemology.** Ramose (2002) maintains *Ubuntu* as an African onto-epistemology upon which an African’s be-ing is anchored. *Ubuntu* “is the indivisible one-ness and wholeness of ontology and epistemology” (Ramose, 2002, p. 230). The word *ubuntu* is composed of a prefix (*ubu-*) and a suffix (*-ntu*), which are inseparable (Ramose, 2002). “*Ubu-* evokes the idea of be-ing in general. It is enfolded be-ing before it manifests itself in the concrete form or mode of ex-istence of a particular entity”
(Ramose, 2002, p. 230). This enfolded be-ing, “Ubu- is always oriented towards unfoldment, that is, incessant continual concrete manifestation through particular forms and modes of being” (Ramose, 2002, p. 230). Ubu-, the ontological, is always oriented toward –ntu, the epistemological (Ramose, 2002; Eze, 2008). –Ntu, writes Ramose (2002), is the “nodal point at which be-ing assumes concrete form or a mode of being in the process of continual unfoldment” (p. 231). Asserting that ubuntu is a gerund10, “ubu- may be regarded as be-ing becoming and this evidently implies the idea of motion” (Ramose, 2002, p. 231)—perpetual motion, which cannot be halted unless motion itself ceases to exist. This motion is verbal always moving toward the noun, –ntu, the temporary place where one has become. The indivisibility of being-becoming toward the very temporary location where one has become situates ubuntu as a gerund, “a –ness and not an –ism” (Ramose, 2002, p. 231). This ‘-ism’, Ramose (2002) warns, falsely gives the impression of entities existing as fixed, independent, and separate. Returning to the inability of language to truly speak what we mean, the fragmentation of verb and noun constitutes false thinking, which finds it roots in “the subject-verb-object understanding of the structure of language – which posits a fundamental irreconcilable opposition in being becoming. On the basis of this imputed opposition be-ing becoming is fragmented into pieces of reality with an independent existence of their own” (Ramose, 2002, p. 231). Language, Western language, has falsely fragmented being in both the real and linguistic sense.

To fully grasp the inseparability of ubu– from –ntu, one must first understand the concept of umuntu, which is defined as “the emergence of homo–loquens11 who is simultaneously homo sapiens” (Ramose, 2002, p. 231). The prefix umu– is ontologically identical to ubu–; however

10 Gerund: A noun made from a verb by adding “-ing”; “a verbal noun in Latin that expresses generalized or uncompleted action” (Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary, n.d.).
11 Homo loquens or “talking man” refers to man as the only animal capable of language. (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Names_for_the_human_species, n.d.).
the former tends toward the more specific where the latter is general. More specifically, *umuntu* “is the specific entity which continues to conduct an inquiry into being, experience, knowledge, and truth” (Ramose, 2002, p. 231). *Umuntu* is an integral component of *ubuntu* as it gives voice to and “relevates…directs and focuses the entire epistemological domain towards the ontology of *ubu*–” (Ramose, 2002, p. 231). The onto-epistemological philosophy of *Ubuntu* maintains, “be-ing human is not enough. One is enjoined, yes, commanded as it were, to actually become a human being” (Ramose, 2002, p. 231).

Ubuntu as philosophy is one such attempt to (re)think and (re)imagine the very real socio-politico cultural issues of the world and propels us toward the creation of a new “awareness of purpose and meaning in life…a positive ethical/moral way of going/being in relation to others” (Venter, 2004, p. 152). Ubuntu is not only a way of being-in-the-world, but also a “recognition of be-ing becoming” (Ramose, 2002, p. 231). The following will discuss briefly the unique conception of African philosophy, the central tenets and corresponding values of a philosophy of *Ubuntu*, and the applicability of *Ubuntu* beyond the geo-socio-cultural boundaries of the continent of Africa.

**Ubuntu as counter-Western, counter-hegemonic philosophy.** Generally, two debates rage within the context of African philosophy and philosophizing: 1) the legitimacy of a philosophy that does not stand up to the rigor of the Eurocentric philosophical tradition; 2) and the privileging of indigenous knowledge/ways of knowing as a means to liberate the heart and minds of the African people from the imprisonment of Eurocentric, Western hegemonic thought—onto-cognitive imperialism (Eze, 2010; Waghid, 2014; Venter, 2004; Ramose, 2002; Deacon, 2002; Battiste, 2002). Deacon (2002) reflects, “African philosophy can be identified as constitutive of a post-colonial quest for a uniquely African identity, which has become lost amid
the brutality of the European rape of the African continent” (p. 97). To emphasize the necessity of a uniquely African philosophy, Van Hook writes:

> Questions concerning the existence of African philosophy are…perceived as reflecting Western colonial bias that there is no such thing as, and has never been (and some would even say, cannot be) an African philosophy, because Africans are not rational or not as rational as Westerners, or do not have the temperament needed to produce philosophy. (Van Hook, 1993, p. 30 as cited in Deacon, 2002, p. 97)

While LeGrange (2011) articulates a false dichotomization between the West and Africa, it is no doubt a reality, but not one that cannot be overcome. Oruka (1990, 2002) in an attempt to overcome this debased view and recognizing the necessity for discourse on African philosophy, has classified African philosophy into four strands: ethno-philosophy, philosophic sagacity, national-ideological philosophy, and professional philosophy (LeGrange, 2011; Waghid, 2014; Deacon, 2002). Using Oruka’s (2002) four strands as a heuristic map, I will discuss each of them briefly.

Ethno-philosophy is best exemplified in the work on Bantu ontology produced by Father Placide Temples, who is recognized as “...the first person to use the term ‘philosophy’ with regard to the thoughts of African people” (LeGrange, 2011, p. 69). Essentially, ethno-philosophy is a folk philosophy that “reproduces both the latent and explicit philosophical doctrines in the hope of providing future philosophers with an intellectual matrix to indigenous Africa” (LeGrange, 2011, p. 69). Ethno-philosophy, the strand in which Ubuntu finds its home, is not without critics. LeGrange (2011) contends ethno-philosophy because it is geared toward Western audiences only reifies “African thought as being pseudo-philosophy or pre-scientific” (p. 70). However, in contrast to the rational, logical, and rigorous investigation of Western philosophy, ethno- or folk philosophy recognizes “the customs, traditions, and religions of a specific people” (Oruka, 1990, p. 15). More importantly, Oruka (1991) writes:
African philosophy is an existential experience common and obvious to all members of the stock. Basic logical principles in the West such as the principle of contradictions and of excluded middle have no room in African thought. The basic principle is that of a poetic self-involvement that defies any Western logical formulation [emphasis added]. (Oruka, 1991, p. 21)

Ethno-philosophy, thus is a holistic philosophy of collective knowledge, customs, and traditions that seeks to accurately represent the lived experiences of African people.

Philosophic sagacity or sagacity philosophy, based on Oruka’s research of Kenyan sages, is a reflective system of thought founded on the wisdom and traditions of people. Oruka (1990) defines philosophic sagacity as the “thoughts of wise men and women in any given community and is a way of thinking and explaining the world that fluctuates between popular wisdom and didactic wisdom” (p. 28). Discussing Oruka’s (1990) philosophic sagacity, Broodryk (2006) confirms:

In Africa, life lessons and life coping advice are taught by so-called sages (wise people). The Kenyan philosopher H. Odera Oruka recorded the wisdom of various sages, which merits more study to researchers of wisdom. The sages, when asked to explain [what] their special roles were in society, and their general roles in life, they reported that their lives were devoted to the betterment of their communities, as well as their service to individuals in their communities. (p. 25)

In addition to the men and women entrusted with the transmission of wisdom from generation to generation, Gyekye (1987) reveals a wealth of “philosophical material…embedded in proverbs, myths and folktales, folksongs, rituals, beliefs, customs, and traditions of the people” (p. 13 as cited in Nafukho, 2006, p. 412). Sagacity philosophers are acknowledged as both sages and thinkers, although one does not need to be a ‘thinker’ in the Western sense to be a sage. Distinct from ethno-philosophy, sages are well versed in the wisdom and traditions of his or her people and are armed with the ability to critically evaluate, through both cognitive and embodied processes, notions categorically accepted by members of their respective communities. Raising critique, LeGrange (2011) argues like ethno-philosophy, philosophic sagacity “comes perilously
close to non-philosophy, because it is based on the views of everyday people” (Bodunrin, 1984 as cited in LeGrange, 2011, p. 70). While LeGrange (2011) raises protest over the classification of ethno-philosophy and sagacity philosophy as actual philosophical constructs due to their insistent focus on the everyday lives of people, I argue, it is the very focus that confirms their place as philosophic constructs. Philosophy is simply a conceptual response, a extraordinary (re)thinking of the ordinary problems human beings encounter in the lived experience of their daily lives.

The third strand or trend in African philosophy is nationalist-ideological philosophy. Discussed earlier, this philosophical trend developed and was produced through the work of the first post-colonial leaders; namely, Senghor, Nyerere, and Nkrumah (LeGrange, 2011; Gade, 2011). With an aim towards decolonizing their newly freed nations and the minds of their people, these leaders promoted Pan-Africanism and were deeply influenced by Marxism. More pointedly, the nationalist-ideological philosophical perspective is characterized by a thought system based on traditional African socialism and communalism (Gade, 2011; Waghid, 2014; LeGrange, 2011). It is a socio-political ethno-philosophy aimed at, as Bodunrin (1984) criticizes, “…glorify[ing] an African past in order to forecast an almost utopian non-colonial future” (p. 2); however, it lacked the rigor and logic to be classified a philosophy.

Finally, the fourth strand of African philosophy is professional philosophy. Professional philosophy is the analysis and interpretation of reality undertaken by trained philosophers (read: Western educated). Philosophy, asserts professional philosophers, is a universal discipline that maintains homogeneity of meaning across cultures (Waghid, 2014, LeGrange, 2011; Eze, 2010; Deacon, 2002). The argument, then, is that “African philosophy is philosophy done by African philosophers whether it be in the area of logic, metaphysics, ethics, or history of philosophy”
(LeGrange, 2011, p. 70). Conversely, Waghid (2014), in essence argues that an ethno-centric philosophy is just as reasonable as any other tradition of inquiry. An African philosophy of education is obtained not through methodological means but through the practice, the active engagement in “conscious rationality or reasonableness” (Waghid, 2014, p. 7), which is operationalized as one’s ability to clearly articulate and defend their arguments, and a willingness to listen with care to the other (Wiredu, 2004). Rationality, contends Hountondji (2002), is not something that is given to humankind in advance, but must be developed “in a spirit of solidarity and sharing…so that the germs of ignorance and poverty will be eliminated forever from planet earth” (Waghid, 2014, p. 7). Waghid (2014) asserts an African tradition of inquiry, like all traditions of inquiry, is nothing more than “a matter of how knowledge is constructed and enacted within an African tradition” (p. 4). Further, he defends African philosophy by cogently arguing “philosophic activity is not a thing or body of knowledge that is neutral and objective, but rather a mode of intellectual inquiry—reasonable, deliberative, and moral” (Waghid, 2014, p. 6). To this end, an African philosophy of education or a Buddhist philosophy of education is a valid means through which to analyze, interpret, and make sense of one’s reality.

Clearly, the professional philosophical strand is distinctly universalist in its strong identification with the traditional Western philosophical traditions. However, for particularists, like Waghid (2014) and Eze (2010), philosophy and culture are indistinguishably entangled. “[S]o much so that cultural values/expressions are perceived as commensurate with philosophy” (LeGrange, 2011, p. 71). In contrast to Western, Eurocentric philosophic models, the philosophy of Ubuntu serves as “an obvious and potent means to rescue people from their loss of identity; to let them regain their cultural and societal values, and to let them experience themselves as human
beings with dignity” (Sebedi, 1989, 1995 as cited in Venter, 2004, p. 152). Distinct even from Eastern philosophies, *Ubuntu* is classified as ethno- and sagacity philosophy, which as a distinctly African philosophy moves society collectively toward harmony and happiness in relationship with others (LeGrange, 2011; Eze, 2010; Waghid, 2014; Louw, 2011; Nafukho, 2005). *Ubuntu* is not merely a cultural value or moral quality, but a philosophy with the wherewithal to transcend the Western philosophical qualifications of rigor, systemization, and factory line uniformity.

**Central Tenets of Ubuntu.** The importance of *Ubuntu* in African society cannot be overstated. In fact, “Every facet of African life is shaped to embrace Ubuntu as a process and philosophy, which reflects the African heritage, traditions, culture, customs, beliefs, value system and the extended family structures” (Makhudu, 1993, p. 40 as cited in Forster, 2010, p. 7). Forming the core of most African traditional cultures, *Ubuntu* through and in relationship with others encourages recognition of our shared humanity through communal dialogue and the practice of respect, compassion, and harmony (Eze, 2010; Ncube, 2010; Venter, 2004; Waghid, 2014; Louw, 2011; Ramose, 2002).

Ubuntism, what Nafuhko (2006) defines as the philosophy of *Ubuntu*, contains three central tenets: spirituality or religiosity, consensus building or democracy, and dialogue (Bangura, 2005; Nafukho, 2006; Waghid, 2014; Louw, 2011). “Ubuntu was decidedly religious” (Nafukho, 2006); however, as Forster (2010) attests there is no narrow or single view of God in relation to the Universe; rather, “there is a predominant understanding that all that exists comes from a Supreme Being. Moreover, it is God who sustains and provides for the created order through elements of sunshine, rain fertility, good health and so on” (Kudadjie & Osei, 2004, p. 35 as cited in Forster, 2010, p. 7). On the other hand, spirituality serves as the unifying force
between the living and living-dead (Louw, 2011). In the spirit of communalism characteristic of *Ubuntu*, the living and the dead are responsible for the care of one another (Forster, 2010). The African worldview places a primacy on the “wholeness of being” (Setiloane, 1998, p. 75, as cited in Forster, 2010, p. 7) and harmony; wholeness begins with God and ends with all of creation. Acquiescing *Ubuntu* with Buddhism, Venter (2004) holds, “The African community…shares some features with Buddhist ideals of the human community as being a vast, ever-expanding net of spiritual, psychological, biological and emotional relations” (Higgs and Smith, 2000, p. 55 as cited in Venter, 2004, p. 151). Venter (2004) drawing further comparison with Buddhism and the African community states, “The African community, like the Buddhist community, shares the earth with the unborn, the living spirits of the dead, the earth, mountain and sky” (Higgs and Smith, 2000, p. 55 as cited in Venter, 2004, p. 151). Forster (2010) interprets this relationship as vertical and horizontal. The vertical element representing the wholeness and harmony of all reality, which encompasses the living dead (spirits), human beings, sentient beings, and all the earth. Within the African worldview, it is deeply felt that:

> The universe itself – comprising both seen and unseen reality (spirit beings, human beings, plants, animals, mountains, waters, stellar bodies, and all) is a whole, a community with symbolic influences and relationships. It is also commonly believed that, through the laws of nature and various spiritual forces, as well as human customs and institutions, God sustains and upholds the world. Thus, he maintains an orderly and harmonious world so that all can perform their own duties in it. (Kudadjie & Osei, 2004, p. 36)

Thus, in a southern African cosmology human beings are just one part of a much larger community of living beings. This is African humanism. The horizontal element, which according to Forster (2010) represents the enactment, the daily, lived praxis of compassion through *Ubuntu*. Louw (2011) defines praxis as more than practice, but as “the intention of actions as related to meaning and destiny. It refers to intentionality: the question regarding significance/telos and
truth/aletheia (p. 173). With the aim of maintaining the all-important equilibrium of the cosmos, *Ubuntu* is utilized as the noetic\(^{12}\) vehicle through which human beings participate in the dance of the universe and engage in actions that co-create our humanity and lead to dignity (Louw, 2011; Forster, 2010).

Again, with its aim being social harmony and cohesion, the second tenet of consensus building is of extreme importance in maintaining communal harmony. Nafukho (2006) referencing the work of Bangura (2005) asserts African democracy operates through discussion toward the pursuit of reconciliation and agreement. Born out of mutual respect, consensus building is an authentic recognition of the personhood of each individual, the communalist notions central to *Ubuntu*, and the necessity of maintaining harmony. Democracy or consensus building, according to Broodryk (2006), is synonymous with gathering underneath the shade of a tree and engaging in conversation until an agreement is reached. Consensus building and communal harmony are maintained utilizing the third of Nafukho’s (2006) central tenets of *Ubuntu*—dialogue. Dialogue or narrative, as we come to understand it in the West, serves as the primary tool for sense-making and wisdom transmission in traditional African society (Nafukho, 2006; Hendry, 2010). *Ubuntu*, as Bangura (2005) reinforces, “with its particularity, individuality and historicality, […] inspires us to expose ourselves to others, to encounter [the] differences of their humanness in order to inform and enrich our own” (p. 32). The gifts of dialogue and encounter reside in the genuine recognition of the humanness of the Other through which we come into the fullness of our own humanity.

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\(^{12}\) Noetics, associated with Husserl’s phenomenology, is a way in which we make sense of the world. According to Louw (2011), “noetics refers to the hermeneutical realm of significance of life and human actions as determined by patterns of thinking (paradigms) and the network of rational conceptualization. It is connected to the relevance and appropriateness of philosophies of life, belief systems and religious convictions that function as intentional driving forces (motivational impulses) in human decision making, existential discernments and a sense of purposefulness in life” (p. 174).
Characterizing *Ubuntu* as an interactive moral ethic, Letseka (2011) posits our humanity is shaped and re-shaped through interaction with and in relation to other interdependent beings. In fact, the spirit of *Ubuntu*—human dignity and respect—is made manifest in these daily interactions and establishes the moral norms and values of the African community. These moral or normative implications include: altruism, kindness, generosity, compassion, benevolence, courtesy, and respect and concern for others. In strong resonance with Buddhistic philosophy and reflecting Nafukho’s (2006) identified three central tenets, Broodryk (2006) offers an in-depth explanation of the beliefs encompassed in an *Ubuntu* ethic. These beliefs formulate the value system that produces the personality traits of a person with *ubuntu*. We will discuss each of the tenets below followed by a brief explanation of the values and personality traits.

“My neighbour and I have the same origins, same life experience and a common destiny” (Broodryk, 2006, p. 5). Sameness or “umoja (togetherness)” (Broodryk, 2006, p. 5) is strongly emphasized within an *Ubuntu* philosophy/ethic. The idea here is that we are in this life together—good, bad, or indifferent—and as a community we reach a common end.

“We are the obverse and reverse sides of one entity” (Broodryk, 2006, p. 6). Expressed through the expression unumtu ngubuntu ngabuntu (or a person is a person through other persons), an *Ubuntu* philosophy or ethic holds central the notion of brotherhood, interdependence. In African proverbial wisdom, it is illustrated through the Ghanaian expression “a tree cannot survive a storm on its own” (Oduru, 2006, p. 3 in Broodryk, 2006, p. 6) and in Zulu the word “simunye” (translated as unity or solidarity) (Broodryk, 2006, p. 6; Eze, 2008). The strength in an *Ubuntu* ethic lies in community, the collective—the fist as opposed to the fingers. Broodryk (2006) offers Mgibi’s (1995) African Collective Fingers Theory as an example, which
According to this theory the thumb, in order to work efficiently, will need the collective co-operation of the other fingers. In practice it means that one needs to open collective forums, which are inclusive in nature, and must, as much as possible, include everyone in a group. (Mgibi, 1995, p. 111 as cited in Broodryk, 2006, p. 7)

A spirit of brotherhood—esprit de fraternite—and a sense of belonging are necessary for cohesion and integral for communal success.

“We are unchanging equals” (Broodryk, 2006, p. 7). Broodryk (2006) asserts that all African people are equal, which may have been true in traditional Africa, but is no longer so following colonization. Apartheid, which literally means separateness, ushered in an era of erroneous Western thought. However, this belief is best or most clearly expressed in the principle of treating all people with dignity and respect. In line with this belief, the Ubuntu infused post-apartheid constitution of South Africa both protects and demands that all people, irrespective of race, gender, income, or cultural heritage be treated with dignity and respect (Gade, 2011; Broodryk, 2006). This belief reinforces the African cosmological view of the holonistic nature of the universe (Forster, 2010), that is “[m]ankind is an integrated whole consisting of different material environments, sexes, racial groups and cultures: all racial and cultural groups are appreciated as equals” (Broodryk, 2006, p. 8). Furthermore, asserts Broodryk (2006), “Equals do not oppress each other” (p. 16).

“We are mutually fulfilling complements” (Broodryk, 2006, p. 8). Again, the communalism that inculcates an Ubuntu ethic is lived out through the value of sharing. In an African worldview or an Ubuntu ethic, one has an obligation to share their gifts, abilities, talents, and resources with others for the betterment of the whole. Sharing, for the benefit of the community, eradicates deficit thinking. The community knows where one lacks another is strong.
“My neighbour’s sorrow is my sorrow” (Broodryk, 2006, p. 9). Sorrow is inevitable in this life. As human beings materialized in the physical world, there is an unwelcome knowing that loved ones will pass on, sickness will take hold, and disaster will strike; however, all these things are temporary—joy will come in the morning. An *Ubuntu* ethic prompts the practice of sympathy (Broodryk, 2006). Through compassionate listening, a sister can assist a sister in dealing with the pain of sorrow. Broodryk (2006) reminds, “sorrow shared is half sorrow” (p. 10).

“*My neighbour’s joy is my joy*” (Broodryk, 2006, p. 10). If shared sorrow is half sorrow, then shared joy is doubly joyful (Broodryk, 2006). This double joy is what Broodryk (2006) defines as happiness of which the pursuit is an inalienable right. He states:

First, happiness is a process, a pursuit, and a way of life. Happiness is a habit, and when practised constantly, is so powerful it can dominate all other attitudes of a person. Secondly, others will interfere with one’s happiness only if one allows them to. If one’s right to be happy is controlled from within, one remains in charge of one’s own happiness. (Broodryk, 2006, p. 10)

Persons practicing an *Ubuntu* ethic are joyful, happy people motivated by a mutual appreciation of personhood.

“*He [/She] and I are mutually fulfilled when we stand by each other in moments of need*” (Broodryk, 2006, p. 12). In keeping with brotherhood/sisterhood inherent within an *Ubuntu* ethic, empathy or the ability to put one’s self in the proverbial shoes of another is a key value. Broodryk (2006) observes that it is only by putting one’s self in the situation of another do we really come to expand our understanding of the other’s suffering.

“*His survival is a precondition of my survival*” (Broodryk, 2006, p. 14). The philosophy of *Ubuntu* is pregnant with “*motho ke motho ka botho* (the essence of caring for others)” (Ramose, 1999, p. 150). The deep recognition of man’s interdependence permeates all
ubuntu-thinking. In a communal culture, interdependence necessitates “an interpersonal bond of care and love” (Broodryk, 2006, p. 14). The expression of this care is realized through compassion—a genuine interest in the well-being and survival of others.

“No community has any right to prescribe destiny for other communities and never prescribe destiny for any person” (Broodryk, 2006, p. 15). Born out of the lived experience of Western colonial oppression and coercive Christian conversion, this belief reinforces the importance of dignity and respect for all people. More importantly, it dismantles the Western colonial insistence of dominant cultural assimilation (Louw, 2011).

“My neighbor is myself in a different guise” (Broodryk, 2006, p. 15). The consciousness of shared face radically alters the manner in which we interact as human beings (Waghid, 2014; Broodyrk, 2006). To comprehend that ‘I am you’ and ‘you are me’ mandates a level of tolerance with one another that seeks only to strengthen the ties of brother/sisterhood and galvanizes the community.

“To be inhumane is to be like an animal” (Broodryk, 2006, p. 18). Humanness is the essence and aim of Ubuntu philosophy. The inhumane treatment of any human being at the hand of another human being reduces the perpetrator to sub-human status. Like Biko (1978), Broodryk (2006) establishes the world can learn much from the African appreciation of the significance of humanness. Broodryk (2006) hypothesizes:

It is due to this affinity with humanness that apartheid South Africa never experienced a bloody revolution. This is the humanness, which saw a political convicted but civilized Nelson Mandela leaving prison after 27 years not being embittered, but propagating for understanding and reconciliation between the races of South Africa. (Broodryk, 2006, p. 18)

Disagreeing with Broodryk (2006), Tutu (2004) recalls the brutality, murder, and death that Black South Africans suffered at the hands of the colonizers. This is an example of the very
different perception of colonizer and colonized. At any rate, the principle is the ability to forgive for the sake of communal harmony, which is the soul of Ubuntu in praxis.

“All the one lives for is to be the best that one can be” (Broodryk, 2006, p. 19).

Reminiscent of the axiom “Whatever you are be a good one” attributed to Abraham Lincoln and popularized by Martin Luther King in the 1960s, this tenet encourages one to be satisfied and at peace with where and who one is in this life. Embracing the harmony of ubuntu-thinking, one realizes comparison is most assuredly the thief of joy and the culprit of sorrow. “It does not matter whether one is a shepherd, academic, businessman, labourer, or chief; one only has to do one’s best, as an equal to all other human beings” (Broodryk, 2006, p. 19).

“Wealth must be shared and your neighbors’ poverty is your poverty” (Broodryk, 2006, p. 22). Counter to Western capitalist discourse, Ubuntu philosophy supports the sharing of wealth or socialism. Broodryk (2006) reverberates Nyerere’s post-colonial discourse represented as the narratives of return, which promoted a return to the traditional African value of ujamaa or African socialism. Unlike Western capitalism, African socialism “is not founded on class struggle, but on the harmony of the extended family” (Gade, 2011, p. 306). The redistribution of wealth ascribed to the practice of socialism extends beyond material assets to the non-material—i.e. spiritual guidance, ethics, wisdom, and knowledge (Broodryk, 2006).

“Knowledge is the challenge of being human so as to discover the promise of being human” (Broodryk, 2006, p. 24). Finally, the attainment of wisdom is demonstrated through the embrace of Ubuntu and the art of being human. In the tradition of philosophic sagacity, a wise person is one who can “make mature statements [and] judgments about the use of human knowledge in the context of daily life” (Presbey, 1997, p. 3). It is through knowledge, theoretical
and experiential, that we come to know better, do better, and be better human beings with and for one another.

Human formation through the philosophy of *Ubuntu* is complex and no one outcome can be attributed to any *Ubuntu* ethic or value without taking a plethora of factors into account; however, Broodryk (2006) theorizes the skills and outcomes associated with the values demonstrated by a person with *ubuntu*. In an attempt to streamline his conjecture, Figure 2 exhibits *Ubuntu* personality values in relation to the life skills flowing from the values, which corresponds with applications and intended outcomes. For example, a person who possesses the value of equality or “*ukalingana*” supports equality in the world through the practice of acceptance and non-discrimination (Broodryk, 2006, pp. 26-27). To reiterate, this Figure 2 serves as an example of the values, possible skills and outcomes associated with a person pregnant with *ubuntu*; it is not meant to be prescriptive.

Whether defined as the moral quality of a person, an ethic, or a philosophy, *Ubuntu* is the life’s blood of African life. It is an intense lived understanding of the interdependence and interconnectedness of all living beings indispensable to the process of being-becoming more human, which compels us toward a code of ethics that reinforces communal harmony, compassion, empathy, tolerance, kindness, and love.

The notion of interconnectedness or inseparability is so pervasive that when speaking of the phenomenon of *Ubuntu*, Archbishop Desmond Tutu declares:

[T]he humanity of the perpetrator of apartheid’s atrocities was caught up in that of his victim: *Ubuntu* means that in a real sense even the supporters of apartheid were victims of the vicious system which they implemented and which they supported so enthusiastically. Our humanity was intertwined. The humanity of the perpetrator of apartheid’s atrocities was caught up and bound up in that of his victim whether he liked it or not. In the process of dehumanizing another, in inflicting untold harm and suffering, the perpetrator was inexorably being dehumanized as well. (Tutu, 1999, p. 35 as cited in Gade, 2012, p. 493)
Table 2: Values, life skills, and intended outcomes of a person with ubuntu

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Life Skills</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Togetherness <em>(umoya)</em></td>
<td>Facilitating togetherness</td>
<td>Improved teamwork, family atmosphere, moral support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brotherhood <em>(ubuzalwane)</em></td>
<td>Implementing brotherhood</td>
<td>Experienced unity, <em>simunye</em> (we are one), solidarity, commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equality <em>(ukulingana)</em></td>
<td>Support equality</td>
<td>Practised non-discrimination, acceptance by all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing <em>(isabelo)</em></td>
<td>Endorsing sharing</td>
<td>Created different responsibilities, happiness and sorrow-participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sympathy <em>(isisa)</em></td>
<td>Expressing sympathy</td>
<td>Showing sympathy: applied listening, problem analysis, consolation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy <em>(uzwela)</em></td>
<td>Practicing empathy</td>
<td>Established open-mindedness, understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassion <em>(umunyu)</em></td>
<td>Honoring compassion</td>
<td>Valued peace, cohesion, warmth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect <em>(ukuhlonipha)</em></td>
<td>Maintaining respect</td>
<td>Structured order, discipline, dignity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolerance <em>(yeka)</em></td>
<td>Allowing tolerance</td>
<td>Self-controlled calmness, coolness, forgiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanness <em>(ubuntu)</em></td>
<td>Saluting humanness</td>
<td>Lived softness, bliss-ness, helpfulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmony <em>(ubungane)</em></td>
<td>Propagating harmony</td>
<td>Resulted steadiness, non-chaos [peace], clarity of vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redistribution <em>(ukwabelwa)</em></td>
<td>Redistributing wealth (and knowledge)</td>
<td>Obtained sustainability, cooperation, capacity, empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obedience <em>(ukulalela)</em></td>
<td>Applying obedience</td>
<td>Justified relationship, convention, custom, values, norms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness <em>(singcolile)</em></td>
<td>Living happiness</td>
<td>Enjoyed spontaneity, long life, friendliness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisdom <em>(ubudoda)</em></td>
<td>Loving wisdom</td>
<td>Executed resolution, decision, evaluation, happiness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13 Source: Broodryk (2006, pp. 3-28)
The shared humanity, the enmeshing of being-doing deduced from Tutu’s statement establishes the inseparability of perpetrator and victim. Through *Ubuntu*, human beings are made aware that we belong to one another and are intimately involved in the creation of one another; this intersubjective realization is just one of the great transferable gifts of *Ubuntu* to the world writ large.

**The Great Gift**

The central premise of *Ubuntu* as philosophy is connection—a “connection where different beings are united as beings” (Venter, 2004, p. 153). Mandela (2005) adds, “The spirit of Ubuntu – that profound African sense that we are human only through the humanity of other human beings – is not a parochial phenomenon, but has added globally to our common search for a better world” (Mandela, 2005, p. 82 as cited in Louw, 2011, p. 183). The great gift of *Ubuntu* as a philosophy of life and education, if embraced, resides in its ability to transform social relations producing a society that is “more egalitarian, transparent, and democratic” (Ncube, 2010, p. 81). As a moral theory, in our deeply bruised world, *Ubuntu* “has the potential to foster a shared moral discourse which is characteristic of a cohesive society” (Morrow, 2007, p. 6 as cited in Letseka, 2001, p. 55). More specifically, “the struggle for ubuntu serves as a philosophy of the struggle for people trying to heal the brutality and desperateness of a deeply ruptured society [emphasis added]” (Swanson, 2005, p. 4 as cited in Letseka, 2011, p. 55). Given the litany of social horrors recited in Chapter 1, we are those people yearning to heal.

**Limitations.** While a gift to the world, *Ubuntu* also contains limitations, especially the limitation of untranslatability into a Western context. Southern African society saturated in philosophy of *Ubuntu*, as we know, is not without its own problems of corruption, death, violence, and exploitation. These are obviously antithetical to an ubuntu ethic. Praeg (2014)
draws our attention to a great limitation of *Ubuntu* in southern Africa—the use of benevolent coercion as an exercise of power in an ubuntu-centric political system and culture. Regarding this political coercion, Praeg (2014) writes: “At work here is a form of benevolent coercion, indoctrination, inculcation or perhaps simply cultural strategies of discipline, aimed at the production of certain modes of being and belonging we have come to associate with *Ubuntu*” (p. 65). Of course, the goodness contained within *Ubuntu* could be utilized in a manner contrary to its original intention; however, this is the risk we face with any philosophical conception that molds the *being* of beings-human. To this end, Bangura (2005) writes:

> Whatever is good, by very nature of its goodness, harbors a grain of evil. This is a guarantee against any exaggerated sense of moral superiority which goodness by itself may entail. The notion of perfection, therefore, is alien to African thought. Perfection in itself constitutes a temptation to danger, an invitation to arrogance and self-glorification. The principle of balance defines the relationship between good and evil. As life operates in a dialectics of struggle so also does good balance evil and vice versa.

As with life in community, we must engage with the pleasant and the unpleasant, taste the bitter with the sweet; so too with *Ubuntu*. We must recognize that every gift has its poison, but the poison does not negate the intention of the gift or goodness contained within. The poison for *Ubuntu* serves a humbling agent and is a reminder that we are still with the certain uncertainty of humanness.

Public policy created through the lens of *Ubuntu* contains the potential to transcend a politics based on narrow, socially constructed identities toward inclusive caring and respect (Letseka, 2011; Waghid, 2014; Eze, 2008). Nkondo (2007) suggests an “ubuntu-based political ideal founded on the idea that we live in a moral space mapped by strong values, that one’s social world provides a framework which defines the shape of a life worth living” (p. 95 as cited in Letseka, 2011, p. 56). Within the philosophical framework of *Ubuntu*, hermeneutic and/or narrative interrogation of shared human experience dominates political thinking, and politics
becomes a “process of acting with others, in social practice” (Nkondo, 2007, p. 96 as cited in Letseka, 2011, p. 56). An Ubuntist political process becomes concerned with building generative coalitions of consensus focused on progress for the whole rather than divisive cliques seeking gains for the few.

Within the realm of education, ubuntugogy, which transcends pedagogy, promotes dialogue and consensus building within the learning environment (Bangura, 2005; Nafukho, 2006). “For any meaningful learning to take place…the learners must interact and engage in dialogue. Consensus building, a key function of learning, requires that both teacher and student must show humanity toward each other” (Nafukho, 2006, p. 415). Consensus building and dialogue are also key components in the engagement of democratic citizenship (Letseka, 2011). The hope and indeed the promise of an Ubuntu-hued philosophy of education both in African and around the globe is its contribution “towards imagination, deliberation and responsibility—actions that can help towards enhancing justice in educative relations” (Waghid, 2014, p. 1).

Waghid (2014) asserts:

By provoking students to work cooperatively through sharing, engagement, and remaining open to the new and unexpected they contribute towards cultivating learning communities; and by learning to show outrage at injustices and human violations, students learn to attend to those on the margins (women, children and those who suffer from dictatorship and displacements on the African continent, and elsewhere). (Waghid, 2014, p. 2)

Imagine a world where education and learning were approached from an ubuntugogical perspective (Bangura, 2005). How different might this world, our human relationships, our planet be differently? These are precisely the questions this futural inquiry interrogates and (re)thinks to imagine a world not yet conceived in the physical. In spite of Western opposition, Ubuntu as philosophical notion, a moral theory, and an ethic provides a powerful tool for global transformation. Ubuntu, as Tutu (2004) reminds, reorients Western thinking: “Ubuntu does not

Privileging once denigrated indigenous ways of knowing, Biko’s (1978) prophetic declaration that “the great gift has to come from Africa–giving the world a more human face” (p. 46) is discovered hidden in plain sight. *Ubuntu*, the philosophy of love, human being-becoming, and interdependence is Africa’s great gift to the world for the benefit of all humanity (Nashon, Anderson, & Wright, 2007; Ramose, 2002; Tutu, 2004).
“Individual consciousness is made of collective consciousness, and the collective consciousness is made of individual consciousnesses. They cannot be separated. Looking deeply into our individual consciousness, we touch the collective consciousness. Our ideas of beauty, goodness, happiness, for example, are also the ideas of our society.”

- Thich Nhat Hanh -

Buddhism provides a unique vehicle for transformation; it allows for the practice of one’s own faith tradition alongside the teachings and practice of Buddha. Indeed, according to Hahn (1999), Buddhism insists in the preservation of one’s “Jewish, Christian, or Muslim roots. That is the best way to realize the Buddha’s spirit. If you are cut off from your roots, you cannot be happy” (p. 169). In this view, one can both attain Buddhist enlightenment and Christian salvation. Buddhism pertains to the present, the now—the metamorphosis of society through transformative onto-epistemological praxis. Nirvana can be attained in the here and now; it is not some destination to be reached as one passes from life to new life. Present transformation or metamorphosis is the benefit of Buddhist teaching and philosophy, and provides along with Ubuntu, a vehicle by which we can transform consciousness and catalyze an educational and societal metamorphosis. The central insight of Buddhism and the crux of this inquiry are found in the Buddha’s teaching on Interdependent Co-Arising (Emmanuel, 2013; Hanh, 1999).

Interdependent Co-Arising is best exemplified in the teaching of impermanence, which states, “all phenomena are conditioned, transitory, and devoid of any essence or “self” that remains unchanged over time. All phenomena arise within a complex network of mutually conditioning causes and effects” (Emmanuel, 2013, p. 6). Nothing is said to exist outside of an unconditioned reality. Buddhistic philosophy asserts we are all products, the very creation of our consciousness
(Ortwein, 2013). The teachings of the Buddha provide a way to liberation or a transformation of the mind consciousness through awakening and compassion (Hanh, 1999). The goal is to transform ignorance \textit{(avidya)} into understanding \textit{(vidya)} (Hanh, 1999). Therefore, “our practice is to identify ignorance when it is present” (Hanh, 1999, p. 236). Cultivating awareness through the \textit{sapta-bodhyanga} or the “Seven Factors of Awakening,” we are able to transcend suffering or wrong thinking. The Seven Factors of Awakening \textit{(sapta-bodhyanga)} are “mindfulness\textsuperscript{14}, investigation of phenomena, diligence, joy, ease, concentration, and letting go” (Hanh, 1999, p. 214). Hanh (1999) asserts, “Clarity, the absence of ignorance, gives rise to the desire to act with love and compassion. This is called the Great Aspiration \textit{(mahapranidhana)} or mind of awakening \textit{(bodhichitta)} in Mahayana\textsuperscript{15} Buddhism” (p. 238). Buddhism teaches us to utilize our consciousness as a tool of transformation and service (Hanh, 1999). Much like education, Buddhism is concerned with the conditioning of the mind and perception through the understanding and practice of Buddhistic virtues (Ortwein, 2013; Emmanuel, 2013). This view is best exemplified by Hanh (1999) at the end of his writings on “The Twelve Links on Interdependent Co-Arising”. Hanh (1999) writes:

\begin{quote}
There is co-arising conditioned by deluded mind and co-arising conditioned by true mind. The world, society, and the individual have been formed by a cycle of conditions based on deluded mind. Naturally, in a world based on deluded mind, there is suffering and affliction. But when conditions are based on true mind, they reflect the wondrous nature of reality. Everything depends on our mind. Imagine one thousand people whose minds are full of misperceptions, wrong views, envy, jealousy, and anger. If they come together, they will create a hell on Earth. The surroundings they live in, their daily lives, and their relationships will all be hellish, if two people full of misunderstanding live together, they create a hell realm for each other. How much greater the hell of one thousand people! To make hell into paradise, we only need to change the mind on which it is based. To change the minds of one thousand people, it may be necessary to bring in some element
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{14} The Sanskrit word for mindfulness is \textit{smriti}, which means “remember.” Mindfulness is remembering to come back to the present moment (Hanh, 1999, p. 64).

\textsuperscript{15} Mahayana or “great vehicle” refers to the northern school of Buddhism, which emphasizes the compassionate action of bodhisattva (enlightment-being; or one on the path to enlightenment who assists other beings in the attainment of enlightenment) (Hanh, 2007, p. 213).
from the outside, like a Dharma teacher or a group of people practicing the Dharma. Imagine one thousand people who do not have wrong perceptions, anger, or jealousy, but who have love, understanding, and happiness. If these people come together and form a community, it will be paradise. The mind of the people is the basis of paradise. With your deluded mind, you make hell for yourself. With your true mind, you make paradise. (Hanh, 1999, p. 249)

In this view, education takes on a wholly different significance. Conditioning the mind not solely for knowing, but also for being with one another in community—mindful living—becomes not a by-product of education but is an aim of the educative process. Buddhism provides a way to transform minds, to fling open the doors of awareness. Indeed, Hanh (1999) reminds, “Once the door of awareness has opened, you cannot close it” (p. 5).

In tandem with transforming mind consciousness, I argue, a reconceptualization of the Western subject too must occur if we are to ever “make paradise” (Hanh, 1999, p. 248). In concert with the wisdom of Ubuntu, the teaching of impermanence or non-self, which I posit is the Buddhist notion of subjectivity, provides cessation from suffering or wrong perception. The Buddhist and Ubuntu conceptions of personhood and subjectivity will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5. This review of relevant literature will provide a brief discussion of the history and origins of Buddhism, and the central tenets of Buddhist teachings utilizing the writings and teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh16 encompassed in The Heart of Buddha’s Teachings: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation (1999). Finally, I will discuss Hanh’s notion of Engaged Buddhism as means to utilize the philosophy and spirituality of Buddhism to initiate a meaningful social metamorphosis.

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16 Thich Nhat Hanh is a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, author, poet, and peace activist. He is the founder of the Engaged Buddhism movement. Hanh’s approach to Buddhism combines traditional Zen teachings with Mahayanna Buddhist traditions, methods from Theravada Buddhism to offer a modern approach to this ancient spiritual tradition. (See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Th%C3%ADch_Nh%C3%A1t_H%E1%BB%99nh)
**History and Origins**

Hanh (1999) explicitly states, “Buddha was not a god. He was a human being like you and me, and he suffered just as we do” (p. 3). Tracing its origins and teachings to the historic Buddha, Siddartha Guatama, 17 who is said to have lived in the fifth and sixth centuries B.C. (Hesse, 1951; Emmanuel, 2013; Hanh, 2007), the origins of Buddhism are revolutionary and democratic, and are akin to the nature of the Protestant Reformation in Christianity; Buddhism turned fifth century India on its head (Hanh, 1999; Safran 2013). Buddhism developed in current day northeast India in response to a growing merchant class, emerging cultural diversity, and the challenging of traditional axioms and religious beliefs. The society of the day was largely agrarian and was divided into four castes: priest, warriors, farmers, and servants; these castes were rigidly adhered to, believed to have their origins in the cosmos, and transferred hereditarily from generation to generation. There was no escape; these castes determined one’s position in life and ethical conduct (Safran, 2003). At the time, Buddhism liberated the people of India from the control of the Brahmins or priest and located the site of salvation or enlightenment at the locus of the individual; one could achieve enlightenment in the ordinariness of life without the assistance of the magic and rituals of the Brahmin or the priestly caste (Safran, 2003). But, who is this Buddha?

According to some legends, Siddhartha was the son of a king, while others insist that he was the son of a Brahmin; at any rate, Siddhartha lived a life of luxury. Following Hesse’s (1951) account, Siddhartha was loved by everyone he met; however, began experiencing “dreams and restlessness of the soul…arising from the smoke of the sacrifices, emanating from the verses of the Rig-Veda, trickling through from the teachings of the old Brahmins” (p. 3). Hesse (1951) translating the legend of Siddhartha, continues:

17 Also spelled Siddhattha Gotama (Emmanuel, 2013).
Siddhartha had begun to feel the seeds of discontent within him. He had begun to feel the love of his father and mother, and also the love of his friend Govinda, would not always make him happy, give him peace, satisfy and suffice him. He had begun to suspect that his worthy father and his other teachers, the wise Brahmins, had already passed on to him the bulk of their wisdom, that they had already poured the sum total of their knowledge into his waiting vessel; and the vessel was not full, his intellect was not satisfied, his soul was not at peace, his heart was not still. (Hesse, 1951, p. 3)

Therefore, Siddhartha, in the Hindu ascetic tradition of self-denial and meditation to achieve enlightenment, set out to fulfill his one goal:

[T]o become empty, to become empty of thirst, desire, dreams, pleasure and sorrow—to let the Self die. No longer to be Self, to experience the peace of an emptied heart, to experience pure thought—that was his goal. When all the Self was conquered and dead, when all passions and desires were silent, then the last must awaken, the innermost Being that is no longer Self—the great secret! (Hesse, 1951, p. 11)

However, enlightenment through asceticism was never reached.

Alternate accounts of the legend of Siddhartha, recall the son of a Hindu King shielded from the realities of sufferings within the walls of his father’s palace. Encountering suffering for the first time in his twenties, Siddhartha comes to realize that suffering is pervasive and is launched into despair (Buddhism, n.d.). One day Siddhartha, encounters a Hindu ascetic, who through self-denial and meditation is attempting to free himself from the cycle of reincarnation. This encounter led Siddhartha to believe that suffering and death could be avoided through asceticism and meditation. Determined to find the way, he left his family in search of an enlightenment that never came through ascetic practice (Buddhism, n.d.; Hesse, 1951; Emmanuel, 2013). However, sitting under the bodhi tree, Buddha’s devotion to finding a solution to the sufferings of birth, sickness, old age, and death were brought to fruition through teaching of the Four Noble Truths (Hanh, 1999). Hanh (1999) writes:

Siddhartha Guatama was twenty-nine years old when he left his family to search for a way to end his and other’ suffering. He studied meditation with many teachers, and after six years of practice, he sat under the bodhi tree and vowed not to stand up until he was enlightened. He sat all night, and as the morning star rose, he has a profound
breakthrough and became a Buddha, filled with understanding and love. The Buddha spent the next forty-nine days enjoying the peace of his realization. (p. 6)

Over the next forty-five years of the Buddha’s life, he spread his message of enlightenment and alleviation of suffering through the practice of meditation (Ortwein, 2013). The Buddha’s great revelation transformed Hinduism through the emphasis of ethics, rejection of the caste system, and declaration of the Hindu gods as useless in the quest for enlightenment (Buddhism, n. d.). The first teaching of Buddha, the Four Noble Truths, were and continue to be revolutionary in their ability to restore well-being and liberate one from suffering. It should be noted that Buddha did not commit his teachings to writing, so much of what we know and read today are interpretations of interpretations; however, the seeds of truth continue to proliferate. Today, roughly “386 million” people in the world continue on the path with between 1-2 million practicing Buddhist in the United States. We now turn to a discussion of the Buddha’s teachings via the writings and teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh (1999).

**Buddha’s Teachings**

Hahn (1999) provides an extensive interpretation of the Buddha’s teachings in his book, *The Heart of Buddha’s Teaching*; however, I will provide a summary of the major points of the work and teachings contained within The Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, and the Four Immeasurable Minds.

**The Four Noble Truths.** The first of Buddha’s teachings is found in the Four Noble Truths. After Buddha’s revelation and transformation under the bodhi tree, Buddha said, “Dear Friends, I have seen deeply that nothing can be itself alone, that everything has to inter-be with everything else. I have seen that all beings are endowed with the nature of awakening” (Hanh, 1999, p. 6). This is the first Dharma\(^\text{18}\) talk from which Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths—

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\(^{18}\) Dharma (Skt): the way of understanding and love taught by the Buddha (Hanh, 2007, p. 212)
“the existence of suffering, the making of suffering, the possibility of restoring well-being, and the Noble Eightfold Path that leads to well-being” (Hanh, 1999, p. 6)—and declared his total liberation from suffering. Following Buddha’s realization,

At that moment the Earth shook, and the voices of the gods, humans, and other living beings throughout the cosmos said that on planet Earth, an enlightened person had been born and had put into motion the wheel of the Dharma, the Way of Understanding and Love. (Hanh, 1999, p. 6)

This teaching is recorded as the *Dhamma Cakka Pavattana Sutra* or *Discourse on the Turning Wheel of the Dharma* (Hanh, 1999). This sutra is characterized by three points: the teaching of the Middle Way, which teaches moderation in all things; the Four Noble Truths; and “engagement in the world. The teachings of the Buddha were not to escape from life, but to help us relate to ourselves and the world as thoroughly as possibly” (Hanh, 1999, p. 8). The ultimate goal of this first Dharma talk, according to Hanh (1999), was the recognition and transformation of suffering into “mindfulness, compassion, peace, and liberation” (p. 8).

The First Noble Truth is *dukkha* or suffering (Hanh, 1999). The Second Noble Truth is *samudaya* or “the origin, roots, nature, creation, or arising of suffering” (Hanh, 1999, p. 9). More specifically, the Second Noble Truth supposes a causal linkage between *dukkha* and our interaction with the world and those within it (Ortwein, 2013). The Third Noble Truth is *nirodha* or “the cessation of creating suffering by refraining from doing the things that make us suffer” (Hanh, 1999, p. 11). Within this truth, the Buddha taught that healing, joy, and happiness are all possible (Hanh, 1999). The Fourth Noble Truth is *marga* or “the path that leads to refraining from doing the things that cause us to suffer” (Hanh, 1999, p. 11). This path, unfolds into the Noble Eightfold Path—*Right View, Right Thinking, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Diligence, Right Mindfulness*, and *Right Concentration* (Hanh, 1999). It is important to note, that “right” does not denote a moral judgment; however, Hanh (1999)
reminds, “through our own awareness, we discover what is beneficial (‘right’) and what is 
unbeneficial (‘wrong’)” (p. 11).

The twelve turnings of the wheel. Hahn (1999) argues, to understand the Four Noble 
Truths beyond intellect, one must practice the twelve turnings of the wheel, which include 
recognition, encouragement, and realization within each of the Four Noble Truths. To clarify, 
Hanh (1999) defines the first turning of the wheel—recognition—as an awareness that something 
is awry, but one is unable to say exactly what is wrong. It is an awareness that “our suffering is 
us, and we need to treat it with kindness and nonviolence” (Hanh, 1999, p. 29). “With all our 
courage and tenderness, we recognize, acknowledge, and identify it” (Hanh, 1999, p. 29).
Encouragement, the second turning of the wheel, looks deeply into the suffering to understand its 
cause (Hanh, 1999). In the third turning of the wheel, realization, the suffering has been 
understood and one is able to call it by name. Figure 3 contains the Twelve Turnings the Wheel. 
The key insights gained in this teaching are the “four kinds of nutrients that can lead to our 
happiness or our suffering — edible food, sense impressions, intention, and consciousness” 
(Hanh, 1999, p. 31).

Edible food, according to Hanh (1999), can cause mental and physical suffering. The 
second nutrient is sense impressions; our six senses—“eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and 
mind—are in constant contact (sparsha) with sense objects, and these contacts become food for 
our consciousness” (Hanh, 1999, p. 32). We see this today with our ingestion of the media, which 
conveys every horrible thing and, in turn, we begin to think that the world is a horrible place. In 
agreement, Hanh (1999) writes:

When you feel despair, fear, or depression, it may because you have ingested too many 
toxins through your sense impressions. Not only children need to be protected from 
violent and unwholesome films, TV programs books, magazines, and games. We, too, 
can be destroyed by these media. (Hanh, 1999, p. 33)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Four Noble Truths</th>
<th>Twelve Turnings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suffering</td>
<td>Recognition: This is suffering.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Encouragement: Suffering should be understood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Realization: Suffering is understood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arising of suffering</td>
<td>Recognition: There is an ignoble way that has lead to suffering.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Encouragement: That ignoble way should be understood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Realization: That ignoble way is understood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cessation of Suffering (well-being)</td>
<td>Recognition: Well-being is possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Encouragement: Well-being should be obtained.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Realization: Well-being is obtained.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How well-being arises</td>
<td>Recognition: There is a noble path that leads to well-being.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Encouragement: This noble path as to be lived.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Realization: This noble path is being lived.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mindfulness, offers Hanh (1999), is the practice of discernment and a means to protect oneself from ingesting toxins. In fact, Hanh (1999) declares, “to get out of the dangerous situation we are in, the practice of mindfulness has to be collective” (p. 34). The third nutrient, volition (intention or will), is defined as “the desire in us to obtain whatever it is that we want. Volition is the ground of all our actions” (Hanh, 1999, p. 34). Consciousness, the fourth nutrient, is eating all of the time and “what it consumes becomes the substance of our li[v]es” (Hanh, 1999, p. 36).

Consciousness is composed of the past actions of our own and society. In the footnote, he adds:

> In the year 255, Vietnamese Meditation Master Tang Hôi taught that our consciousness is like the ocean with the six rivers of our senses flowing into it. Our mind and our body come from consciousness. They are formed by ourselves and our environment. Our life

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19 Source: see (Hanh, 1999, pp. 29-47)
can be said to be a manifestation of our consciousness. Because of the food that our consciousness consumes, we are the person we are and our environment is what it is. In fact, the edible foods we take into our body and the foods of our sense-impressions and intention all end up in our consciousness. Our ignorance, hatred, and sadness all flow back to the sea of consciousness. We should know the kind of food we feed our consciousness every day. When *vijñāna* (consciousness) ripens, it brings forth a new form of life, *nama rupa* (mind/body). (Hanh, 1999, p. 36)

The importance of all four nutrients, but most especially consciousness, cannot be overstated. Through the practice of mindfulness and the “Four Immeasurable Minds of love, compassion, joy, and equanimity” (Hanh, 1999, p. 36), we can nourish our consciousness and set about on a new way of being.

**The Noble Eightfold Path: The Middle Way.** Finding that extreme asceticism failed to live up the promise of enlightenment and transcendence, and extreme hedonism failed to fulfill his desire for peace and lasting joy, the Buddha discovered the Middle Way. The Middle Way, the passage between asceticism and hedonism, “gives rise to vision, which gives rise to knowledge, to enlightenment…” (Laumakis, 2008, p. 47 as cited in Ortwein, 2013, p. 119). Ortwein (2013) suggests the metaphysical implications of the Middle Way are that human souls lack a fixed self. Epistemologically, the Middle Way necessitates a cautionary path between blind certainty and total disbelief (Ortwein, 2013). The Middle Way unfolds as the Noble Eightfold Path (Hanh, 1999; Buddhism, n. d.; Ortwein, 2013). Hahn (1999), recalling a question asked to the Buddha from one of the canonical works, writes:

> The Buddha replied, ‘Subhadda, it is not important whether they are fully enlightened. The question is whether you want to liberate yourself. If you do, practice the Noble Eightfold Path. Wherever the Noble Eightfold Path is practiced, joy, peace, and insight are there.’ (p. 49)

The Noble Eightfold Path–Right View, Right Thinking, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Diligence, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration–inter-are, that is, there exists no linear order rather “each limb contains all seven” (Hanh, 1999, p. 50). The Eightfold
Path is divisible into three main qualities: wisdom, moral action, and meditation (Buddhism, n. d.; Ortwein, 2013).

**Wisdom.** Wisdom, the first of the three qualities, indicates that one holds deeply the Four Noble Truths and understands their implications in life (Hanh, 1999; Ortwein, 2013). The wisdom quality of categorization contains Right View (*samyag drishti*) and Right Thinking (*samyak samkalpa*). Right View encompasses a deep comprehension of the Four Noble Truths—“our suffering, the making of our suffering, the fact that our suffering can be transformed, and the path of transformation” (Hanh, 1999, p. 51). To put it another way, Right View is the ability to discern which of the four nutrients (discussed earlier) have been ingested and what has been produced as a result of the ingestion (Hanh, 1999). Right View is best exemplified in the following parable:

Sharipura described Right View as the ability to distinguish wholesome roots (*kushala mula*) from unwholesome roots (*akushala mula*). In each of us, there are wholesome and unwholesome roots — or seeds — in the depths of our consciousness. If you are a loyal person, it is because the seed of loyalty is in you. If you live in an environment where your seed of loyalty is watered, you will be a loyal person. But if your seed of betrayal is watered, you may betray even those you love. You’ll feel guilty about it, but if the seed of betrayal in you becomes strong, you may do it. (Hanh, 1999, p. 51)

Reminiscent of the Parable of the Sower in Christian teachings, Right View has the ability to transform “so you sow, shall you reap” into watering and reaping only the wholesome seeds of our store conscious\(^{20}\) that you water through the practice of mindfulness (Hanh, 1999, 2007). The seeds of Buddhahood lie dormant in each of us. Hanh (1999) maintains that the cause of a great deal of our suffering is wrong perception. “The Buddha advised us not to be fooled by what we perceive. He told Subuti, ‘Where there is perception, there is deception’” (Hahn, 1999, p. 53). In

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\(^{20}\) Buddhist psychology asserts our consciousness is divided into eight parts, which include mind consciousness (*manovijñāna*) and store consciousness (*alayaviñāna*). Store consciousness, according to Buddhist psychologist, is described as a field in which every kind of seed can be planted—seed of suffering, sorrow, fear, and anger, and seeds of happiness and hope. (Hanh, 1999, p. 12)
addition to practicing mindfulness, we can liberate ourselves from deceptive perception by simply asking if we are perceiving a thing correctly.

Taking Right View a step further, Hahn (1999) asserts that our happiness and the happiness of those around us depend on Right View, our perception of happiness. Hanh (1999) writes:

We have an idea of happiness. We believe that only certain conditions will make us happy. But is often our very idea of happiness that prevents us from being happy. We have to look deeply into our perceptions in order to become free of them. Then, what has been a perception becomes an insight, a realization of the path. This is neither perception nor non-perceptions. It is a clear vision, seeing things as they are. (Hanh, 1999, p. 54)

Understanding the internal and the external life, connects us to reality and liberates us from the suffering of wrong perception. Right View, then, “is the insight we have into the reality of life, a living insight that fills us with understanding, peace, and love” (Hanh, 1999, p. 54). It is not an ideology. Right View cannot be described, but must be practiced and experienced in the miraculous ordinariness of our daily lives (Hanh, 1999). Hanh (1999) does suggests watering the seeds of Right View through “mindful living–mindful breathing, mindful walking, living each moment of our day in mindfulness” (p. 55). To reiterate, Right View must be practiced; Hanh (1999) declares, “We have to put our view into practice. In the process of learning, reflecting, and practicing, our view becomes increasingly wise, based on our real experience” (p. 56). Right View is the foundation for Right Thinking (Hanh, 1999).

Right Thinking, Hanh (1999) asserts, leads us to Right Action. “Thinking is speech in our mind” (Hanh, 1999, p. 59) and reflects reality, where wrong thinking causes our view to be skewed. De-centering Cartesian thought and affirming the connection of mind and body, Hanh (1999) writes:

When Descartes said, ‘I think, therefore I am,’ he meant that we can prove our existence by the fact that our thinking exists. He concluded that because we are thinking, we are
really there, existing. I would conclude the opposite: ‘I think, therefore I am not.’ As long as mind and body are not together, we get lost and we cannot really say that we are here.’ (Hanh, 1999, p. 59)

Right Thinking connects the functions of the mind to the actions of the body, through conscious breathing the two become one again.

According to Hanh (1999), Right Thinking has two parts: “initial thoughts (vitarka) and developing thought (vichara)” (p. 60). While much of our thinking is unnecessary, both parts of thought are necessary to develop Right Thinking. Again, Buddhism is focused on learning through action and reflection; therefore, Hanh (1999) lays out four practices that assist us in developing Right Thinking. First, remembering that wrong perception causes wrong thinking, we must ask ourselves, “Are you sure?” (Hanh, 1999, p. 60). Second, to ensure that we are present, in the moment, we must ask, “What am I doing?” (Hanh, 1999, p. 60). Hanh (1999) writes, “Sometimes I ask one of my students, ‘What are you doing?’ to help him release his thinking about the past or the future and return to the present moment. I ask the question to help him be — right here, right now” (p. 61). Mindfulness is a state of being. Third, keeping in mind that Right Thinking leads to Right Action and vice versa, we must say, “Hello, habit energy” (Hanh, 1999, pp. 61-62). “Our way of acting depends on our way of thinking, and our way of thinking depends on our habit energies” (Hanh, 1999, p. 62). Saying hello or embracing the habit energy renders it powerless. Fourth, Hanh (1999) reminds that Right Thinking gives way to Right Diligence. The “Bodhichitta” or “mind of love,” (Hahn, 1999, p. 62) is cultivated when we seek to understand ourselves for the aim of showering others with happiness. Each of these Right Thinking practices reinforce Right View and leads to one of the other gateways on the Noble Eightfold Path. Dwelling in the present, we are able to transform and liberate ourselves from suffering (Hanh, 1999).
**Moral Action.** Moving now into the second categorization, moral action, involves conduct in speech, behavior, and livelihood (Ortwein, 2013). This categorization contains Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood, and holds that we can reduce suffering or dukkha by resisting participation in the acts that cause suffering. To put it differently, Ortwein (2013) offers, “when we resist repaying an evil with another evil we stop the chain reaction that promulgates further suffering. This…category brings us closer to a Buddhist theory of virtue” (p. 120). Right Speech is “knowing the words that created happiness or suffering” (Hanh, 1999, p. 84). More explicitly, Right Speech is classically explained as: “(1) Speaking truthfully. […] (2) Not speaking with a forked tongue. […] (3) Not speaking cruelly. […] (4) Not exaggerating or embellishing” (Hanh, 1999, pp. 84-85). It is important to note that Right Speech finds its basis in Right Thinking. Speech is the verbal expression of our thinking, so it is important to guard your thoughts which controls your tongue. At the core of Right Speech, asserts Hanh (1999), is deep listening, which he describes as listening with compassion. According to Hanh (1999), “compassionate listening brings about healing. When someone listens to us this way, we feel some relief right away” (p. 86). In agreement with Hanh (1999) regarding our current state as a society, he states:

> You must also use loving speech. We have lost our capacity to say things calmly. We get irritated to easily. Every time we open our mouths, our speech becomes sour or bitter. We know it’s true. We have lost our capacity for speaking with kindness. (Hanh, 1999, p. 87)

In keeping with a central tenet of Ubuntu, the dialogical becomes ever more important in reducing suffering, increasing understanding, and producing a harmonious environment. Compassion—compassionate listening, speech, and writing—“is the only energy that can help us connect with another person. The person who has no compassion in him can never be happy” (Hanh, 1999, p. 91). Finally, Hanh (1999) declares “to practice social justice and non-
exploitation, we have to use Right Speech” (p. 93). In other words, Right Speech leads us to Right Action.

Right Action is very much so needed in our society in today. Right Action, encourages Hanh (1999) is “right action of the body. It is the practice of touching love and preventing harm, the practice of nonviolence toward ourselves and others” (p. 94). The opening chapter–Chapter 1–begins with a litany of violence, of wrong action toward other human beings. Can we imagine a different absent present-past and absent present-future where the seeds of the teaching of Right Action have been watered within the hearts and minds of our students (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2015)? As a reminder that Right Action is achieved through mindfulness, Hanh (1999) developed the Mindful Trainings as the practice of Right Action. The Mindful Trainings include: “reverence for life…generosity…sexual responsibility…[and] mindful, eating, drinking, and consuming” (pp. 94-96). Due to their centrality of the Right Action and the means through which we can course correct the current behavior exhibited in society, I will provide full excerpts on each from Hanh’s (1999) writings.

Reverence for life, Hanh’s first mindfulness training, points us toward the awareness that we are guilty of killing. This awareness can bring out a cessation of the killing that we are all complicit in committing. Hanh (1999) writes:

‘Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I am committed to cultivating compassion and learning ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants, and minerals. I am determined not to kill, not to let others kill, and not to support any act of killing in the world, in my thinking, and in my way of life.’ We may be killing every day by the way we eat, drink, and use the land, air, and water. We think that we don’t kill, but we do. (Hanh, 1999, p. 94)

We are complicit in the violence, in the killing of this world; however, we are able to stop it with mindful awareness.
In resonance with *Ubuntu*, Hanh’s (1999) second Mindfulness Training, generosity, encourages us to live simply and to share. More importantly, counter to Western culture “this training tells us not just to refrain from taking what is not ours or exploiting others. It also exhorts us to live in a way that brings about justice and well-being in society” (Hanh, 1999, p. 95). Regarding the Mindfulness Training on generosity, Hanh (1999) reflects:

‘Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation, social justice, stealing, and oppression, I am committed to cultivating loving kindness and learning ways to work for the well-being of people, animals, plants, and minerals. I will practice generosity by sharing my time, energy, and material resources with those who are in real need. I am determined not to steal and not to possess anything that should belong to others. I will respect the property of others, but I will prevent others from profiting from human suffering or the suffering of other species on Earth.’ (Hanh, 1999, p. 95)

Right Action concerns the promotion of social justice and liberation of the minds, bodies, and souls in a Sisyphean cycle of bondage.

Traversing ever deeper into the moral terrain of society, Hanh’s (1999) third Mindfulness Training is sexual responsibility. The encouragement of responsible sexual behavior through mindfulness, asserts Hanh (1999), assists in protecting the integrity of families and individuals. Hanh (1999) maintains, “practicing this training, we not only protect ourselves and those dear to us, but we protect the whole human species, including children” (p. 95).

Linked to the entirety of the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, the fifth Mindfulness Training “encourages mindful eating, drinking, and consuming” (Hanh, 1999, p. 96). The key idea is the necessity of a good diet to transform both the self and society (Hanh, 1999). To this point, Hanh writes:

‘Aware of the suffering caused by mindful consumption, I am committed to cultivating good health, both physical and mental, for myself, my family, and my society by practicing mindful eating, drinking, and consuming. I will ingest only items that preserve peace, well-being, and joy in my body, in my consciousness, and in the collective body and consciousness of my family and society. I am determined not to use alcohol or any other intoxicant or to ingest foods or other items that contain toxins, such
as certain TV programs, magazines, books, films, and conversations. I am aware that damage to my body or my consciousness with these poisons is to betray my ancestors, my parents, my society, and future generations. I will work to transform violence, fear, anger, and confusion in myself and in society by practicing a diet for myself and for society. I understand that a proper diet is crucial for self-transformation and for the transformation of society.’ (Hanh, 1999, p. 96)

Without mindful consumption, we cannot transform the situation that we find ourselves in society—our current reality. In fact, it may be the only way out, “the only way to stop the course of destruction for our body, our consciousness, and the collective body and consciousness of society” (Hanh, 1999, p. 97). The practice of mindfulness is one key to liberation.

The last of the moral action category on the Noble Eightfold Path is Right Livelihood, which Hanh (1999) defines as a means of earning a living that does not work against your ethical code or that does not transgress “your ideals of love and compassion” (p. 113). Cogent to the aim of this inquiry, “the way you support yourself can be an expression of your deepest self, or it can be a source of suffering for you and others” (Hanh, 1999, p. 113). As mentioned in Chapter 1, higher education moved from the pursuit of knowledge and the vocational discernment to education for the sole purpose of supplying market demand and economic prosperity (Berrett, 2015). Particularly relevant to this point, Hahn asserts we must:

[b]ring awareness to every moment, we try to have a vocation that is beneficial to humans, animals, plants, and the earth, or at least minimally harmful. We live in a society in which jobs are sometimes hard to find, but if it happens that our work involves harming life, we should try to find another job. Our vocation can nourish our understanding and compassion, or erode them. We should be awake to the consequences, far and near, of the way we earn our living. (Hanh, 1999, p. 113)

The impact that one person has on the world cannot be understated nor underestimated.

Discovering one’s vocation, living one’s purpose in alignment with one’s values is Right Livelihood. Hanh (1999) emphasizes, “Right Livelihood is not just a personal matter. It is our collective karma” (p. 155). Providing the following example, he elaborates:
Suppose I am a schoolteacher and I believe that nurturing love and understanding in children is a beautiful occupation. I would object if someone were to ask me to stop teaching and become, for example, a butcher. But when I meditate on the interrelatedness of things, I see that the butcher is not the only person responsible for killing animals. We may think the butcher’s livelihood is wrong and ours is right, but if we didn’t eat meat, he would not have to kill. Right Livelihood is a collective matter. The livelihood of each person affects everyone else. (Hanh, 1999, p. 115)

Not only does Hanh’s (1999) example highlight the necessity of Right Livelihood, but in a very real way reminds of us of our interconnectedness and interdependence as human beings. Indeed, our human and cosmological interconnectedness holds that the actions of one very much so impacts the whole. Even more directly, Hanh (1999) states, “If someone has a profession that causes living beings to suffer and oppresses others, it will infect their own consciousness, just as when we pollute the air that we ourselves have to breathe” (p. 117). Right Livelihood, Right Thinking, and Right Action encourage us to live, work, and be in a manner that releases the fragrance of love and compassion in society.

Meditation. The last of the three qualities or categorizations of the Noble Eightfold Path is meditation or the ability to control the mind and cultivate the will to resist the urges of the mind (Ortwein, 2013). Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration are the two teachings of the Noble Eightfold Path that comprise this categorization, and are perhaps the most important of all the tenets of the Path (Hanh, 1999). Hanh (1999) expresses mindfulness or “smriti…is remembering to come back to the present moment” (p. 64).

Right Mindfulness as the heart of the Buddha’s teaching from which all others radiate. “To cultivate mindfulness in ourselves is to cultivate the Buddha within, to cultivate the Holy Spirit” (Hanh, 1999, p. 64). Incorporating Buddhist psychology, Hanh avows, 

(abhidharma, “super Dharma”), the trait “attention” (manaskara) is “universal,” which means we are always giving our attention to something. Our attention may be “appropriate” (yoniso manaskara), as when we dwell fully in the present moment, or inappropriate (ayoniso manaskara), as when we are attentive to something that takes us

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Mindfulness in and of itself is a transformative way of being-in-the-world and with one another. Sustaining mindfulness in a world wrought with distraction is the great difficulty of the practice. Hanh (1999) offers the pedagogical tool of the seven Miracles of Mindfulness.

**The miracles of mindfulness.** The Miracles of Mindfulness offer suggestions for the practice of mindfulness in our everyday lives. The first Miracle of Mindfulness is “to be present and able to touch deeply the blue sky, the flower, and the smile of our child” (Hanh, 1999, p. 65)—to be in the now. The second Miracle of Mindfulness is to extend the awareness from ourselves to those around us (Hanh, 1999). This is an opportunity for you and your beloved to see, to deeply see one another. The third Miracle of Mindfulness “is to nourish the object of your attention” (Hanh, 1999, p. 65). Hanh (1999) asserts that love is most deeply felt and shown in the practice of appropriate attention. The fourth Miracle of Mindfulness is the relief of another’s suffering through deep listening and mindful presence (Hanh, 1999). For example, “when someone is about to die, if you sit with him stably and solidly, that alone may be enough to help him leave this life with ease. Your presence is like a mantra, sacred speech that has a transforming effect” (Hanh, 1999, p. 66). Tying these four Miracles of Mindfulness back to meditation, they compose the “first aspect of meditation — shamatha — stopping, calming, resting, and healing” (Hanh, 1999, p. 66).

Looking deeply (vipashyana), tied to the second aspect of meditation, is a the fifth Miracle of Mindfulness (Hanh, 1999). Understanding, the sixth Miracle of Mindfulness, is defined as looking deeply and seeing what could not be seen before (Hanh, 1999). About understanding, Hanh (1999) expands:
Seeing and understanding come from within us. When we are mindful, touching deeply the present moment, we can see and listen deeply, and the fruits are always understanding, acceptance, love, and the desire to relieve suffering and bring joy. (Hanh, 1999, pp. 66-67)

Understanding, proclaims Hanh (1999), “is the very foundation of love. When you understand someone, you cannot help but love him or her” (p. 67). Elsewhere, Hanh (2014) declares, “understanding is love’s other name. If you don’t understand you can’t love” (p. 10). The pursuit of understanding is love-in-action. Finally, the seventh Miracle of Mindfulness is transformation. Through the practice of Right Mindfulness, “we touch the healing and refreshing elements of life and begin to transform our own suffering and the suffering of the world” (Hanh, 1999, p. 67). In the practice of mindfulness, community or Sangha\(^{21}\) takes on an important aspect in modeling the behavior and holding us accountable (Hanh, 1999). Transformation takes time and patience is necessary, but once transformed “we stop the wheel of samsara, the vicious cycle of suffering and confusion that has gone on for so many lifetimes” (Hanh, 1999, p. 67). The practice of the seven Miracles of Mindfulness leads us to the path of happiness, health, and liberation from suffering toward transformation (Hanh, 1999).

Finally, the last of the Noble Eightfold Path is Right Concentration. The goal of Right Concentration is “to cultivate a mind that is one-pointed” (Hanh, 1999, p. 105). Active concentration and selective concentration compose this tenet of the Noble Eightfold Path (Hanh, 1999). Utilizing following poem by a Buddhist monk, Hanh (1999) sets out to explain active concentration. The poem reads:

\[
\text{The wind whistles in the bamboo}
\text{and the bamboo dances.}
\text{When the wind stops,}
\text{the bamboo grows still.}
\text{A silver bird}
\]

\(^{21}\)Sangha (Skt.) is the Buddhist community of practice comprised of monks, nuns, and laypersons (Hanh, 2007, p. 216).
Flies over the autumn lake.
When it has passed,
the lake’s surface does not try
to hold on to the image of the bird. (Hanh, 1999, p. 105)

Active concentration, like the bamboo in the wind and the reflection of the silver bird over the lake, dwells intensely in the present moment, welcome what comes, releasing and returning to its new present when it passes. Selective concentration, on the other hand, is focusing intently on one object and holding onto the object in the mind (Hanh, 1999). For example, “If the object of our concentration is a math problem, we don’t watch TV or talk on the phone. We abandon everything else and focus on the object” (Hanh, 1999, p. 106). Concentration, then, becomes not an escape but a deep presence. Hanh (1999) maintains “living each moment deeply, sustained concentration comes naturally…and gives rise to insight” (p. 106). Degree of concentration and quality of life enjoy a positive correlation, according to Hanh (1999), and Right concentration is a path to happiness and Right Action. There are nine levels of concentration (Hanh, 1999).

The nine levels of concentration. We will briefly summarize the nine levels of concentration, beginning with the “Four Dhyanas…[or] concentrations on the form realm. The next five levels belong to the formless realm” (Hanh, 1999, p. 107). Unlike worldly concentration, Buddhist concentration seeks to liberate (Hanh, 1999). When practicing “samadhi” (Hanh, 1999, p. 107) or concentration you live deeply in the moment, “you are absorbed in the moment. You become the moment [emphasis in original]” (Hanh, 1999, p. 107). Together, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration assist us in transcending the carnal desires of the world, “and we find ourselves lighter and happier. Our world is no longer gross and heavy, the real of desires (karma dhatu)” (Hanh, 1999, p. 107). The first Four Dhyanas, in the form realm, are the means by which the growth of mindfulness, concentration, happiness, peace, equanimity, and joy are catalyzed (Hanh, 1999). Moving through the fourth Dhyana into the
formless dyhanas, one enters into a deeper experience, concentration, and reality (Hanh, 1999). It is in this deeper realm, where one begins “to see the impermanent, nonself, and interbeing nature of the phenomenal world. Earth, water, air, fire, space, time, nothingness, and perceptions interare. Nothing can be by itself alone” (Hanh, 1999, p. 107). This understanding of interbeing is central to Buddhistic philosophy and resonates deeply with Ubuntu philosophy and notions of personhood (Eze, 2010). We are beings holonic, communal, and enmeshed in a web of interconnectedness.

Limitless space is the fifth level of concentration, which holds that everything becomes space once we begin to practice deep concentration (Hanh, 1999). Looking and concentrating deeply, one can ascertain that space is composed of “non-space elements”—air, earth, water, etc. (Hanh, 1999, p. 108). More succinctly, Hanh (1999) writes, “According to the teachings of the Buddha, nothing has a separate self. So space and everything else inter-are. Space inter-is with the other five elements” (p. 108). The kernels of Buddhist subjectivity are beginning to blossom, which again finds agreement with Ubuntu and is deeply counter to Western notions of subjectivity. Limitless consciousness, following the same logic as limitless space, is the sixth level of concentration (Hanh, 1999). Almost in direct congruence to the definition of Ubuntu, nothingness is seventh level of concentration. Hanh (1999) defines nothingness in the following manner:

We go beyond outward appearances or signs and come to “signlessness.” At first, we think that members of our family are separate from one another, but afterwards we see that they contain each other. You are the way you are because I am the way I am. (Hanh, 1999, p. 108)

This is Ubuntu. It is the understanding of the “intimate connection between people…” and the shedding of the thinking “that the universe contains millions of separate entities. Now we understand ‘the nonexistence of signs’” (Hanh, 1999, p. 108).
“The eighth level of concentration is that of neither perception nor non-perception” (Hanh, 1999, p. 108). It is a recognition that all of the products of our perception are false. In agreement with DeleuzeGuattarian philosophy (1987), Hanh (1999) avers:

Therefore, we see that we cannot rely on our old way of perceiving, and we want to be in direct touch with reality. We cannot stop perceiving altogether, but at least now we know that perception is a perception of a sign. Since we no longer believe in the reality of signs, our perception becomes wisdom. We go beyond signs (“no perception”), but we do not become perceptionless (“non-perception”). (pp. 108-109)

The regime of the sign has been defeated and replaced by the indwelling regime of intuition, embodied knowing, or deep looking. Cessation, that is, “the cessation of ignorance in our feelings and perceptions, not the cessation of feelings and perceptions” (Hanh, 1999, p. 109) is the ninth level of concentration. Within this level, insight is born; through concentration, we begin to search for a place of non-suffering (Hanh, 1999).

Deeply understanding the implications of the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path “…is the greatest wisdom that one can achieve in this life. These are skillful, useful, and beneficial views. If you attain this wisdom, you are liberated from the cycle of pain and sorrow” (Olson, 2005, p. 55 as cited in Ortwein, 2013, p. 119). However, Hanh provides an ominous warning:

But if our path is not noble, if there is craving, hatred, ignorance, and fear in the way we live our daily life, if we practice the ignoble eightfold path, suffering will naturally be the outcome. The practice is to face our suffering and transform it in order to bring about well-being. We need to study the Noble Eightfold Path and learn ways to put it into practice in our daily lives. (Hanh, 1999, p. 46)

Having explored the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, we turn to the Four Immeasurable Minds or the Brahnaviharas, which represent the most hopeful aspects of human nature.
The Four Immeasurable Minds (*Brahmaviharas*). The *Brahmaviharas* or the Four Immeasurable Minds are the dwelling places of love; they include: love, compassion, joy, and equanimity (Hanh, 1999). Hanh (1999) avers the four *Brahmaviharas* are considered to be immeasurable, “because if you practice them, they will grow in you every day until they embrace the whole world. You will become happier, and everyone around you will become happier, also” (p. 169). The emergence of the *Brahmaviharas* is best explained in Hanh’s recalling of the story handed down through Buddhist teaching. The story follows:

During Buddha’s lifetime, those of the Brahmanic faith prayed that after death they would go to Heaven to dwell eternally with Brahma, the universal God. One day a Brahman man asked the Buddha, “What can I do to be sure that I will be with Brahma after I die?” and the Buddha replied, “As Brahma is the source of Love, to dwell with him you must practice the ‘Brahma Abodes,’ (*Brahmaviharas*) or Four Immeasurable Minds — love, compassion, joy, and equanimity.” […] The Four Brahman Ivaiharas are the abodes of true love. This address is much greater than a four-star hotel. It is a 1,000-star dwelling. (Hanh, 1999, p. 169)

To reiterate, Buddhism is about practice; therefore, to practice the *Brahmaviharas* is to heal oneself from the emotional conditions that plague us all from time to time. We now turn to a discussion on each of the four *Brahmaviharas*.

*Love.* Love or loving kindness (*maitri* in Sanskrit or *metta* in Pali) is the first of the abodes of true love, and births in us “the intention and capacity to offer joy and happiness” (Hanh, 1999, p. 170). The capacity of love—joy and happiness—is developed through the practice of deep listening and looking, which enables one to discern what will bring others happiness (Hanh, 1999). Hanh (1999) suggests offering someone what we think they need versus seeing what they actually need is not maitri and exemplifies a lack of understanding. Recall that understanding, in the perspective of Hanh (2014, 1999), is simply love’s (*maitri*) other name. More explicitly, he states, “Without understanding, your love is not true love. You must look deeply in order to see and understand the needs, aspirations, and suffering of the one you love”
(Hanh, 1999, p. 171). In a nod to poststructuralism, Hanh (1999) reminds us of the importance of language. *Maitri* can be and is often translated not as love but loving kindness, which some Buddhist teachers prefer “as they find the word ‘love’ too dangerous” (p. 171). Hanh (1999), however, prefers the word love and asserts “Words sometimes get sick and we have to heal them” (p. 172). Using the word ‘love’ not as desire, but going back to *maitri*’s primary meaning of friendship. “In Buddhism, the primary mean of love is friendship” (Hanh, 1999, p. 172). Underscoring the centrality of love as integral to our very being, Hanh (1999) does well to remind us all that

> We all have the seeds of love in us. We can develop this wonderful source of energy, nurturing the unconditional love that does not expect anything in return. When we understand someone deeply, even someone who has done us harm, we cannot resist loving him or her. (p. 172)

In agreement with *Ubuntu*, maitri or love comprises a revolutionary act. Love necessitates understanding, tolerance, happiness and each of the other three *Brahmaviharas* (Hanh, 1999, Broodryk, 2006). Imagine a world, an educational system with love as its foundation, where understanding in human relations held an equally privileged position to academic understanding.

**Compassion.** Compassion (*karuna* in both Sanskrit and Pali) comprises the intentionality to transform suffering and lighten burdens (Hanh, 1999). Paying attention to and in an effort to heal language, Hahn (1999) maintains the translation of *karuna* is understood to be compassion, but it does not necessarily convey the whole meaning. Hanh (1999) writes, “‘Compassion’ is composed of *com* (“together with”) and *passion* (“to suffer”). But we do not need to suffer to remove suffering from another person. […] Still, until we find a better word, let us use “compassion” to translate karuna” (p. 172).

In parallel to the *Ubuntu* value of *umunyu* or compassion, *karuna* is practiced with deep looking and listening, and by being mindful of breathing (Broodyrk, 2006; Hanh, 1999). The
practice of compassion has the ability to reduce another’s suffering and activate joy (Hanh, 1999). With profound implications for education and human relations, Hanh (1999) movingly conveys the impact of compassion. He explains:

One compassionate word, action, or thought can reduce another person’s suffering and bring him joy. One word can give comfort and confidence, destroy doubt, help someone avoid a mistake, reconcile a conflict, or open the door to liberation. One action can save a person’s life or help him take advantage of a rare opportunity. (Hanh, 1999, p. 173)

Imagine the teaching and modeling of compassion in the field of education. Think on the generative, multiplicative effects that the practice of compassion in the education realm can have on being-doing of this nation, of this world. Particularly, germane to the inquiry at hand is Hanh’s (1999) inclusion of ideas in the practice of karuna; Hanh (1999) proclaims, “One thought can do the same, because thoughts always lead to words and actions. With compassion in our heart, every thought, word, and deed can bring about a miracle” (p. 173). Every action is preceded by an idea.

Joy. The third abode of love is joy (mudita), which is a fruit of love. “If our love does not bring joy to both of us, it is not true love” (Hanh, 1999, p. 173). Deciphering between joy and happiness, Hanh (1999) discerns joy relates directly to the mind and happiness to both the mind and body. Joy and happiness inter-are (Hanh, 1999). Joy is practiced through mindfulness, believing joy to be a natural by-product of the mind one can increase their joy by being mindful. Ever the poststructuralist, Hanh (1999) disputes some scholars’ definition of mudita as “‘sympathetic joy’ or ‘altruistic joy,’ the happiness we feel when others are happy” (p. 174) as being too limited. Furthermore, these disputed meanings promulgate the false dichotomy between the self and others (Hanh, 1999). Rather, joy or mudita “is filled with peace and contentment” (Hanh, 1999, p. 174); it is discovered in our happiness and the happiness of others.
Joy must first be deeply felt for ourselves before it can felt for others. In short, joy is for everyone or as Broodryk (2006) avers shared joy is doubly joyful (Hanh, 1999).

**Equanimity.** The fourth and final abode of love is equanimity (*upeksha* in Sanskrit and *upekkha* in Pali), which “is the ability to see everyone as equal, not discriminating between ourselves and others” (Hanh, 1999, p. 174). *Upeksha* is translated to mean “equanimity, nonattachment, nondiscrimination, evenmindedness, or letting go” (Hanh, 1999, p. 174). Hahn illustrates the final abode of love as follows:

*Upa* means “over,” and *iksh* means “to look.” You climb the mountain to be able to look over the whole situation, not bound by one side or the other. If your love has attachment, discrimination, prejudice, or clinging in it, it is not true love. People who do not understand Buddhism sometimes think *upeksha* means indifference, but true equanimity is neither cold nor indifferent. If you have more than one child, they are all your children. (Hanh, 1999, p. 174)

Utilizing Hanh’s (1999) multiple children illustration, practicing equanimity is not indifference to love, but is the communication of a deep expression of love to all of your children—equally (Hanh, 1999).

Equanimity parallels Broodryk’s (2006) Ubuntuist understanding that we are at once “unchanging equals” (p. 7) and that “equals do not oppress each other” (p. 16). “True love allows you to preserve your freedom and the freedom of your beloved” (Hanh, 1999, p. 175). The implications of the practice of equanimity in everyday relations are particularly salient in a society that, in practice, has proclaimed Black and Brown bodies guilty until proven innocent; Hanh (1999) writes: “In a conflict, even though we are deeply concerned, we remain impartial, able to love and understand both sides. We shed all discrimination and prejudice, and remove all boundaries between ourselves and others” (p. 174). Regarding subjectivity and this inquiry’s aim, Hanh (1999) continues:

As long as we see ourselves as the one who loves and the other as the one who is
loved, as long as we value ourselves more than others and see ourselves as different from others, we do not have true equanimity. We have to put ourselves ‘into the other person’s skin’ and become one with him if we want to understand and truly love him. When that happens, there is no ‘self’ and no ‘other.’ (p. 175)

Through the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, the Four Immeasurable Minds together with the Seven Factors of Awakening, and in consistent practice we can arrive at enlightenment (Hanh, 1999). The enlightened person radiates the Four Immeasurable Minds—love, compassion, joy, and equanimity (Hanh, 1999). “They are the four aspects of true love within ourselves and within everyone and everything” (Hahn, 1999, p. 170).

**Buddhist Philosophy**

Safran (2003), in conjunction with Adams (2012), assert central to the Buddhist and Updanishadic philosophy is the concept of atman, which is equivalent in some respects to our concept of soul. The atman is the essence of the person, which transcends phenomenal experience. It is thus the real self in contrast to the experienced self. This atman is conceptualized as identical with the single unified essence behind appearances. The individual experience of self, and all phenomena in the world, are thus illusions, behind which lies as a transcendental reality in which all phenomena are one. The failure to see behind this veil of illusion keeps people trapped in the pain of individuation and the suffering of life and death. Those who fail to recognize their true nature as part of the universal essence experience the pain and sorrow of life, and at death are reborn once again into endless rounds of life and death. The goal is to reorganize the illusory nature of the self and to unify the true self or atman with the underlying universal essence. (Safran, 2003, p. 11)

This doctrine, not found in the Four Noble Truths, is of ancient and persistent Buddhist thought and along with Duhka (Suffering) and Anitya (Impermanence) composes the triad of the trilaksana, or the Three Marks of Existence (Adams, 2012). In short, what has been termed in Western thought as the doctrine of no-self or spelled differently than above “the doctrine of anãtman” (Adams, 2012, p. 275) is widely considered the Buddhist theory of subjectivity and makes the ontological claim “of a kind of groundless ground of being” (O’Sullivan, 2014, 258). In other words, being just is.
Buddhist Ontology

Asakura (2011) writing to understand Mou’s Buddhistic ontology in an attempt to overcome the imprisonment of Kantian metaphysics, first distinguishes between the noumenal and phenomenal forms of ontology. Noumenal and phenomenal refer to the Kantian postulation that two worlds exist; the noumenal, the world outside of ourselves as things really exists which is incomprehensible and the phenomenal, the world as perceived or conceptualized within the mind of the individual(s) (Kant, 1929). Asakura (2011) argues “phenomenal ontology must be fully grounded in the noumenal version, the ultimate ground must be morality: it is essentially a moral vision of the world” (p. 654). Conversely, Buddhistic ontology, is amoral and “only on this amoral ground, or on the lack of any ground, can we see the possibility of posing a question of being” (p. 654). Moreover, Asakura (2011) defines Buddhistic ontology as “a question of being, asking amorally the meaning of what it is be” (pp. 654-655). Buddhistic ontology is non-metaphysical, which in the Heideggerian sense, the question of being can be posed without the shackles of morality (Asakura, 2011). Buddhist ontology, therefore, transgresses the necessity of Kantian morality and the distinction of the noumena and phenomena (Asakura, 2011). In doing so, the “essence of Buddhism is discovered in its non-metaphysical and precisely ontological investigation of the being of entities” (Asakura, 2011, p. 672). While Hanh (1999) and Waldron (2003) would contend that there is no essence of Buddhism, they would find agreement that Buddhist ontology “attempts to comprehend and affirm the whole reality, including its most

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22 Noumenal refers to an object that can be intuited only by direct knowledge (intuition) and not perceived by the senses; an object independent of intellectual intuition of it or of sensuous perception of it. Also called a thing-in-itself. In Kantian philosophy, for example, the noumenal refers to an object such as the soul, which cannot be known through perception, although its existence can be demonstrated (Hanh, 2007, p. 214).

23 Phenomenal refers to an occurrence, circumstance, or fact that is perceptible by the senses. In Kantian philosophy and physics, the phenomenal is an observable event or the appearance of an object to the mind (Hanh, 2007, p. 215).
troubling aspects, immediately and without reservation, by casting its gaze of the being of all things or entities” (Asakura, 2011, p. 669). In other words, nothing is beyond the gaze of understanding or can be separated from the whole.

Buddhist ontology is free of value or moralistic judgment and recognizes the interconnected nature of all things–that all things inter-are (Hanh, 1999). However, in our humanness, inability to live in the contradictions, and our Western need for all ruptures to be mended, Buddhist ontology poses a challenge. Asakura (2011) solidifies and illuminates Buddhism’s dissolution of the Western categorization of human inquiry when he states, “For its members, ontology is not a theoretical problem; it is a ‘metanoetic’ practice against the tendency to convert contradictions into reconciliation” (p. 670). In short, the ontological and epistemological are one; there is no division. (Hanh, 1999; Asakura, 2011). Buddhism onto-praxis allows one to sit comfortably in the uncomfortableness of the in-between.

Asakura (2011) aptly sums up the Buddhist ontology in his description of both Mou’s and the Kyoto School’s Buddhistic ontology, he states:

…Buddhistic ontology, which is a practical and radically ontological type of philosophy. It is radically amoral and impersonal in the sense that it transcends the personal standpoint. It is a question of being in its univocal horizon, which can only be described in paradoxical or non-metaphysical ways. Reality self-realizes in this affirmation of being, which pays concentrated attention to the being of all things, which is also an affirmation of the controversial and even disturbing aspects of our world. This question of being constitutes an ontological awareness in its purely subjective and practical sense. It is realizable in its awareness and in its all-embracing and no longer personal compassion. (Asakura, 2011, pp. 673-674)

When reduced to philosophy, Buddhist ontology can be described as a “groundless ground of being” (O’Sullivan, 2014, p. 258) or more commonly understood as interbeing or non-self, which proffers the impermanence, instability, and interconnectedness of self (Hanh, 1999). Given the Buddhist notion of self as non-self, one can deduce that there is no separation in the
Buddhist perspective between being and knowing (Hanh, 1999; Mack, 2010). The Buddhist perspective is onto-epistemological, the self is ever-changing and knowledge connotes a permanence; therefore, for the learner, the nature of being and the nature of knowledge—what is known, and/or what can be known—is also ever changing. In this view, truth, then, is not universal but situational, positional, and subjective.

**Engaged Buddhism**

Buddhism in praxis is naturally an engagement in the world; however, in the midst of the Vietnam War Thich Nhat Hanh “broke with the 2500-year tradition of Buddhist apoliticism” (Knabb, 2002, p. 50) to found an order that employed Buddhism as an ethical and meditational practice to transform contemporary social issues (Hanh, 2008; Seiber, 2015). Arising not only in the midst of physical war, but also in the midst of ideological warfare of 1954 Vietnam dominated in the North by Marxist-Leninist ideology and in the South by Catholic personalism, Engaged Buddhism began as a series of articles in Vietnam with the sole aim of looking at Buddhism with fresh eyes (Hanh, 2008). In light of the tumultuous context of Hanh’s early years (1949-1964), he imagined a Buddhism that enters “into life, social life” (Hanh, 2008, p. 31)—Engaged Buddhism. Engaged Buddhism is present in every moment of life, and Hahn maintains is the kind of wisdom that responds to anything that happens in the here and now—global warming, climate change, the destruction of the ecosystem, lack of communication, war, conflict, suicide, divorce. (Hanh, 2008, p. 31)

Quelling our natural tendency to run away from suffering, Engaged Buddhism walks right into the pain of suffering to transform it.

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24 According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, personalists believe that the human person should be the ontological and epistemological starting point of philosophical reflection. They are concerned to investigate the experience, the status, and the dignity of the human being as person, and regard this as the starting-point for all subsequent philosophical analysis. Personalists regard personhood (or “personality”) as the fundamental notion, as that which gives meaning to all of reality and constitutes its supreme value. Personhood carries with it an inviolable dignity that merits unconditional respect. (Retrieved from [http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/personalism/#WhaPer](http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/personalism/#WhaPer))
A Renewed Four Noble Truths. Looking at the Four Noble Truths in light of the situation we know find ourselves in, that is, in light of the current global socio-cultural milieu, we come to see that transformation and well-being are possible (Waldron, 2003; Hanh, 2008; Hanh, 1999). In Engaged Buddhism’s (re)thinking of the first Noble Truth, dukkha, through mindfulness we can identify today’s “true face of ill-being,” (Hanh, 2008, p. 32) which Hanh defines as “tensions, stress, anxiety, fear, violence, broken families, suicide, war, conflict, terrorism, destruction of the ecosystem,[and] global warming” (Hanh, 2008, p. 32). Refusing to hide our heads under a bushel and looking deeply into the suffering, we are able to see the path to transformation (Hanh, 2008). Hahn (2008) writes: “If we know how to live like a Buddha, dwelling in the present moment, allowing the refreshing and healing elements to penetrate, then we will not become victims of stress, tensions, and many kinds of disease” (p. 32). “Dis-ease” (P. Hendry, personal communication, May 7, 2015) is caused by our inability to live our lives fully, deeply in every moment (Hanh, 2008, 1999). Speaking of schooling and Engaged Buddhism, Hanh (2008) observes “…even school teachers don’t know how to help their students recognize and hold their emotions tenderly. We people cannot communicate[,] they don’t understand each other…there is no love, no happiness” (p. 32). Engaged Buddhism as a practice within schools encourages communication, deep listening, and emotional mindfulness (Hanh, 1999). Even more importantly, it encourages the striving to understand on the part of both the teacher and student.

Again, Buddhism is an engagement in and with the world; with respect to contemporary social issues that deeply wound humanity, Hanh argues:

Fear, misunderstanding, and wrong perceptions are the foundation of all these violent acts. The war in Iraq, which is called anti-terrorist, has not helped to reduce the number of terrorists. In fact the number of terrorists is increasing all the time because of the war. In order to remove terrorism you have to remove wrong perceptions.
We know very well that airplanes, guns, and bombs cannot remove wrong perceptions. (Hanh, 2008, p. 32)

The same can be said for America’s so-called War on Crime, which has only served to exacerbate crime. Through Buddhism and Engaged Buddhism, we are brought to the awareness that “only loving speech and compassionate listening can help correct wrong perceptions. But our leaders are not trained in that discipline and they rely on the armed forces to remove terrorism” (Hanh, 2008, pp. 32-33). An education that trains and encourages loving speech and deep listening are necessary components to recognize and transform the suffering of ill-being (Hanh, 1999, 2008).

The Third Noble Truth, “the cessation of ill-being, which means the presence of well-being—just as the absence of darkness means the presence of light” (Hanh, 2008, p. 33) is possible through the shedding of ignorance, which is the root of all of our problems. The Fourth Noble Truth is achieved through practice, which sets us on a path of well-being.

The Noble Eightfold Path and Hanh’s (1999) Mindfulness Trainings teach non-attachment to views. The goal of the teachings are insight not attachments. More to the point, the Buddha said, ‘My teaching is like the finger pointing to the moon. You should be skillfull. You look in the direction of my finger, and you can see the moon. If you take my finger to be the moon, you will never see the moon.’ (Hanh, 1999, p. 17)

Attachment to views can be equated to fanaticism, which can be attributed as the root cause of all wars (Hanh, 2008). Where there is an attachment to views, there is no peace. Discussing Buddhist refusal of the Vietnam War, Hanh (2008) composed a poem to express the Engaged Buddhist perspective. The last line of this poem can and should be recited over and over again in classrooms, boardrooms, and government war rooms. The poem reads:

*Whoever is listening, be my witness:*
*I do not accept this war;*
*let me say this one more time before I die.*
Our enemies are not men. (Hanh, 2008, p. 35)

In fact, our enemies are not men, but ideas. “Our enemies are hate, fanaticism, violence. Our enemies are not men. If we kill men, with whom shall we live?” (Hanh, 2008, p. 35). Not only with whom shall we live, but with what idea will be forced to live with. An idea can outlive man by millennia. In fact, we see that physical violence is akin to throwing a match on a drought stricken forest floor, we know that eventually the rain will come and the fire will be no more. Ideological violence—wrong ontological and epistemological viewpoints—on the other hand, do not disintegrate but proliferate, replicate, and transmute like a virus. The ability to contain it is just within reach, but always escapes our grasp.

Engaged Buddhism teaches that transformation, awakening to suffering begins with self first (Sivaraksa, 2002). The inward practice of awareness produces the outward results of personal and societal transformation. Each of us are change agents with the ability to enact changes within our communities—micro and macro (Hanh, 1999, 2008). To reiterate, Sivaraksa (2002) writes: “While the Buddha’s intention was certainly to change individuals, the ultimate aim was liberation. However, he intended to help liberate not only individuals, but the whole society” (p. 43). Our collective and individual metamorphoses are contemporaneous reactions. Liberation, in Engaged Buddhist tradition, must come through an awakening to the systemic, structural causes of suffering. Engaged Buddhism, very much like, traditional Buddhism necessitates an engagement in and with the world as means to raise awareness, heighten consciousness, and catalyze meaningful societal transformation.

Conclusion

Thich Nhat Hanh (1999) reminds us that “transformation is gradual, but once we see clearly the causes of our suffering, we can make the effort to change our behavior and bring our
suffering to an end” (Hanh, 1999, p. 43). Believing that “even the most flawed people have
Buddha-nature, and reconciliation begins with the acknowledgement of common humanity and
shared suffering” (Sivaraksa, 2005, p. 32), Buddhism provides an epistemology and
methodology (pedagogy) to transform our collective ontology—in fact, they inter-are (Hanh,
1999). Infusing the theory and practice of the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, and the
Four Immeasurable Minds into the fabric of American education can, along with Ubuntu, bring
about a revolutionary societal metamorphosis. Holding deeply Buddha’s teaching on Nirvana,
that is, “we already are what we want to become.[…] We only need to return to ourselves and
touch our true nature” (Hanh, 1999, p. 140), we come to understand that the transformation that
we seek already lies within in. Now is always the time to transform our current ‘reality’ into our
future hope.
“...thinking is living at a higher degree, at a faster pace, in a multidirectional manner.”

- Rosi Braidotti -

Method is an ontological decision, it signals a way of being-doing in the world (Law, 2004). I desire to think the unthinkable, and imagine the not yet as if it were. At the recommendation of Deleuze (1995), I have started at the middle in the space sans authors, sans canonical works, or the stability of traditional methodologies (Koro-Ljungberg, Carlson, Tesar, & Anderson, 2015). I start in the middle, on this plateau25 (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) not because I want to make use of the DeleuzoGuattarian concept as methodological trope, but because I have no place else to begin. I dwell in the present-present dragging along the present-past, that is to say, I am situated in the now, while being held captive by the past, while looking toward an “unthinkable absent future-present” (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2015, p. 613). Attempting to transcend the cage of Cartesian thought, I am trapped in it–stuck in the middle attempting to free myself not physically, but ontologically, cognitively, and imaginatively. My present help is bi-directional, it “moves into two directions at once: one oriented toward the past and [the] other contracting toward the future” (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2015, p. 612); thinking how did we get ourselves in this mess—past, imagining how we can get ourselves out—future, and wrestling with the reality that while “everything is possible, ..not everything is”—present (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2015, p. 613). This is my middle, this is my plateau, this is my becoming-researcher,

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25 Deleuze and Guattari (1987) states, “A plateau is always in the middle, not at the beginning or the end. A rhizome is made of plateaus” (p. 21) and “[e]ach plateau can be read starting anywhere and can be related to any plateau” (p. 22).
becoming-Ph.D., becoming-more human (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). This is both the beauty and the daunting task of an absent present-future qualitative inquiry.

Koro-Ljungberg et al. (2015), writing on brute methodologies and qualitative inquiry’s enablement of thinking the once unthinkable thought, asks:

How can anyone “predict” future-to-come or describe the absent-present or absent-future-presence of qualitative inquiry without being sidetracked? By fleeting presuppositions. By our human-ness. By that bug on the wall over there. By eggplant. How can one think about presence or future of something that is under erasure—something without origins and something one needs to let go as soon as she or he starts to use it? Deleuze (1990) wrote “instead of a present which absorbs the past and future, a future and past divide the present at every instant and subdivide it ad infinitum into past and future, in both directions at once” (p. 164). (Koro-Ljungberg et. al, 2005, p. 613)

While traditional qualitative researchers and methodologists may argue the illusory nature of an absent future-present sidetracks us from the a very real present, I argue that (re)thinking absent-future-present is a rhizomatic engagement, the creation of maps not tracings26 (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Parr, 2005). Thinking with Buddhism and Ubuntu, creating a map is thought-action engagement in the co-creation of a future to come. To be fair, I have just done what I accuse traditional positivist methodologists of doing, reducing a thing down to its most simple state and creating dualist positionalities. The contrasting of maps and tracings creates a false value judgment dualism. Deleuze and Guattari (1987), in dealing with this dualism, inquire:

26 Distinguishing the a map from a tracing, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) state: “The rhizome is altogether different, a map and not a tracing. Make map, not a tracing. The orchid does not reproduce the tracing of the wasp; it forms a map with the wasp, in a rhizome. What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. The map does not reproduce an unconscious closed in upon itself; it constructs the unconscious. It fosters connections between fields, the removal of blockages on bodies without organs onto a plane of consistency. It is itself a part of the rhizome. The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation. It can be drawn upon a wall, conceived as a work of art, constructed as a political action or as meditation. Perhaps on of the most important characteristics of the rhizome is that it always has multiple entry ways…

A map has multiple entryways, as opposed to the tracing, which always comes back “to the same.” The map has to do with performance, whereas the tracing always involves an alleged ‘competence’” (pp. 12-13).
Is it not of the essence of the map to be traceable? Is not of the essence of the rhizome to intersect roots and sometimes merge with them? Does not a map contain phenomena of redundancy that are already like tracings of its own? Does not a multiplicity have strata upon which unifications and totalizations, massifications, mimetic mechanisms, signifying power takeovers, and subjective attributions take root? Do not even lines of flight, due to their eventual divergence, reproduce the very formations their function it was to dismantle or outflank? But the opposite is also true. It is a question of method: *the tracing should always be put back on the map*. This operation and the previous are not at all symmetrical. For it is inaccurate to say that a tracing reproduces a map. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 13)

To create a mapping, the cartographer must know the terrain, and yet constructs the map through his or her own perception. (re)Thinking as (non)method is cartography, mapping-in-action. (re)Thinking pushes personal and methodological paradigmic boundaries, “subverting and transgressing limits and boundaries and liberating research that traditionally has managed and marginalized the researcher” (Koro-Ljungberg et. al, 2005, p. 613). Thinking and (re)thinking with as (non)method is an active, subjective engagement in inquiry, in life (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). Thinking, asserts Braidotti (1994), “is living at a higher degree, at a faster pace, in a multi directional manner” (p. 167). (re)Thinking as (non)method is “inquiry as in-betweeness, multiplicity that is not a component or a collection” (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2015, p. 617).

**I Am a Multitude.** As a researcher, philosopher, problemitizer, and being-human, I resist the epistemological and methodological dungeons created by positivist researchers and reified in the once liberating approach of traditional qualitative research. Koro-Ljungberg et al. (2015) declare:

Traditional paradigms mould, discipline, test, tweak, digitalize, approve, surveille, and treat anything and everything alike. In that sense, the researcher’s role is to tame the data, participants, and stakeholders to place them into their appropriate places in the research process, allowing them to operate, ghost-like, in the research machine, to produce safe, often emotionless research, to cultivate and mould them into ideal forms that will eliminate disruptions or potentially uncomfortable knowledge interests and outcomes. Through promoting simplistic practices, using dangerous, seductive numbers (and sometimes language), offering ready-to-deliver solutions and a business-like “operating” manual the aim is to answer most if not all questions of the social life. (p. 615)
Embracing my present-past, present-present, and imagining my absent present-future, (re)thinking as (non)method is an ethical, ontological, and epistemological engagement (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2015; St. Pierre, 2014). It is an engagement in a critical ontology of ourselves (Foucault, 1984), the world we inhabit, and the world-to-come that we hope to inhabit—the future, which “is not only coming but in some way it is already here in its absent, present, and absent present elements” (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2015, p. 614). Koro-Ljungberg et al. (2015) pose an interesting question: “What does our collective gaze on absent present-future produce?” (p. 614). Perhaps, “it finally kills the subject, either ‘I’ of ‘we’” (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2015, p. 614). Perhaps it refocuses our perception of Other or encourages us to meet and fully encounter the Other in the beauty of their otherness. Perhaps it does all of the above (Oliver, 2001; Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2015). As Eze (2008) asserts in his discussion on the philosophy and culture that is Ubuntu, “The process of encounter with the other helps me to shed any prior misgivings…[t]his experimental moment informs and enriches my own perspective and frees me from dogma in judgment” (p. 394). Ubuntu and Buddhism, the two philosophical perspectives that I (re)think with in this inquiry, represents an “ethical consciousness…that does not seek for uniformity or identity of interest, but understanding; it appropriates empathy, but eschews unanimity and conformity” (Eze, 2008, p. 394). Understanding, according to Hanh (1999) is simply love by another name. This is the promise of (re)thinking; the hope of creating maps and not tracings (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

(re)Thinking as (non)Method

(re)Thinking as (non)methodological inquiry is a rendezvous with both “philosophy and disciplinary knowledge that leads us to the rethinking of ontological, epistemological and ethical notions” (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2015, p. 615). Essentially, it is an attempt at ‘un-doing’,
transgressing, subverting, and resisting the epistemological and methodological violence inflicted on beings-human; it is a resistance to the creativity killing assimilationist machines that we call American schooling; it is a decolonizing response to the academic colonization to which we have been subjected through (un)hidden curricula (Pinar et al., 2008; Apple, 2013; St. Pierre, 2014; Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2015; Freire, 1970/2000). The ‘un-doings’ of (post)qualitative inquiry have evolved “through connectivity by reaching out to others for ideas, thoughts, and philosophies to support the reversal of the injustices of earlier research paradigms” (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2015, p. 615).

Let me reiterate (re)thinking as (non)method, I assert, is simply the onto-cognitive process by which we take what we know, what we have experienced, and intention of the endeavor we are pursuing–what I call assemblages27 of (un)knowing–and process them through the abstract machine called the mind (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). (re)Thinking raises more questions rather than producing solutions, produces more lines of flight; it is provocation of thought. More succinctly, “It is a question of a model that is perpetually in construction or collapsing, and of a process that is perpetually prolonging itself, breaking of and starting up again” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 20). This is (re)thinking.

When speaking on the function of qualitative inquiry, Koro-Ljungberg et al. (2015) aver its function presents “an opportunity for readers to be rendered speechless but willing to act differently themselves with others through continual provocation” (p. 617). In other words, it incites contagious provocation and makes uncomfortable present and past-present onto-epistemological stances. Given the calcification of traditional epistemological methodologies,

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27 Deleuze and Guattari (1987) write: “There is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author). Rather, an assemblage establishes connections between certain multiplicities drawn from each of these orders, so that a book has no sequel nor the world as its object nor one or several authors as its subject (p. 23).
this shift in thought and practice is difficult; however, the potential opportunities for new ways of knowing, being-becoming, and doing far outweigh the risks. In my appreciation, Kincheloe’s (2001, 2004, 2005, 2008) description of bricolage is a comparable conception. Bricolage, according to Kincheloe (2008), assists in “transcending the reductionism of the zombies of positivism…[who proclaim] the correct ways to teach” (pp. 134-135) and do research through epistemological unilogicality. Additionally, Kincheloe (2008) professes, the bricolage takes seriously Freire’s “concept of radical love…concurrently producing new modes of human connectedness and fresh ways of seeing, new modes of consciousness, new forms of knowledge, and new ways of acting in the world” (p. 134). Jackson and Mazzei (2012), two post-qualitative researchers, have described this as thinking with theory. Thinking with theory is an attempt to de-center humanist qualitative research al a Patti Lather and Elizabeth St. Pierre (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). Moreover, it employs “Deleuze’s conceptual play of the zigzag: ‘The zigzag is the lighting bolt spark of creation, unpredictable, undisciplined, anti-disciplinary, and non-static’” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. vii) to plug in the same data to various theories to demonstrate “how knowledge is opened up and proliferated rather than focused and simplified” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. vii).

An aside on post methodologies. In agreement with St. Pierre (2014) and others, the post epistemological methodology discourses are actually ‘return to' discourses—a pre-qualitative methodology (i.e. simply thinking); however, even when we wish it away, the Western colonial (positivist) gaze rears its ugly head. I mean to say, in the West we are not satisfied to say this thing existed before, but must plant our flag, stake our claim, assert our authority over that which, in truth, existed millennia before we arrived and will continue long after we have departed for other shores. What is more, the gaze not only claims the person, place or thing as its
own, but “invents its eastern face and western face, and reshapes them both—all for the worst” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 20). This understanding of Western domination is particularly relevant given the crux of this inquiry, which involves de-centering Western knowledges and philosophies to (re)think the Western subject through the once denigrated ways of knowing and philosophical perspectives of Africa and the East. The idea of naming or renaming represents, what LeGrange (2011) refers to as the “hegemony of Western science/philosophy as a consequence of military, economic and political power…” (p. 73). Nonetheless, even while I castigate it, I too, am transfixed by the gaze and held captive by Western cognitive imperialism (Battiste, 2002). Despite my criticisms and recognizing the limitations of language, I will engage the term—sparingly—within the confines of this inquiry for the sake of communicatory clarity.

(re)Thinking as (non)method works against the colonizing forces of the positivist regime through an engagement of “creative methodological stammering” (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2015, p. 617)—the employment of an array of methodological and epistemological tools to (re)imagine or to (re)think an absent present-future. Specifically, I will enlist ‘philosophy as method’ (in the tradition of Barad, Foucault, Derrida, and Deleuze and Guattari) and Kincheloe’s (2001, 2004, 2005, 2008) generative conception of the bricolage to think the once unthinkable.

Abstract Machine Composition: Holonic Assemblages of Knowing

Philosophy as Method

Simply stated, philosophy is a conceptual response to problems that arise within the human experience (Venter, 2004). “Philosophy as method is an engagement, an ethical relationship with thought” (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2015, p. 617). It is an engagement within the context of the present-present’s social, political, ideological, and pedagogical milieu, which

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28 A holon is “whole in one context, yet at the same time is a part of another context” (Forster, 2010, p. 5). They are whole–parts. All things are holons.
through (re)thinking yields something anew—imagines a new present-future. Philosophy as method is devoid of boundaries, borders, or limits (Koro-Ljungberg, 2015). Offering a wealth of provocations, Koro-Ljungberg et al. (2015) aptly state:

> With philosophy as a method, qualitative inquiry has re-thought the research discourses not to construct, create, and necessarily argue for another “paradigm,” but to demonstrate that research is limitless in its ontological, epistemological and ethical reach, and possibilities. Qualitative inquiry has become political and poetic at the same time. It has, with mostly liminal and cosmetic wounds, resisted the preparation of/for simplistic reductionist mechanistic and machine-like subjects. Of course, there are dangers and seductive notions that await qualitative inquiry in the future: to complete the research and to “compete” with other forms of research also within. […] Qualitative inquiry can never be satisfied with itself as it continues thinking the unthinkable with philosophy as its method and rawness as its strategy. (p. 618)

This assertion is exemplified in the provocative work of Barad’s *new materialism*; Deleuze and Guattari’s *rhizo- and schizoanalysis*; Derrida’s *deconstruction*; and Foucault’s *archaeology, genealogy, and power-knowledge* (St. Pierre, 2014; Spivak, 1993).

Utilizing the rhizomatic nature of philosophy as method, that is, the ability to “[connect] any point to any other, [even when] its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 21), I am able to bring “theory into practice and ontologies into the research process” (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2015, p. 618). The introduction of philosophy into method and educational research methodology dictates a new methodological becoming, forcing researchers to release themselves from the methodological choke hold—ridding themselves of method “as an objective set of procedures, automated activity, or predetermined single, and simplified task” (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2015, p. 618). Within the old guard, this new way of (re)thinking method is sure to catalyze cacophonic discourse; however, for those of us who embrace philosophy as method and who hover in the in-betweeness, we understand that philosophy as method is (re)thinking, is life. Philosophy as method, like (re)thinking as
(non)method, creates “movement and diversity within ‘methods’ when thinking and doing blend and interact continuously and seamlessly” (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2015, p. 618).

**The Bricolage: A Holon within a Holon**

In addition to philosophy as method as an holonic assemblage of knowing within (re)thinking as (non)method, I utilize the “…theoretical embrace and methodological employment of the bricolage” (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 680) to sift through, re-imagine, and make sense of the human complexities that the research question(s) seek to interrogate. Bricolage is a holon within a holon. The concept of bricolage, first introduced by Levi-Strauss (1966) in *The Savage Mind* is derived from the “French word, bricoleur, [which] describes a handyman or handywoman who makes use of the tools available to complete a task” (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 680). Again, the employment of bricolage both theoretically and methodologically allows for a mutltiperspectival approach (Kellner, 1995) drawing on various "textual and critical strategies to 'interpret, criticize, and deconstruct the cultural artifacts under observation" (Kincheloe, 2001, 682). In resonance with multiperspectivism, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) call for bricoleurs to utilize "hermeneutics, structuralism, semiotics, phenomenology, cultural studies, and feminism" (p. 3). Each of these methodological tools seek to deeply understand the human experience. Hermeneutics, according to Webster and Mertova (2007) is the "art and science of interpretation" (p. 5). In agreement with Denzin and Lincoln's (2000) assertion and given the nature of the research questions, this study utilizes the methodological tools contained within hermeneutic phenomenology (Webster & Mertova, 2007; Savin-Baden & Major, 2012; Creswell, 2013), narrative inquiry (Webster & Mertova, 2007; Savin-Baden & Major, 2012; Clandinin, 2008; Creswell, 2013; Keats, 2009; Hendry, 2010), and critical hermeneutics (Kincheloe, 2008) to re-imagine American higher education through the lens of two seemingly disparate notions of
subjectivity—Buddhism and Ubuntu. Each of these tools in the proverbial methodological toolkit directly correlates with the aim of the study and work in tandem to compose (re)thinking as (non)method’s assemblages of knowing. More specifically, the methodological tools being employed within the bricolage deeply explore the manner in which human beings make meaning of themselves and world. In alignment with this study and the theoretical and methodological tenets of bricolage, through textual analysis or hermeneutics I seek to understand human experience, and re-imagine the human experience. In the following paragraphs, we will expound on the benefits, limitations, and potential challenges associated with bricolage, in general, and the trinity of methodological approaches employed for analyzing and interpreting the ideas of this inquiry, which construct a holonic assemblage of knowing.

Kincheloe (2001) argues bricolage is one response to the implosion of social research that no longer fits "neatly into disciplinary drawers" (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 681). He contends, "we must operate in the ruins of the temple, in a postapocalyptic social, cultural, psychological, and educational science where certainty and stability have long departed for parts unknown" (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 681). Within the academy, specifically, traditional data reigns supreme; in fact, an enterprise once focused on the edification of human beings now reduces those same human beings to data points, percentages, and statistics that serve not to edify, but rather dehumanizes (Barnett, 2011). Bricolage seeks to transcend the reductionism of traditional social science research methodology through an understanding and acceptance “that human experience is marked by uncertainties and that order is not always easily established” (Kincheloe, 2004, p. 5). In the Levi-Straussian sense, bricoleurs use their knowledge of various research methodologies, active agency, and understanding of the “complexity of the lived world” (Kincheloe, 2004, p. 2) to tinker with research methods given the educational, political, and
social contexts. “This tinkering is a high-level cognitive process involving construction and reconstruction, contextual diagnosis, negotiation, and readjustment” (Kincheloe, 2004, p. 3).

Kincheloe rightly reminds those employing both the theory and method of bricolage that the task is complex and demands a lifetime effort (Kincheloe, 2001). To avoid reductionism, one must "learn a variety of ways of seeing and interpreting in the pursuit of knowledge" (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 682; Kellner, 1995). In short, we must simply be-do what already comes naturally: (re)thinking. “Thus, bricolage is concerned not only with multiple methods of inquiry, but with diverse theoretical and philosophical notions of the various elements encountered in the research act” (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 682).

It is through this varied, multiliteracies, methodological, theoretical, and philosophical approach to inquiry that as e.e. cummings (1959) proclaims, “now the eyes of [our] eyes are opened,” and new understandings emerge–new ways of seeing, thinking, and being-becoming are illuminated. In strong resonance with (re)thinking as (non)method, as bricoleurs and researchers becoming-bricoleurs (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), Kincheloe (2001) writes:

the limitations of a single method, the discursive structures of one disciplinary approach, what is missed by traditional practices of validation, the historicity of certified modes of knowledge production, the inseparability of knower and known, and the complexity and heterogeneity of all human experience, they understand the necessity of new forms of rigor in the research process. (p. 681)

As the researcher constructs the most useful bricolage, these assumptions guide the study and the selections of the most appropriate tools in the researcher’s methodological toolkit (Kincheloe, 2001). In agreement with Kincheloe (2001), “such diversity frames research orientations as particular socially constructed perspectives not sacrosanct pathways to the truth. All methods are subject to questioning and analysis, especially in light of so many other strategies designed for similar purposes” (p. 686). In other words, methodological diversity yields new modes of
thought and opens the cognitive space to think the once unthinkable, which has the potential to manifest new ontological perspectives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Lester, 1997; Thomas, 1998). With respect to analysis, born of the questioning and perpetual interdisciplinary methodological interrogation are synergistic interpretative perspectives of the artifact(s) (Kincheloe, 2001).

Interdisciplinarity, then, becomes a most important aspect of bricolage. In fact, Kincheloe (2001), in agreement with (re)thinking as (non)method, argues that bricolage operates as a deep form of interdisciplinarity and states, “bricolage is unembarrassed in its effort to rupture particular ways of functioning in the established disciplines of research. One of the best ways to accomplish this goal is to include what might be termed *philosophical research* to the bricolage” (p. 688). A mode of inquiry, philosophical research interrogates the nature of knowledge construction, understanding and subjectivity, and their subsequent effects (Kincheloe, 2005).

Philosophical research or philosophy as method “…provides bricoleurs with the dangerous knowledge of the multivocal results of humans' desire to understand, to know themselves and the world (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 688). In the study of the subjective meaning making of human beings, bricoleurs use their philosophical modes of inquiry to understand that this phenomenological form of information has no analogue in the methods of particular formalist forms of empirical research. Thus in an obvious example, a choice of methods is necessitated by particular epistemological and ontological conditions—epistemological and ontological conditions rarely recognized in monological forms of empirical research (Haggerson, 2000; Lee, 1997). (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 688)

With respect to this study, the three philosophical notions of subjectivity are onto-epistemological in nature and the aspects of bricolage not only allow for the full bubbling up of onto-epistemological insights, but also recognizes the "important lived world political consequences, as they shape the ways we come to view the social cosmos and operate within it" (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 682). Undertaking bricolage is complex, and Kincheloe (2001) argues:
To account for their cognizance of such complexity bricoleurs seek a rigor that alerts them to new ontological insights. In this ontological context, they can no longer accept the status of an object of inquiry as a thing-in-itself. Any social, cultural, psychological, or pedagogical object of inquiry is inseparable from its context, the language used to describe it, its historical situatedness in a larger ongoing process, and the socially and culturally constructed interpretations of meaning(s) as an entity in the world. (p. 682)

It is in this way, the bricouler recognizes and asserts that ontology and epistemology cannot be and are not separate as the old guard of social researchers would have us believe where human inquiry and sense-making are concerned; hence the use of word 'onto-epistemological'. In agreement with Kincheloe (2001), the understanding of the inseparability of ontology from epistemology (and/or vice versa) requires "...bricoleurs [to] devise new forms of rigor, new challenges to other researchers to push the methodological and interpretive envelopes" (p. 688). This understanding of the inseparability of ontology and epistemology allows the bricoleur and (re)thinker to “subvert the finality of the empirical act” (Kincheloe, 2004, p. 6) in a number of ways. First, there is a comprehension of the research process as subjective and inscribed at the level of human experience. Further, through a multilogical approach to inquiry bricoleurs are “emancipated from the tyranny of pre-specified, intractable research procedures” (Kincheloe, 2004, p. 13) thus allowing research methodologies to adapt to the milieu and the research itself to engage in inquiry that “becomes thicker, more insightful…more rigorous” (Kincheloe, 2004, p. 11). Moreover, through the work of Varenne (1996) and in the employment of bricolage, we come to discover:

What is produced is something new, a new form, a hermeneutical historiography or historical hermeneutics. Whatever its name, the methodology could not have been predicted by examining historiography and hermeneutics separately, outside of the context of the historical processes under examination (Varenne, 1996). The possibilities offered by such interdisciplinary synergies are limitless. (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 686)

It is in the use of hermeneutics as a means to explore human meaning that led to the utilization of the tools of hermeneutic phenomenology, critical hermeneutics, and narrative inquiry. We now
seek to explore the limitless possibilities through an exploration of the first tool: hermeneutical phenomenology (Webster & Mertova, 2007; Savin-Baden & Major, 2012; Creswell, 2013).

**Hermeneutic Phenomenology.** Before delving into hermeneutic phenomenology, we will begin with an exploration of the philosophy, assumptions, and limitations of its parent–phenomenology. Phenomenology attempts to uncover the experience of a phenomenon and reveal the commonalities of that experience (Creswell, 2013). Particularly useful to qualitative researchers concerned with exploring and understanding the nature of human experience, phenomenology allows for the investigation of phenomena both internal or outwardly through the analysis and observation of things (objects) and actions and/or interiorly through the analysis of cognition, pictorial artifacts, and emotions (Savin-Baden & Major, 2012). Conversely, phenomenology seeks to reduce individual experience in relation to a phenomenon or an "object' of human experience" (van Manen, 1990, p. 163 as cited in Creswell, 2013, p. 77) to an essence or a universal essence (Savin-Baden & Major, 2012; Creswell, 2013) "a grasp of the very nature of the thing" (van Manen, 1990, p. 177 as cited in Creswell, 2013, p. 76). The reductionist nature of phenomenology presents certain challenges to the study and will be discussed in detail in subsequent sections.

Phenomenology, like bricolage, contains a strong philosophical component (Creswell, 2013). In fact, "...Merleau-Ponty (1962) raised the question, "What is not phenomenology?" (Creswell, 2013, p. 77) and "Husserl was known to call any project currently underway "phenomenology" (Creswell, 2013, p. 77). However, given the reductionist tendencies of the methodology, Creswell (2013) identifies four primary philosophical perspectives of phenomenology:

[1.] A return to the traditional task of philosophy. [He asserts] by the end of the 19th century, philosophy had become limited to exploring a world by empirical means, which
was called "scientism." The return to the traditional task of philosophy existed before philosophy became enamored with empirical science is a return to the Greek conception of philosophy as a search for wisdom.

[2.] A philosophy without presuppositions. Phenomenology's approach is to suspend all judgments about what is real—the "natural attitude"—until they are founded on a more certain basis. This suspension is called "epoche" by Husserl.

[3.] The intentionality of consciousness. This idea that consciousness is always directed toward an object. Reality of an object, then, is inextricably related to one's consciousness of it. Thus reality, according to Husserl, is divided not into subjects and objects, but into the dual Cartesian nature of both subjects and objects as they appear in consciousness.

[4.] The refusal of the subject-object dichotomy. This theme flows naturally from the intentionality of consciousness. The reality of an object is only perceived within the meaning of the experience of an individual.

[5.] An individual writing a phenomenology would be remiss not include some discussion about the philosophical presuppositions of phenomenology along with the methods in this form of inquiry. (Creswell, 2013, pp. 77-78)

Contained within Creswell's (2013) four primary philosophical perspectives of phenomenology are assumptions that problematize the very nature of the philosophical presuppositions of the researcher. More specifically, the philosophical perspectives presented by Creswell (2013) expose a grand limitation and causes one to ponder: Is there a common lived human experience? Is there an essence of humanness or humanity with respect to the phenomenon of life?

Additionally, situating myself conceptually as a critical postmodernist, I question: (1) the centering of the human being as sole meaning maker; and (2) if the human being is center of meaning making, which human beings are constructing the meaning. More specifically, I am skeptical of the notion that the reality of an object is only perceived with the meaning of the experience of the human being and seemingly holds all other living things and objects at the mercy of human experience and interpretation. As a counterbalance, the research of phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty (1964/1998) seemingly channels Buddhist (Hahn, 1999) and Ubuntu (Waghid, 2014; Eze, 2008, 2010, 2011) notions of (post)humanism, focused specifically
on the phenomenology of the body. Merleau-Ponty (1964/1998) argued “that ‘being embodied’ was the main way of understanding the world but he argued that embodiment was not restricted to our own bodies; [rather] we also unite with others and other things” (Baden & Major, 2012, p. 214). Secondly, in parallel with (re)thinking as (non)method, I question the objectification of research through bracketing and hold that all research is subjective; one is incapable of removing one's experiences and/or preconceived notions from the research process (St. Pierre, 2004; P. Hendry, personal communication, January 2014). Hermeneutic phenomenology, in the tradition of Heidegger, provides another tool to loosen the shackles of Cartesian thought (Baden & Major, 2012).

Hermeneutic phenomenology, developed by Heidegger, focuses on "shedding light on the taken for granted experiences that then enable researchers to create meaning and develop understanding" (Savin-Baden & Major, 2012, p. 216). Particularly relevant to the undertaking at hand, van Maren (1990) further expanded Heidegger's definition. van Maren (1990) argued "the purpose of phenomenology is the interpretation of a text or a study in history in order to gain understanding (Savin-Baden & Major, 2012, p. 216). According to Baden and Major (2012), the central component of Heidegger's work "was the hermeneutic circle, whereby the researcher's interpretation move from seeking to understand a particular component of experience to developing a sense of the whole, then back again to examining a further component, in an iterative cycle" (p. 216). Thus enabling the researcher to deeply engage, through self-reflexivity, in the phenomena of interest (Savin-Baden & Major, 2012).

Heidegger having worked with Husserl to establish phenomenology later re-evaluates his position and begins to advocate for a more holistic understanding of humanity. Heidegger, in contrast to Husserl, begins to focus not on individual perception or thought of the world, but
“dasein, the mode of being human” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2012, p. 213-214). In short, Heidegger begins to focus not on comprehending phenomena, but holistically understanding what it means to be human. Additionally, where Husserl advocated for the researcher to bracket or suspend their personal judgments of the world, Heidegger (1927/1962) argued against bracketing and saw “the person and their experiences as coexisting. He saw bracketing as being impossible, as it was not possible to stand outside experience” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2012, p. 214). Reinforcing this incommensurability of the person-experience dichotomy, Savin-Baden and Major (2012) aver:

In phenomenology, philosophy and method are inextricably linked; thus the origins of phenomenology should be traced back to the philosophies of Husserl and later Heidegger. Phenomenology was founded by Husserl (1907/1964), who argued that consciousness was an important concept and proposed the study of lived experience of the life world. Husserl criticized psychology for trying to use objective scientific methods to study human issues. He founded phenomenology on the basis that what needed to be examined was the way people lived in the world, rather than the world being seen as a separate entity from the person. He argued that life world is what individuals experience pre-reflectively, before humans categorize or conceptualize an experience. His arguments to some extent stood against the Cartesian model in which the mind and body were seen as separate and distinct entities. (p. 213)

Critically important to this inquiry, these points reinforce the position that ontology, epistemology, and methodology are not only inextricably linked, but are one and the same; they inter-are (Hahn, 1999). As human beings, our understanding of the world is not divided into the subjective, man-made categorizations turned orthodox truth of the old regime–ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Kincheloe, 2001). However, our being, knowing, doing, and experiencing are rhizomatic (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987)—conducting, producing, and reproducing in an on-going process of iteration—living—that is as natural as breathing. In consonance with (re)thinking as (non)method, our present-past, present-present, and absent present-future are fluid, immanent, inseparable, and interdependent.
In keeping with the bricolage approach (Kincheloe, 2001, Berry & Kincheloe, 2004), the following six hermeneutic phenomenological research activities will work with and against critical hermeneutics (Kincheloe, 2008), and narrative inquiry (Webster & Mertova, 2007; Baden & Major, 2012; Clandinin, 2008; Creswell, 2013; Keats, 2009) to guide the study. van Manen (1990) holds that phenomenological researchers should undertake the following activities:

1. Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commit us to the world;
2. Investigating experience as we live rather than as we conceptualise it;
3. Reflecting on the essential themes which characterise the phenomenon;
4. Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
5. Maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;

In contrast to van Manen (1990), Giorgi (1989) illuminates four core features common across the phenomenological methodological approach. Giorgi (1989) argues "the essences or structures are revealed through use of the imaginative variation" (Savin-Baden & Major, 2012, p. 215). As I (re)think or (re)imagine Western subjectivity and higher education, this point is particularly cogent to the research questions that guide this inquiry.

Additionally, Spiegelberg (1960) drawing unintended inference to Buddhist (Hahn, 1999) thought outlines three steps phenomenological researchers take when engaging in research irrespective of type. He asserts researchers intuit by “experiencing or recalling the phenomenon. [Spiegelberg (1960)] suggests the researcher “‘Hold’ it in your awareness, or live in it, be involved in it; dwell in it or on it” (Baden & Major, 2012, p. 215). Second, phenomenological researchers analyze or “examine the phenomenon, by examining [:] the pieces, parts, in the spatial sense; the episodes and sequences, in the temporal sense; the qualities and dimensions of the phenomenon; settings, environments, surroundings; the prerequisites and consequences in time; the perspective or approaches one can take; cores or foci and fringes or horizons; the
appearing and disappearing of the phenomena; the clarity of the phenomena” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2012, p. 215). The last step, according to Spiegelberg (1960), is “describing: write down your description. Write it as if the reader had never had the experience. Guide them through your intuiting and analyzing. (Savin-Baden & Major, 2012, p. 216). Taking into account Spiegelberg’s (1960) and van Maren’s (1990) emphasis on narrative, it is important to explore the use of narrative inquiry (Webster & Mertova, 2007; Savin-Baden & Major, 2012; Clandinin, 2008; Creswell, 2013; Keats, 2009) as the third tool in the my bricolage toolkit.

**Narrative Inquiry.** Narrative is so deeply interconnected with the human experience that empirical data alone cannot capture these experiences; “human beings think, perceive, imagine and make more choices according to narrative structures” (Sarbin, 1986, p. 8 as cited in Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 3). From ancient times to present day, narrative–text, voice, picture–is used to describe the breadth and depth of human experience and the endeavors of humanity (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Narrative speaks into (in)existence and (un)writes us onto the pages of history. According to Carr (1986) narrative is not concerned with the short-term, rather it “…pertains to longer term or larger-scale sequences of actions, experiences and human events. He argues that action, life, and historical existence are themselves structured narratively, and the concept of narrative is our way of experiencing, acting and living, both as individuals and as communities, and that narrative is our way of being and dealing with time” (Webster and Mertova, 2007, p. 2). Given that “experience happens narratively… [and] should be studied narratively”, narrative or rather the meaningful connections we form in our lives are inseparable from the daily-lived experiences of human beings (Webster & Mertova, 2007). In the ethno- and sagacity philosophic traditions of *Ubuntu* and within the African culture, narrative or storytelling takes on the importance of transmitting cultural wisdom from generation to generation (Eze,
The need for storytelling in the human experience is as basic a need as food, water, and shelter; according to Dyson & Genishi (1994), stories help to make sense of, evaluate, and integrate the tensions inherent in experience: the past with the present, the fictional with the 'real', the official with the unofficial, personal with the professional, the canonical with the different and unexpected. Stories help us transform the present and shape the future for our students and ourselves so that it will be richer or better than the past. (pp. 242-243)

In harmony with Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology (Savin-Baden & Major, 2012), narrative is not objective; rather it is a perceived reconstruction of human experience and therefore makes no claims at ‘truth’ (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Stories, according to Amsterdam and Bruner (2000), “derive their convincing power not from verifiability but from verisimilitude; they will be true enough if they ring true” (p.30) for human beings under their spell. Similarly, I argue mythology–hyperreal truth– becomes more important than facts due to its ability to both captivate and educate. Moreover, narrative allows for the holistic presentation of depth and complexity of human experience, and recognizes temporal elasticity of interpretation and experience (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Keeping all of this in mind, the transformative possibilities of story, of voice and text are of particular interest to this study; hence the utilization of narrative inquiry within the bricolage assemblage.

Narrative inquiry with its foundation in stories of human experience and provides a generative framework for investigating human experience through their stories (Webster & Mertova, 2007). More formally defined, narrative inquiry is a “specific type of qualitative design in which "narrative is understood as spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of event/actions, chronologically connected" (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 17). Resting on the assumption that humans make sense of random events by imposing story structures (Bell, 2002), narrative inquiry endeavors “to capture the 'whole story', whereas other methods tend to
communicate understandings of studied subjects or phenomena at certain points, but frequently omit the important 'intervening' stages (Webster & Mertova, 2007, pp. 3-4). Narrative inquiry requires a depth of analytic examination that goes beyond what is merely written, and unearths the meaning concealed behind and within the words on the page. Narrative as close reading of texts assists the researcher in understanding how participants experience, live, and tell about their world. People construct and understand the world through stories (Bruner, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1988), and as Richardson (1997) asserts, narratives are able to act both as a ‘means of knowing and a method of telling’. (Keats, 2009, p. 58)

Utilizing narrative text to understand the construction of human subjectivity in the notions of Buddhism and Ubuntu is an important component of this (re)thinking engagement. Additionally, I posit, the influence of postmodernism on narrative inquiry is recognized in “the influence of experience and culture on the construction of knowledge” (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 4) and provides the necessary philosophical underpinning to explore the culture(s) that construct knowledge and shape the lives of human beings in their grasp through the analysis of narrative texts.

Narrative texts are written and may include “travel journals, poetry, letters, emails, books, articles, and other such texts. The texts that become important in the research process may be created by the participants, the researcher or other authors” (Keats, 2009, p. 186). Each of these texts tells a story, its own story and aids the researcher in understanding the lived experience of human beings. It is through story–narrative–that human beings come to know and construct the world (Bruner, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1988), which allows narrative the ability to cross the perceived divide, that is narrative texts are able to provide the researcher with “a means of knowing and a method of telling” (Richardson, 1997, p. 58). Turning now to the methodological aspects of narrative inquiry, Webster and Mertova (2007) distinguish narrative
inquiry from the confining concepts and strict adherence to procedure at the foundation of traditional empirical research methodology. Narrative inquiry, then, “does not strive to produce any conclusions of certainty, but aims for its findings to be ‘well grounded’ and ‘supportable’, retaining an emphasis on the linguistic reality of human experience” (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 4). The theoretical nature of the study coupled with the exploration of notions of human subjectivity by (re)thinking with and through various texts commands the repeated emphasis of the latter point (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). The “findings” of the study, if they can be deemed as such, are not finite conclusions rather the inquiry seeks to disrupt or break open the current American higher education metanarrative to expose the field of limitless possibilities in becoming-more human.

Illuminating the analytic perspectives of narrative inquiry, Keats (2009) turns to Lielblich et. al (1998) to describe the four types of interpretive models a researcher would employ to derive meaning from text. They include:

(a) **holistic-content** where story content is considered holistically as the researcher explores both explicit and implicit meaning; (b) **holistic-form** where content is considered in terms of formal aspects of story structure such as plot development over time; (c) **categorical-content** where specific segments of story content are counted and categorized into researcher-defined categories; and (d) **categorical-form** where characteristics of style or language use are counted and categorized into defined categories (e.g., frequency of passive utterances). (Keats, 2008, p. 188)

For the purposes this inquiry, the holonic assemblage of the bricolage will employ the analytical tools of both holistic-content and categorical-content (Keats, 2009). Moreover, utilizing marginalia or notes in the margin similar to traditional coding, the researcher will conduct relational readings or close reading of the multiple texts in search of relationships, linkages, similarities, and disagreements (Keats, 2009; Creswell, 2013). The exploration of intertextual relations allows the “researcher the opportunity to understand how the texts are related and
influence each other” (Bazerman, 2004 as cited in Keats, 2009, p. 191). Arising from relational or intertextual reading, the researcher can identify and notate the themes, patterns, and perspectives that emerge. Finally, the use of multiple texts “opens the possibility for creating new realities of meaning and knowledge” (Keats, 2009, p. 193).

Critical Hermeneutics. In keeping with Creswell (2007), each of the methodological approaches contained within the bricolage assemblage works to uncover human experience and/or the commonality of experience within the biological phenomenon of human life (Savin-Baden & Major, 2012; Keats, 2009; Webster & Mertova, 2007). I counter the reductionist interpretations of hermeneutic phenomenology and narrative inquiry through the utilization of critical hermeneutics (Kincheloe, 2008), which “build[s] bridges between reader and text, text and its producer, historical context and present, and one particular social circumstance and another” (p. 58). Critical hermeneutics holds that knowledge is constructed solely through interpretation; in fact, there is only interpretation (Kincheloe, 2008). Kincheloe argues, research and perception are simply acts of interpretation; “[t]hus, the quest for understanding is a fundamental feature of human existence, an encounter with the unfamiliar always demands the attempt to make meaning, to make sense” (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 57).

Combining the hermeneutic tradition, postmodernism critique, and critical theory, critical hermeneuts problematize the authority of claims found within texts (Kincheloe, 2008). Central to this study is Kincheloe’s (2008) insistence that

[n]o pristine interpretation exists—indeed, no methodology, social or educational theory, or discursive form can claim a privileged position that enables the production of authoritative knowledge. Human beings must always speak/write about the world in terms of something else in the world, ‘in relation to…’ As creatures of the world, we are oriented to it in a way that prevents us from grounding theories and perspectives outside of it. […] In its critical theory-driven context, the purpose of hermeneutical analysis is to develop a form of cultural criticism revealing power dynamics within social and cultural texts. (pp. 57-58)
As with (re)thinking as (non)method, our situatedness in the world greatly affects our perspectives and the thoughts we are able to think. In agreement with Kincheloe (2008), this inquiry is an attempt to make sense of and re-imagine the socio-cultural fix that we now find ourselves in through a dialogue between philosophical texts and an engagement “in the back-and-forth of studying parts” (p. 58). The utilization of critical hermeneutics as methodological tool, argues Kincheloe (2008), “can produce profound insights that lead to transformative action (Coben, 1998; Gadamer, 1989; Goodson, 1997; Kincheloe and Berry, 2004; Mullen, 1999; Peters and Lankshear, 1994)” (p. 58); namely, the re-conceptualization of American higher education, a transformation in human relations, and a robust dialogue on humanness–on what it means to be a human being.

**Method, No Method**

“…[A] moment comes when we realize that our life *is* the path, and we no longer rely merely on the forms of practice. Our action becomes “non-action,” and our practice becomes “non-practice” (Hahn, 1999, p. 122). Each of these holonic assemblages of knowledge resonate deeply with the philosophical assumptions and presuppositions, which undergird my (re)thinking. While I take the time to provide an explanation of the traditional qualitative methodologies that constitute a part-whole of my assemblages of knowing, I continue to maintain that *my method is actually no method at all.* (re)Thinking as (non)method is simply being-thinking; an engagement with ideas and concepts “always under conditions of discontinuity, rupture, and multiplicity” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 16) within the abstract machine of the mind. It is both cognitive and intuitive. Therefore, if you come to this space/time in search of enumerated lists of objectivist procedures that can be replicated by others, you will not find that here. If you come here looking for the positivist words that demonstrate rigor: data,
validity and reliability; they do not reside here. If you come here looking for a discussion of the research instrument; no external instrument exists. I am the researcher, the instrument, and the analytical matrix – thinking and re-thinking, being-becoming, problematizing and (re)producing, connecting and reconnecting all points of knowledge that I embody (known and unknown) with hope in an absent present-future.

Qualitative inquiry, in general, but most especially (re)thinking is what Koro-Ljungberg et al. (2015) call a generous and generative inquiry” (p. 615), which invites others and subaltern to work alongside with the mainstream and alongside “the center” or practices that might be considered normative. It generously welcomes the other and generates spaces for others to express, create, and speak; maybe spaces of displacement and shadow spaces (see Spivak, 1993). It gives until it has nothing else to give and it shares until nothing else can be shared. (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2015, p. 615)

In other words, it is an engagement in (re)thinking with, to borrow language from the mathematical sciences, distributive proprieties. Its impact extends beyond the boundaries of this page or the collection of neurons and glial cells that construct the physicality of our abstract machine–the brain. It alters our very being-becoming, which necessitates a new doing.

(re)Thinking, in agreement with Koro-Ljungberg et al. (2015), asserts:

Any attempts to create streamlined unity through centralized control or “the theory or method policing” would be quite foolish as this unification will ultimately only serve those doing the policing. The desirable and sustained mode of multiplication, a welcome by the machine, could also promote diverse applicability and creativity embedded in many qualitative inquiry processes whereas theoretical or methodological exclusiveness, surveillance, and control may generate homogeneous field and docile scholars within it; scholars who can follow but not lead, scholars who repeat history rather than create or change it. (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2015, p. 617)

This is the result of a tracing: an imitation mutating the once rhizome into root, which has “organized, stabilized, neutralized the multiplicities according to the axes of significance and subjectification belonging to it” (Deleuze & Gauttari, 1987, p. 13). Traditional methodology is a
tracing: “a plane of organization” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 270), a tree–living and growing in the city, its horizontal expansion strangled by cement that demarcates its place in the world, yet its roots burrow deeper, clutching earth for fear of toppling over while its branches grow heavenward teeming with the poisoned lifeblood of a very present-past.

(re)Thinking and other experimental qualitative (non)methodologies, offer Koro-Ljungberg et al. (2015), are:

In comparison, methodological and theoretical extensions, seen as a part of the multiplication process, will continue to challenge scholars to seek and generate new connections across disciplines, traditions, and individuals. A field that is unified and singular is also easily controllable and replaceable. Instead, diverse and unpredictable multiplications of practices and theories can generate energy that might be hard to harness and control both methodologically and onto-epistemologically. (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2015, p. 617)

(re)Thinking as (non)method is a map not a tracing. It is a rhizome, “an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system without a General and without an organizing memory or central automation.[it is] all manner of becomings” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 21). As opposed to the tree metaphor, (re)thinking is the vine—folding, unfolding, curling and elongating, scaling gracefully and randomly up the sides of ruins soon to be overtaken by lush greenery and deceptively delicate appearing vine tentacles reproducing ad infinitum.

(re)Thinking as (non)method is unlimited, multiplicitous, liberated, magnanimous, “a plane of consistency” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 270). To reiterate, the Braidotti (1994)

29 Deleuze and Guattari (1987) describe the plane of organization as “constantly working away at the plane of consistency, always trying to plug the lines of flight, stop or interrupt the movements of deterritorialization, weigh them down, reconstitute forms and subjects in a dimension of depth” (p. 270).
30 “The plane of consistency is the body without organs. Pure relations of speed and slowness between particles imply movements of deterritorialization, just as pure affects imply an enterprise of desubjectification. Moreover, the plane of consistency does not preexist the movements of deterritorialization that unravel it, the lines of flight that draw it and cause it to rise to the surface, the becomings that compose it.” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 270). This is the goal of (re)thinking as method. (also see D&G, 1987, p. 251)
quote that opens this chapter and Hahn’s (1999) contemplation that commences this section, (re)Thinking is no method at all, it is simply life—living and being in active engagement with the world.

**Limitations**

Some scholars may view this approach as a limitation as it does not follow a traditional empirical methodological approach. However, the intent of this original inquiry is to (re)think/re-imagine/reconceptualize the Western subject and higher education through the utilization of the philosophical notions of Buddhism and *Ubuntu*, and as a milieu within which rhizomatic thinking can flourish and lines of flight emerge (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). The holonic assemblages of knowing, which compose my abstract machine–the mind–work with and against, at varying intensities, the colonizing forces of the positivist regime through an engagement of “creative methodological stammering” (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2015, p. 617)—the employment of an array of methodological and epistemological tools to (re)imagine or to (re)think an absent present-future.

**Arriving At a New Plateau**

With no beginning and no end, we now arrive at the middle, at a new plateau—new imaginings, new provocations, new perspectives. Acknowledging that this is not a traditional methodology, I am guided by my experience as, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin asserted, a spiritual being having a human experience. To clarify, (re)thinking is simultaneously an experiential recollection, intuitive knowing, and cognitive recall. In keeping with (re)thinking, the totality of my experiences as a higher education practitioner and as a being-human in relationship with other beings-human, propels me toward new thought-action, into thinking what was once unthinkable. (re)Thinking with Buddhism and *Ubuntu*, offers the possibility of new onto-
epistemological becoming(s); new ways of being-becoming and doing. Mindfulness, an understanding of our mutual subjectivity (intersubjectivity), and dialogue all components of the generative Buddhist and *Ubuntu* philosophy, catalyzes new lines flight, new rhizomatic becomings. (re)Thinking through Buddhism and *Ubuntu*, makes thinkable a once unthinkable absent present-future, where students become more human in the act of being-doing education and where they are not dehumanized by data or physical, emotional, ontological and epistemological violence. (re)Thinking makes possible an absent present-future Being-West, who recognizes beings-human as co-creators of humanity, interdependent, and interconnected with all in the known universe. Imagine the world we would live in if higher education were primarily concerned with being-becoming, becoming-consciousness, becoming-more human, becoming-just society, and becoming-radical love. Imagine higher education as an environment where communalism, dialogue, respect, dignity, and learning over knowledge acquisition thrive (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Kincheloe, 2001, 2004, 2008; Freire, 1970; Eze, 2008, 2010, 2011; Hahn, 1999). This is the absent present-future’s revolutionary becoming (Deleuze, 1990). Transfigured, metamorphosed by *(re)*thinking, we arrive again just as we started on a new plateau burgeoning with new lines of flight, new rhizomatic becomings toward an ever-present absent present-future.
“We are here to awaken from the illusion of our separateness.”

- Thich Nhat Hanh -

“...we are definitely not alone...we don’t form relationships, they form us. We are constituted by webs of interconnection. Relationship comes first, and we emerge as more or less distinct centers within the vast and complex networks that surround us. In this new view, we are noted in the complex web of life. Each of us is a meeting point, a center of convergence, for countless threads of relationship. We are moments in time and locations in space where the universe shows up – literally, as a phenomenon (from the Greek “phainomenon”, ‘to appear’ or ‘to show’). In other words, in this “new story” we emerge as subjects from intricate networks of interrelatedness, from webs of intersubjectivity.”

- Christian de Quincy -

Derrida (1991) proclaims, “This question of the subject and the ‘who’ is at the heart of the most pressing concerns of modern societies” (p. 115). Who is the ‘I’ that we speak? Were we born into the ‘I’ or was the ‘I’ born within us–semiotically reproduced, simultaneously generating and ameliorating; disrupting the peace of simply being? Is the ‘I’ that we think we know truly ever known or is it formed like clay in the perfervid hands of socio-political discourse–unabatedly shaping and molding, folding and breaking us into interpretations unrecognizable from genesis to new genesis? Beginning with Aristotle, revolutionized by Descartes (1996, 1970) and his cogito, romanticized by Rousseau (1953), rationalized by Kant (1929), and reconceptualized by Heidegger (1962), ontological and epistemological notions regarding the subject and nature of subjectivity have dominated Western thought from the Enlightenment to current day (Mansfield, 2000; Costanzo, 2015; Dezhi, 2001). As Nick Mansfield writes, “The focus of the self as the centre both of lived experience and of discernible meaning has become one of–if not the–defining issues of modern and postmodern cultures
[emphasis in original]” (Mansfield, 2000, p. 1). Today, the debate has intensified with the, albeit reductionist, emergence of the “Anti-subjective” (Mansfield, 2000, p. 8) school of thought birthed by German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1889) (1844-1900) and reproduced through the works of Michel Foucault (1979, 1980, 1984), Jacques Derrida (1987, 1991), Judith Butler (1990), and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987) among others (Mansfield, 2000). In resonance with the so-called “anti-subjectivists” and notions postulated by Heidegger, Buddhist and other indigenous thought is becoming recognized as a common thread woven throughout these various theories of anti-subjectivity (Mansfield, 2000; Hanh, 1999; Safran, 2013; O’Sullivan, 2014).

Postmodernism, in critique of modernity, with its skepticism toward grand meta-narratives, emphasis on the power of language in the construction of culture and subjectivity, and commitment to the exploration of difference has ushered in the permeation of ancient Buddhist and indigenous thought within psychoanalytic and social sciences theories allowing the West to fall in pace with Eastern and southern African thought and re-imagine dominant notions of self, human-ness, and humanity in relation to the world/planet we inhabit and in turn inhabits us (Lyotard, 1992; Mansfield, 2000; Natoli & Hutcheon, 1993; Slattery, 2013, Waugh, 1992; Safran, 2013). Writing from a psychoanalytical perspective, Safran (2013) asserts that postmodernity has shifted the field of study from that of the individual as a separate entity to the relational field of self. More specifically, “Human beings are regarded as being fundamentally interpersonal in nature; mind is regarded as composed of relational configurations; and self is regarded as constructed in a relational context” (Safran, 2013, p. 8). Shifting glacially, but shifting nonetheless, notions of subjectivity in postmodernity are beginning to take flight; however, to imagine where we are going, we must understand where we have been.
The subject, notions of subjectivity, or the ‘I’ that I speak and who in turn speaks me, following Derrida’s (1991) assertion, in the West this terrain of self—located at the intersection of the physicality and mental capacity (consciousness), and spirit of the human being—remains much contested. While in the East and southern Africa, the notion of the subject is neither contested nor bound by grounding metaphors; the subject is liberated, fluid, dynamic, blissfully becoming in relationship with all things. The subject in community, or rather in communion, with all things seen and unseen provides the foundation for an intersubjective being-becoming (Hanh, 1999; Eze, 2008, 2012; Forster, 2010; Waghid & Smeyers, 2012; Ramose, 2002). Eastern and southern African cosmologies through the generative onto-epistemologies of Buddhism and *Ubuntu* provide fertile soil from which a new, reconceptualized Western subject will sprout. This chapter will begin at the very beginning with a genealogical exploration and operationalization of the Western ‘subject’ and major modern and postmodern notions of Western subjectivity. Next, this chapter explores Buddhist (Hanh, 1999) and Ubuntuist (Eze, 2008, 2012; Forster, 2010; Waghid & Smeyers, 2012; Ramose, 2002; Menkiti, 1984) notions of intersubjectivity, respectively. Finally, (re)thinking with Buddhism and *Ubuntu*, I will conclude with a reconceptualization of the Western subject as the Being-West.

**The Elusive Subject**

What, who is this elusive subject? “Etymologically, to subject means to be ‘placed (or even thrown) under’. One is always subject to or of something [emphasis in original]” (Mansfield, 2000, p. 3). Mansfield (2000) utilizes the word ‘subject’ to “describe interior life or selfhood, especially as it is theorized in terms of its relationship to gender, power, language, culture and politics, etc” (p. 185). Mansfield (2000) contends that the subject and the self are at times used interchangeably; however, “‘self’ does not capture the sense of social and cultural
entanglement that is implicit in the word ‘subject’: the way our immediate daily life is always
already caught up in complex, political, social, and philosophical—that is, shared–concerns” (p.
3). Therefore, using the word ‘self’ to mean subject belies the very entanglements that construct
‘self,’ if there is such a conception, which is swept up and into in every moment of life
(Mansfield, 2000). “The word subject therefore, proposes that the self is not a separate and
isolated entity, but one that operates at the intersection of general truths and shared principles”—
discourse that we construct and reciprocally constructs (Mansfield, 2000, p. 3). It is precisely this
notion of entanglement, what can be interpreted as a rhizomatic ontology and epistemology
(onto-epistemology or being-knowing), that problematizes the Western humanist notion of
subjectivity and sets us on the path of resonance with both the Buddhist onto-epistemological
notion of subjectivity–interbeing and the Ubuntist intersubjective notion of personhood (Deleuze
Letseka, 2013; Forster, 2010; Waghid & Smeyers, 2011; Imafidon, 2012; Ramose, 2002;
Mnyaka & Motlhabi, 2005). Moreover, the notion of the self as an entanglement (Lather & St.
Pierre, 2013), originating from the work of Karen Barad (2007), de-centers the human, turns
Descartes cogito on its head and recognizes, in the Buddhist perspective, the “impermanence–
interpenetration–insubstantiality” of being (O’Sullivan, 2014, p. 258). Similarly, Ubuntu, the
essence of African ontology, “is diametrically opposed to the Cartesian schema” (Forster, 2010,
p. 6). However, we are getting ahead of ourselves and will come back to this point later in the
discussion. In short, the subject requires linkage to something; it does not exist outside of
relationship (Mansfield, 2000). In the Cartesian sense, God is the floor of being and the subject is
ever linked to that “something outside of it–an idea or principle or the society of other subjects.
To be ‘subject’ insists upon the existence of ‘object’ (Mansfield, 2000; Hanh, 1999). The
‘subject’ has come to define our understanding of and relationship with the world. So, what then is subjectivity? Mansfield (2000) offers:

‘Subjectivity’ refers, therefore, to an abstract or general principle that defines our separation into distinct selves and that encourages us to imagine that, or simply helps us to understand why, our interior lives inevitably seem to involve other people either as objects of need, desire and interest or as necessary sharers of common experience. (p. 3)

The philosophical concept of subjectivity first introduced by Aristotle and furthered by Descartes, Kant, and William James presupposes a ‘subject’ possesses consciousness (feelings, desires, beliefs); a ‘subject’ has agency or holds sway (power) over an object(s); and the object or the truth of the object is determined by the subject. With respect to this inquiry and in agreement with Mansfield (2000), subjectivity can be understood as “primarily an experience [that] remains permanently open to inconsistency, contradictions, and unself-consciousness” (p. 6).

What types of subjects exist? Defining our relation with the world around us, there are innumerable subject positions; however, Mansfield (2000) focuses on four broad categories: the subject of grammar, the politico-legal subject, the philosophical subject, and the subject as human person. For the purposes of the inquiry, we will focus on both the philosophical subject and the subject as human person. The philosophical subject or the ‘I,’ writes Mansfield (2000) “is both the object of analysis and the ground of truth and knowledge” (p. 4). The subject as human person or selfhood avers Mansfield (2000) is the type of subjectivity to which human beings continue to return in an effort to make sense of themselves and the world. He writes:

[W]e remain an intense focus of rich and immediate experience that defies system, logic and order and that goes out into the world in a complex, inconsistent and highly charged way. Sometimes we seek to present this type of subjectivity as simple and unremarkable: we want to show ourselves as normal, ordinary, straightforward. At other times, we long for charisma, risk and celebrity, to make an impression, to be remembered. Usually we live an open-ended yet known[,] measured yet adventurous journey into experience, one we see as generally consistent and purposeful. It is this unfinished yet consistent
subjectivity that we generally understand as our selfhood or personality. (Mansfield, 2000, p. 4)

It is precisely the human being as subject—the double consciousness, the interdependent co-arising, the flow of energy, the knot of physicality, consciousness, and spirit; swept up and transfigured in the rhizomatic ballet of becoming we understand as life—upon which this inquiry is centered (Hanh, 1999; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; O’Sullivan, 2014; Lather & St. Pierre, 2013).

The Western Subject in Modernity: A Brief Genealogy

The historicity of the artistic, political, and intellectual period classified as modernity is varied; however, many historians classify modernity over three phases beginning mid-fifteenth century and lasting well into the twentieth century. Modernity, according to Sim (1999) or philosophical modernity has come to be defined by the enduring legacy of seventeenth century Enlightenment thought located in the works and thinking of Descartes, Kant, Locke, and Bacon. Their influence upon all aspects of philosophy and subsequently every field of study is profound (Sim, 1999). Marked by rationality and reason, the cornerstone of Western thought, the individual instead of God becomes the unit of reality (Kant, 1929). This is a radical notion and complete change from the Aristotelian metaphysical notion, which cosmologically and ontologically posited the wholeness and completeness of the universe and human beings, respectively. Epistemologically, the metaphysical worldview contends knowledge is fixed or rather all the knowledge that will ever exist already exists and that knowledge is supernaturally gifted to living beings (Davis, 2004). Conversely, in the physical worldview of modernity, knowledge is ever changing, always evolving and the subject now “possessed of a free and autonomous individuality that is unique to it, …develops as part of its spontaneous encounter with the world” (Mansfield, 2000, p. 12). Epistemologically, we come to know the world
through observation; namely, rationalism and empiricism. Western thought in modernity, according to Mansfield (2000), where the subject is concerned dominates psychoanalysis; believing the “object of analysis is quantifiable and knowable–in short a real thing with a fixed structure, operating in knowable and predictable patterns” (p. 9). The psychoanalytic view of subjectivity reifies the belief of an individual, autonomous, and knowable subject.

Mansfield (2000), discussing the impact of the Enlightenment and Descartes’ lasting influence, expresses the historically radical ontological and epistemological notions that have undergirded Western thought:

firstly, the image of the self as the ground of all knowledge and experience of the world (*before I am anything, I am I*) and secondly, the self as defined by the rational faculties it can use to order the world (*I make sense*). (Mansfield, 2000, p. 15)

These two thoughts, in a time ruled by God-Omnipotent and therefore unthinkable in the theocratic regime, shook the West in the 1500’s; however, while Descartes was able to epistemologically escape the regime, his ontological position remained static, held captive by tradition and theology (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Mansfield, 2000; Hicks, 2004). Today, we continue to experience the impact of Cartesian thought and are struck nauseous by the persistent shaking of its aftershock, yet strangely comforted by the rhythmic rumble of its reliability.

With respect to theorizing about the ‘subject’ or the Cartesian ‘I,’ the works of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), the late eighteenth century German philosopher, has also left a lasting contribution to Western thought about self and consciousness (Mansfield, 2000). In *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), Kant explains the human ability to first observe, transform the observation into a representation, and then think about the image, which allows human beings to know the world (Mansfield, 2000). Mansfield (2000), interpreting Kant (1929) suggests:

We turn these observations into representations as they enter our minds and become things to think about. They circulate in our minds as images. Each and every
representation a human being makes of the world, according to Kant, from the simplest sensory perception to the most complex formula, is understood to be grounded in the ‘I’ that perceives. Kant writes: ‘it must be possible for the “I think” to accompany all of my representations’ (Kant, 1929, p. 152). (Mansfield, 2000, p. 18)

Mansfield (2000) continues:

Before we perceive anything, something must be there, in place to do the perceiving. We do not open every observation or statement with the phrase ‘I think’, especially when we are merely communicating with ourselves. Yet, although it is unspoken, any dealing with the world is impossible without being challenged through the ‘I’. Furthermore, this ‘I’ at the heart of ‘I think’ is always ‘in all consciousness and the same’ (Kant, 1929, p. 153). (Mansfield, 2000, p. 18)

With the Kantian subject, all experiences of the world are connected to the self, the self that thinks, and all appears to be occurring within and to a single self. Every understanding or relationship with world around us must be entered through the door of human experience or observation with the expectation that “even the most primitive or abstract, must cross the threshold of the thinking ‘I’ (Mansfield, 2000, p. 19). Kant (1929), introducing the concept of the self-conscious, posits:

The thought that the representations given in intuition one and all belong to me, is therefore equivalent to the thought that I unite them in one self-consciousness… I call them one and all my representations, and so apprehend them as constituting one intuition. (p. 154)

The notion of the self-conscious, then becomes critically important in Western understanding of the subject and reinforces the subject-object dichotomy. For Kant, the awareness of self precedes meaning making through observation or experience and unlike the Cartesian cogito is solely identified through thought and not God (Mansfield, 2000; Davis, 2004). In short, before humans can come to understand the world, “first you must think yourself. This self is the feeling of connection or consistency between all your perceptions, the collection point of your thoughts” (Mansfield, 2000, p. 19). Subjectivity, in Kantian philosophy, is only realized through an awareness of the world that passes through or crosses the threshold of the naturally imbued or
predestined ‘I’, which “operates before we discover all the things that make our 'I' separate from everyone else’s” (Mansfield, 2000, p. 19) and not the interiority of representation. Finally, it is important to note, the Kantian subject is not merely an osmotic being, passively allowing messages to flow through its membrane rather the Kantian subject is agentic, active. To state it more succinctly, the Kantian subject “grasps the outside world in a positive act of thought that not only connects it with things, but gives it a strong, unified and purposeful sense of selfhood” (Mansfield, 2000, p. 20). The focus on the individual’s experience and sense making, through the evangelization of Kant’s Cartesian bifurcation, emerges and remains the focus of the human experience (Mansfield, 2000; Davis, 2004).

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), critiquing Descartes and the various bifurcations that evolve directly from Cartesian thought, argues the notion of the human subject is “dependent upon a fixable and self-aware entity…that is the most fundamental form of human experience—indeed, the very ground of the possibility of experience” (Mansfield, 2000, p. 22) fails or refuses to inspect the thought behind the thought. Heidegger (1962) writes:

In the course of this history certain distinctive domains of Being have come into view and have served as the primary guides for subsequent problematics: the ego cogito [I think] of Descartes, the subject, the ‘I’, reason, spirit, person. But all these remain uninterrogated as to their Being and its structure, in accordance with the thoroughgoing way in which the question of Being has been neglected. (p. 44)

Prior to Heidegger (1962), the philosophical dialogue of subjectivity centered the perceiving self, reason, and the human spirit (Mansfield, 2000). Questioning the notion that human beings “may be able to talk about how we experience and know the world, but what does it mean that we exist in the first place?” (Mansfield, 2000, p. 22); Heidegger shifts the Enlightenment dialogue on subjectivity from its epistemological nature to its ontological core and concerns himself with questioning the “the most fundamental aspect of life” (Mansfield, 2000, p. 23): the very nature of
Being (Heidegger, 1962). The mere fact that ‘we are’ is the bedrock of human life, and everything else that structures the human life must proceed it, argues Heidegger (1962).

Turning his attention to the very nature of human Being, Heidegger (1962) begins his theorizing of “Daisen, commonly meaning ‘existence’, but literally being-there (Heidegger, 1962, p. 27). Disrupting the Enlightenment divide of human separate from the world, Heidegger contends that no such separation does or can exist. In resonance with Buddhist subjectivity and Ubuntu personhood, Mansfield (2000) argues, the very essence of Heidegger’s Dasein is constituted by the fact that it is in the world and belongs to it. The world concerns us, and our relationship to it is one of care. We are not aliens enclosed within our fortress-selves, in a world that is absolutely foreign to us. Our experience conjoins us to the world. (Mansfield, 2000, p. 23)

The Enlightenment subject “possessed of a free and autonomous individuality” that is unique and develops as “part of our spontaneous encounter with the world” (Mansfield, 2000, p. 11) in Heidegger’s estimation, is nothing more than an illusion “perpetrated on us by Descartes and the philosophers he influenced” (Mansfield, 2000, p. 11). Today, the seemingly commonsensical Heideggerian notion of human beings as in, of, constructing and simultaneously being constructed by the world literally turned Enlightenment subjectivity on its head and opened up the field of possibility allowing for the reconceptualization of subjectivity altogether (Mansfield, 2000).

Nietzsche’s Node: The Postmodern “Anti-Subjectives”

The reconceptualization of the subject with its nascence in the node of Nietzsche has rhizomatically proliferated into what Mansfield (2000) terms the “Anti-Subjectives” or the theoretical school of thought that holds the idea of the subject and thus the notion of subjectivity is a mere illusory invention of language. Nietzsche’s understanding of human life was not an
aware, thinking person illuminating their way one-encounter at a time guided by morality and discernment. On the contrary, Nietzsche takes up the position that human beings are

the embodiment of a quantum of force called ‘will’. Those with little of this life-force—the herd of the weak—try to constrain those with more—the elite of the strong—by inventing all sorts of moral categories that assert doctrines of guilt and responsibility. (Mansfield, 2000, p. 10)

This Nietzschean notion of will is also problematic because it presupposes intensities of will and causes to question: Are these intensities of will innate? In a poststructuralist read of Nietzsche and indeed the knot of agreement binding the Anti-Subjectivists is the complicity and the imprisonment of language in the construction of the illusion of moral categories and responsibility. We are all constructed by and within the world through discourse, and the subject is not innate, but an invention caught up in power relations (Mansfield, 2000; Foucault, 1979, 1980, 1984).

Michel Foucault, whose work is majorly influenced by Nietzsche, has absorbed the idea of the duplicity of the subject in reality. Subjectivity is an invention used “by dominant systems of social organisation in order to control and manage us” (Mansfield, 2000, p. 10). In agreement with Foucault’s theorizing on power and discourse, Mansfield (2000) asserts, we are browbeaten by education and discourse to believe that division, fixed categories that separate, divide and conquer is the way the world is and should be organized based on socially constructed principles and truths ingrained as gospel truth. The subject, pressed under the powerful thumb of discourse and paralyzed by power (Foucault, 1979, 1980, 1984) is not the embodiment of “the free and spontaneous expression of our interior truth” (Mansfield, 2000, p. 10). In fact, there is no subjectivity at all rather we are subjectified – the victims of subjectification; systematically “led to think about ourselves, so we will police and present ourselves in the correct way, as not insane, criminal, undisciplined, unkempt, perverse or unpredictable” (Mansfield, 2000, p.10).
The subject is an invented normalizing epistemological construct utilized as a mechanism of ontological and epistemological disciplining.

Given the interest of space/time, we will not illuminate the positions of the likes of Derrida, Lacan, Irigaray, Freud, or Kristeva; however, given its strong resonance with the Buddhist perspective, we will briefly discuss the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987). To simply summarize the complexity of Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) notion of self is quite a feat. However, Mansfield (2000) suggests:

To them, the self is merely the collection of point of infinite and random impulses and flows (to use their terms, lines of flight, and machinic assemblages) that overlap and intercut with one another, but that never form any but the most transitory and dynamic correspondence. (Mansfield, 2000, p. 136)

Reducing Buddhism to a philosophical perspective, both Buddhist and DeleuzoGuattarian ontology recognizes the “groundless ground of being” (O'Sullivan, 2014, p. 258). Within this ontological position, the subject-object dichotomy disintegrates; reinforcing this point, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) write:

There is no longer tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author). Rather, an assemblage established connections between certain multiplicities drawn from these orders, so that a book has no sequel nor the world as its object nor one of the several authorities as its subject. In short, we think that one cannot write sufficiently in the nature of a name outside. (p. 23)

In fact, all things are multiplicities, organs without bodies connected in various assemblages, perpetually and rhizomatically becoming—an endless expansion, a constant folding and unfolding (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Instigating the shift from the arborescence31 of Enlightenment thinking, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) usher in a Western era of thinking East;

31 Arborescence, utilizing the metaphor of a tree, refers to the blind acceptance of “hierarchical systems with centers of significance and subjectification… [that] only receives information from…pre-established paths [roots and trunks]” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 16).
that is to say emanating from their conception of rhizomatics, lines of flight, and becoming are the Buddhist principles of interbeing, interconnectedness, insubstantiality, and immanence (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Hanh, 1999; O’Sullivan, 2014).

**Buddhist Subjectivity: Interbeing, Saturated in Emptiness**

The individual is myth; all things are interconnected, endlessly interwoven in an assemblage of relationships in perpetual process (Hanh, 1999). More importantly, the nature of reality is emptiness, no static essence and not existing outside the existence of every thing else (Hanh, 1999). Emptiness does not imply lack, but complete fullness, the fullness of everything. Emptiness is the complete recognition of interdependence; that there is no division between you-I, there is no ‘and’–we are one-same. In fact, we are the cosmos, the trees, the sun and moon–where one begins and one ends is but an illusion. We “inter-are”; “interbeing” or non-self is Buddhist subjectivity (Hanh, 1999, p. 125).

Waldron (2003), utilizing both evolutionary science and Buddhism to understand the afflictions of self-identity or subjectivity, argues that the utilization of both science and Buddhism to understand the misguided formation of human identity or the human condition is due to Western thought finding commonality among the notion of traditional Buddhism (Waldron, 2003). He writes:

> There is a growing consensus that we may understand ourselves and our world more deeply and fully if we conceive of things in terms of interconnected patterns of relationship rather than as reified entities existing somehow independently of their own developmental history, their internally differentiated processes or their enabling conditions. (Waldron, 2003, p. 146)

In keeping with Harvey (2011), Waldron (2003) thinking-West alludes to the idea that all things are interconnected as a new discovery or needing Western approval, and fails to recognize their origins lay in ancient Eastern and African ontologies. At any rate, Waldron (2003) through
traditional Indian Buddhist perspectives attempts to understand or make sense of the human condition.

Waldron (2003) asserts Western “thinking in terms of unchanging essences, entities, and identities deeply misconstrues the human condition” (p. 146) and leads to human suffering and evil. However, reinforcing the rhizomatic nature of self (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), the Buddhist perspective affirms:

1. that all “conditioned phenomena” (saũskṛta-dharma) are radically dependent (pratītya-samutpāda) and hence lack any fixed or unchanging “essence” (svabhāva);
2. that what we are, rather, are assemblages of dynamic yet wholly conditioned “constructs” (saũskāra) that have been painstakingly carved out (upādāna) of these contingent dependent relationships; 3. that we tend to construe these assembled constructs as substantial “selves” or fixed identities (ātman); 4. that in our efforts to fashion and secure such an “identity” we actively ignore and attempt to counteract its contingent, constructed nature; and, finally, 5. that these efforts effectively channel human activities (karma) into the repetitive behavioral patterns that actually bring about more evil and suffering. These activities, in short, represent misguided and futile efforts to deny our dependence, to counteract our impermanence and to attain lasting security for this putative, substantial “self”—attempts, as the Buddhists would say, to “turn reality on its head.” (Waldron, 2013, p. 146)

Essentially, instead of recognizing ourselves as “bodies without organs” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 4) and “assemblages” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 23), human beings have attached themselves to the idea or sense that their identity is fixed, “unitary, autonomous entit[ies], independent and isolated from the dynamically changing and contingent world around us” (Waldron, 2003, p. 146). This unyielding attachment to self in an effort to counteract our impermanence (natural death) is the cause of our suffering (Hanh, 1999; Waldron, 2003).

In agreement with Deleuze and Guattari (1987) [D&G], the Buddhist perspective of self holds that we are ever-changing conglomerates of processes (skandha) [“molecular” (p. 34) and “rhizomatic” (p. 23)] formed in self-organizing patterns that are ever open [“assemblages” (p. 156)], like all organic processes, to change, growth and decay based
upon the natural functions of assimilation, interpenetration and dissolution [“organs without bodies” (p. 4)]. (Waldron, 2003, p. 147)

Identity, then, in the Buddhist perspective is constructed through the affliction of the “three poisons” (Waldron, 2003, p. 147): aggression, ignorance, and attachment. Human beings poisoned at birth with these afflictions, much like the original sin concept in Christianity, cause their own suffering through their attempts to sustain the discursively constructed ‘self’ (Waldron, 2003). Further, Buddha’s teaching on “The Two Truths” (Hanh, 1999, p. 121), confirms “suffering is not objective [, but]…depends largely on the way you perceive” (Hanh, 1999, p. 123). Affirming the Buddhist onto-epistemological notion of interbeing, Hanh (1999) writes, “With the eyes of interbeing, we can always reconcile the Two Truths. When we see, comprehend, and touch the nature of interbeing, we see the Buddha” (p. 123). Further, taken from Ekottara Agama 18, “this verse (gatha) was spoken by the Buddha shortly before his death:

>All conditioned things are impermanent.
They are phenomena, subject to birth and death.
When birth and death no longer are,
the complete silencing is joy. (Hanh, 1999, p. 123)

Ignorant or wrong perception, then, in Buddhist philosophy causes suffering (Waldron, 2003; Hanh, 1999). Perceiving oneself as subject and that outside of self as object is a false perception or “eye-consciousness” (Ñāṇamoli 1995, 1134, M III 285 as cited in Waldron, 2003, p. 151) and fails to recognize the nature of interbeing (Hanh, 1999).

Affirming the necessity of “Right View” (Hanh, 1999, p. 51), Hanh (1999) argues the notion of self or self as subject is the result of false perception; he writes:

To perceive always means to perceive something. We believe that the object of our perception is outside the subject, but that it is not correct. When we perceive the moon, the moon is in us. When we smile at our friend, our friend is also us, because she is the object of our perception.
When we perceive a mountain, the mountain is the object of our perception. When we perceive the moon, the moon is the object of our perception. When we say, “I can see my consciousness in the flower,” it means we can see the cloud, the sunshine, the earth, and the minerals in it. But how can we see our consciousness in a flower? This flower is our consciousness. It is the object of our perception. It is our perception. To perceive means to perceive something. Perception means the coming into existence of the perceiver and the perceived. The flower that we are looking at is part of our consciousness. The idea that our consciousness is outside the flower has to be removed. It is impossible to have a subject without an object. It is impossible to remove one and retain the other.

…Our perceptions carry with them all the errors of subjectivity. (Hanh, 1999, p. 53)

Therefore, the insight of Right View liberates us from suffering, and from the constrictions of space/time. Right View allows us to awaken from the illusion that we are autonomous, static entities.

Keeping the limitations of language in mind and the realization that Buddhism is devoid of such subjective value judgments, Hanh (1999) and Waldron (2003) both contend within Buddhist thought the Western notion of subjectivity is viewed as wrong viewing and wrong thinking. Realizing the impermanence of all formations, we come to understand that we “inter-are” striking the notion of self for “inter-being, non-self” (Hanh, 1993, p. 125). In harmony, Waldron (2003) asserts, “Both the distinction between self and non-self and their interdependence are therefore not only logical, but ontological as well, for they are intrinsic to the notion of “self” identity from its very inception” (p. 157). Subjectivity is but an illusion, the result of ignorant perception, failure of interdependent recognition and need for self-protection, permanence, and the accumulation of a priori biological evolutionary karma (Hanh, 1999; Waldron, 2003).

**From Evangelical Monist to Inter-Multiplicities**

Releasing the West from its stagnancy and unleashing the kinetic energy of the Universe, Buddhism in resonance with the postmodern understanding of subjectivity, contains within its
onto-epistemological web the ability to rid contemporary culture of the individualistic and atomistic perspective that has come to dominate every fiber of our Western dominated, global culture (Slattery, 2013). Within the field of psychoanalytics and the social sciences, the postmodern turn has been accompanied by an understanding of knowledge as human constructed; the constructivist epistemological position asserts “reality is intrinsically ambiguous and is given form only through our interpretation of it” (Safran, 2013, pp. 8-9). Consistent with Buddhist philosophy, the constructivist epistemology within psychoanalysis recognizes the subjective, positional nature of knowledge (Safran, 2013; Slattery, 2013). Additionally, the postmodern coalescing with Buddhism is implicated in the “shift toward viewing the self as multiple rather than unitary” (p. 9)–as a multiplicity (Hanh, 1999; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). In the tradition of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, postmodern thought challenges traditional notions of power and authority (Mansfield, 2000; Safran, 2013). Constructing is an endless hermeneutic engagement, which gives way to an infinite number of meanings over modernity’s conception of universal truth (Safran, 2013; Creswell, 2013).

Buddhism and other indigenous onto-epistemologies, knowingly or unknowingly, has released all things from the shackles of universal truth and chains of knowledge exposing the “fertile ground of pure creativity and freedom” (Chopra, 1994, p. 86). The Western obsession with truth, knowledge, and delimiting categorization is actually an attachment to the known. And what’s the known? The known is our past. The known is nothing other than the prison of past conditioning. There’s no evolution in that – absolutely none at all. And when there is no evolution, there is stagnation, entropy, disorder, and decay.

Uncertainty, on the other hand, is the fertile ground of pure creativity and freedom. Uncertainty means stepping into the unknown in every moment of our existence. The unknown is the field of all possibilities, ever fresh, ever new, always open to the creation of new manifestations. (Chopra, 1994, pp. 86-87)
Haunted by the original sin of Adam and Eve, the dominant Judeo-Christian West’s need to eat from every tree of knowledge has impeded the growth and poisoned the once fertile ground of a world interconnected and limitless (P. Hendry, personal communication, April 21, 2015).

All is not lost, nothing is ever lost nor found; however, in the Buddhist tradition meditation offers a way toward heightened awareness (Hanh, 1999). Buddha offers the practice of meditation, that is, setting oneself apart to develop the interior life. However, Hanh (1999) contends that simply living can be/is meditation. It is in the absolute mundanity of life that we come to understand the wonder of the world. In the Deleuzian sense, “Buddhism provides instruction on how to access–and in a sense determine–this groundless ground of our being: meditation for example, that allows for a contact with an infinite potentiality that lies behind our habitual, and finite being…” (O’Sullivan, 2014, p. 259). Meditation cultivates awareness and provides insight into the multiplicitous interconnectedness of our being. It is through the practice of meditation and ethical living that we come to truly experience the onto-epistemological nature of Buddhist subjectivity (Hanh, 1999).

The evangelical monist, believers of a unitary self, continue to hold tightly to the belief of self as stable and cohesive (Safran, 2013). However, the tide is turning; self-multiplicity, argues Safran (2013) “has more potential than the unitary self” (p. 10) and liberates us. Buddhism’s onto-epistemological notion of subjectivity (non-self) attempts to liberate and alleviate suffering in praxis. The way of the Noble Eightfold Path: Right View, Right Thinking, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Diligence, Right Concentration, and Right Livelihood–provides not a departure from, but a return to frontiers long forgotten (Hanh, 1999). The self as rhizomatic, fluid, dynamic, ever changing deeply interconnected and inter-being with all in the known universe revolutionizes and reconceptualizes the very notion of East/West, death/life,
minority/majority, and subject/object. More importantly, the Buddhist notion of self commingled with the southern African philosophical concept of *Ubuntu* can turn the giants of Western subjectivity and education on their head (Hanh, 1999; Eze, 2010). We now turn to a discussion of subjectivity or personhood within an Ubuntuist or southern African worldview.

**Ubuntu: A Relational Ontology and Intersubjective Alchemy of Personhood**

Intersubjectivity, from an African perspective, maintains a person becomes more human and may only grow into the fullness of their humanity through and in relationship–active engagement–with other persons (Eze, 2008; Forster, 2010). As Tutu (2004) reminds in Chapter 2, “*Ubuntu* does not say, ‘I think, therefore I am.’ It says rather: ‘I am human because I belong. I participate. I share’” (p. 27). Southern Africa remains deeply entrenched in tribal or communal worldview (Eze, 2012; Kochalumchuvattil, 2010). Much like Buddhism (Hanh, 1999), the notions of interdependence, inter-being, and communalism are the very fibers that constitute the fabric of African society. The philosophical construct of *Ubuntu* and *ubuntu* as an ethic of which an African’s being in the universe is “inseparably anchored upon” (Ramose, 2002, p. 230) is a way of life that “has for many centuries sustained the African communities in South Africa, in particular, and in Africa as a whole” (Mnyaka & Motlhabi, 2005, p. 215). Letseka (2013) argues, “*Ubuntu* is a normative concept (a moral theory), a humane notion, and a potential public policy” (p. 351). Morality within Africa, according to Letseka (2013), is that which evolves from the process of living and is grounded in the context of communal life” (Verhoef & Michel, 1997, p. 394 as cited in Letseka, 2013, p. 352). To reinforce the point that morality is born of communal living, Menkiti (2004) argues African morality “demands a point of view best described as one of beingness-with others” (p. 324). Moreover, the expression “*Umuntu ngumntu ngbany’ abantu* (Xhosa)” (Mnyaka & Motlhabi, 2005, p. 218), which is translated to mean ‘a person is a person
through other people’ serves as the foundation of the notion of personhood within an

Ubuntugogical worldview. Mnyandu (1997) reminds:

ubantu is not merely positive human qualities, but the very human essence itself, which “lures” and enables human beings to become abantu or humanised beings, living in daily self-expressive works of love and efforts to create harmonious relationships in the community and the world beyond. (p. 81)

Indeed, in addition to the description of ubuntu offered by Mnyandu (1997), the very definition of ubuntu on which this inquiry is centered proffered by Eze (2010) speaks to the alchemy of personhood in community and communion with others. One is not born a person, but rather becomes human person in community with others (Eze, 2012; Menkiti, 1984; Letseka, 2013; Forster, 2010; Waghid & Smeyers, 2011; Imafidon, 2012; Ramose, 2002; Mnyaka & Motlhabi, 2005). In fact, Gade (2012) argues that some Black South Africans did not consider Whites persons in apartheid South Africa because they did not inhabit the values of ubuntu. As a reminder, Eze’s (2010) understanding of Ubuntu, which guides this inquiry states:

‘A person is a person through other people’ strikes an affirmation of one’s humanity through recognition of an ‘other’ in his or her uniqueness and difference. It is a demand for a creative intersubjective formation in which the ‘other’ becomes a mirror (but only a mirror) for my subjectivity. This idealism suggests to us that humanity is not embedded in my person solely as an individual; my humanity is co-substantively bestowed upon the other and me. Humanity is a quality we owe to each other. We create each other and need to sustain this otherness creation. And if we belong to each other, we participate in our creations: we are because you are, and since you are, definitely I am. The ‘I am’ is not a rigid subject, but a dynamic self-constitution dependent on this otherness creation of relation and distance. (Eze, 2010, p. 190-191)

Ubuntu is not solely an accounting of human action, but finds its core in the ontological–in being. In fact, it is an ontological and axiological philosophy of life that seeks to first contribute to the well-being of others and community. To reiterate, within the southern African worldview, one that is born a human does not and cannot become a human being or human person alone (Eze, 2010, 2008, 2014; Menkiti, 1984; Letseka, 2013; Forster, 2010; Waghid & Smeyers, 2011;
Imafidon, 2012; Ramose, 2002; Mnyaka & Motlhabi, 2005). More specifically, African
humanity or humanness

is not something that I can acquire or develop by my own isolated power. I can only
exercise or fulfill my humanity as long as I remain in touch with others for it is they who
empower me…”remaining in touch” is not just a sociological notion but a moral one. It
implies certain chosen attitudes on my part and qualities of relationship with others.
(Hartin, Decock, & Connor, 1991, p. 189)

Within the culture and philosophy of *Ubuntu*, personhood is an intersubjective\(^{32}\) formation, that

is, a shared ontological process of personhood—of being-becoming.

**Intersubjective Being-becoming: A Contemporaneous Formation**

If personhood is not given at birth, then what constitutes a person? First, it must be stated
explicitly that *Ubuntu* is grounded in a pre-Enlightenment (non-Western) understanding of
personhood or subjectivity, that is, the subject is understood as communal, a holon–part/whole of
society (Letseka, 2013; Foucault, 1975; Forster, 2010). Eze (2008) reiterates this point with a
reminder that the “term ‘person’ must be understood differently from the enlightenment
codification of a person as essentially rational, where ‘rationalism’ remains the sole criterion for
subjectivity” (p. 387). He argues that while rationality is presupposed, the more critical element
of subjectivity within an *Ubuntu* onto-epistemological framework is an understanding of
personhood as a dialogical engagement with and in community (Eze, 2008). A person is
incomplete without other persons and only in community is one able to recognize their humanity
(Eze, 2008; Mnyaka & Motlhabi, 2005). This point and understanding of subjectivity within a
southern African worldview is often misunderstood as the flourishing of community at the
expense of the individual, which is not the case. Attempting to enhance our understanding of
African personhood, Ramose (1999) writes:

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\(^{32}\) Eugene de Quincey (2005) describes intersubjectivity as “knowing through relationship – a form of
non-senory, non-linguistic connection through ‘presence’ and ‘meaning’, rather than through mechanism
or exchanges of energy…intersubjectivity [is]…‘consciousness as communion’” (p. 2).

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The African concept of a person as wholeness does not deny human individuality as an ontological fact, as an analytic finitude, but ascribes ontological primacy to the community through which the human individual comes to know both themselves and the world around them. (p. 79)

One cannot exist nor obtain their humanity outside of community. In essence, Ramose (1999) regards both the individual and the community as a holon—a part/whole—that is, a whole in one context and a part in another (Forster, 2010). In agreement with Eze (2008), “the community in my view, is not prior to the individual and the latter does not pre-exist the community. The individual and the community are not radically opposed in the sense of priority but engaged in a contemporaneous formation” (p. 386). One is not lost at the expense of the other, but each are entangled and flourish (or perish) together.

According to Wiredu (1992) there is a descriptive and a normative African conception of a person, that is, an ontological and a social conception. The ontological or descriptive conception of southern African personhood includes: “okra—the life principle and source of human dignity and destiny, sunsum (the personality or charisma principle), and mogya (the blood or kinship principle)” (Onah, 2002, p. 75). Similarly, in the Asante tradition, Appiah (2004) writes:

…a person consists of a body (nipadua) made from the blood of the mother (the mogya); an individual spirit, the sunsum, which is the main bearer of ones personality; and a third entity, the okra. The sunsum derives from the father at conception. The okra, a sort of life force that departs from the body only at a person’s last breath; is sometimes as with the Greeks and the Hebrews, identified with breath; and is often said to be sent to a person at birth, as the bearer of ones nkrabea, or destiny from Nyame. The sunsum, unlike the okra, may leave the body during life and does so, for example, in sleep, dreams being thought to be the perceptions of a person’s sunsum on its nightly peregrinations… (p. 28)

Reducing the descriptive conception of personhood to Western vernacular, a person is a tripartite intermingling of mind, body, and soul (spirit).
The normative African conception of a person holds that one is not born with personhood rather a person’s humanity is acquired through and in social intercourse (Eze, 2008). Imafidon (2012) posits, “a person is not just any human being, but one who has attained the status of a responsible member of society” (p. 7). Again, unlike the Western conception of the subject, the African subject is a Being communal. To reinforce this point, Mbiti (1969) writes:

In traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes his existence to other people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply part of the whole. The community must therefore make, create, or produce the individual; for the individual depends on the corporate group...whatever happens to the individual happens to whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say, “I am, because we are; and since we are therefore I am.” This is the cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man [emphasis added]. (p. 108-109)

While Mbiti’s communalist notion of personhood or humanity strikes a cord with other Ubuntu philosophers and researchers, others (Eze, 2008; Forster, 2010; Imafidon, 2012) take issue with his promotion of a sociocentric view of personhood, which appears to sacrifice the individual for the sake of the community or whole.

In agreement with Mbiti (1969) and Menkiti (1984), Eze (2008) concurs that an individual’s subjective formation is a dependent, communal “discursive formation” (p. 388). However, Eze (2008) and Imafidon (2012) argue that a radical communitarian notion of subjective formation must be problematized. Eze (2008) offers:

In my view, the identity or subjectivity of the individual and community are mutually constitutive and hence none is supreme...In advancing the good of community, the individual’s good is concomitantly advanced precisely because the community’s and individual’s goods are not radically opposed but interwoven. The community is a guarantor or my subjectivity, whereas I guarantee the community’s survival by advancing its constitutive goods, knowing that if the community hurts, it is the individual that hurts. (p. 388)

The dichotomy of individual and community is a permeable, if not invisible, barrier. The individual and community relationship is symbiotic—each creating and maintaining the other.
As Shutte (2001) reinforces, “the community is not opposed to the individual nor does it simply swallow the individual up; it enables each individual to become a unique center of shared life” (p. 9). More to the point, one’s humanity is only realized through recognition of the humanity of the Other. This intersubjective relationship, through recognition, “preserves the other in her otherness, in her uniqueness, without letting her slip into the distance” (Louw, 2001, pp. 10-11). One’s place of belonging and being-becoming are engaged in a web of interconnection, of discursive engagement. *Ubuntu* holds that personhood or one’s humanity is born through, within, and between the interactions of self with the various nested holarchies of the Other—individuals, community, and society writ large.

**A New Perspective**

Forster (2010) argues the southern African ethic of *ubuntu* with respect to ontological being and identity has the potential to add a new perspective to what it means to be a human person in relationship with other human persons, which run counter to science and epistemologically dominated approaches to being-human. In keeping with Derrida’s assertion at the opening of the chapter, Forster (2010) agrees the “question ‘who am I?’ is fundamental to human existence” (p. 2). Moreover, he asserts subjectivity or the ability to know one’s place in the world is central to our wellbeing as beings-human. To put it differently, “ontologically, it shapes the image we have of ourselves, as well as our relation to the others, and ultimately informs our understanding of the place we understand ourselves to occupy within the whole Kosmos” (Forster, 2010, p. 2). The intermingling of Buddhist and Ubuntist perspectives regarding relational ontology provides the energy necessary to wake us from the illusion that we are separate (Hanh, 1999).
Forster (2010), indicting postmodernism, suggests where one once held a firm foundation with regard to questions of identity and subjectivity, they are now uncertain. To illustrate his point, Forster (2010) utilizes a quote from JRR Tolkien’s cinematic version of *Lord of the Rings*, “The world is changed. I feel it in the water. I feel it in the earth. I smell it in the air. Much that once was, is lost, for none now live who remember it” (Forster, 2010, p. 2). As a postmodernist, I applaud postmodernism’s certain uncertainty, that is, its ability to question and problematize once taken for granted notions and maintain a fluidity of thought on all things (un)thinkable. The notion of subjectivity, in the wake of modernity, “One cannot say ‘I am …’ without the necessity of qualifying that by saying ‘but, I am also…’ The rigid categories of modernity simply fail to take into account the richness of diversity and experience that comprise the rich tapestry of contributing factors that shape our individual and collective identity” (Forster, 2010, p. 2).

Postmodernism, as a challenge to the foundationalism of Enlightenment thinking, catalyzes a rethinking of truth and rationality. In agreement with the (non)methodological approach of the this inquiry, John R. Franke reminds:

This rethinking has resulted not in irrationality, as is often claimed by less informed critics of postmodern thought, but rather in numerous redescriptions and proposals concerning the understanding of rationality and knowledge. These postmodern ideas produce a more inherently self-critical view of knowledge than modernity. (Forster, 2010, p. 2)

Within this paradigm, identity is no longer an easily verifiable anything and it is no longer acceptable to simply accept knowledge as truth. Moreover, everything in the epistemological strata *must* be questioned and the ontological strata uncovered.
Resonance with Buddhist Teaching

Forster (2010) via Richards’ (2002) exploration of the work of Ray Kurzweil,33 poses a central question: “Am I the stuff in my brain and body?” (p. 42 as cited in Forster, 2010, p. 2). In direct opposition to the Cartesian cogito, Kurzweil makes two observations to debunk the once taken for granted notion of subjectivity (Forster, 2010). First, borrowing from quantum physics, he illuminates the common misconceptions of permanence and physicality. More specifically, Kurzweil writes: “Consider the particles making up my body and brain are constantly changing. We are not all permanent collections of particles” (Richard, 2002, p. 42 as cited in Forster, 2010, p. 3). Kurzweil’s assertion of the perpetually changing nature of material or physical matter resonates deeply with the Buddhist and DeleuzoGuattarian notions of impermanence (Forster, 2010; Hanh, 1999; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). More specifically, the work of quantum physicist David Bohm (1980) has demonstrated the rhizomatic nature of reality or rather that “physical reality is an ever-changing movement of constituent elements that we understand to make up physical matter” (Forster, 2010, p. 3), which Bohm (1980) terms “holomovement” (p. 185). Again, counter to a Cartesian or Newtonian worldview, a Bohm (1980) holds “that reality is a dynamic whole in a constant state of change; an explication of the undivided whole that is in a perpetual state of flux” (Bohm, 1980, p. 185). This is a redistribution of the impermanence and insubstantiality of Buddhist ontology (Hanh, 1999).

Additionally, the essence of interbeing (Hanh, 1999) is found in Shutte’s (2004) conception of African personhood. Southern Africans understand, he writes,

self and other as co-existing, each in the other in the sense of being identified with each other. The fundamental human reality must be seen as a field of personal energy in which each individual emerges as a distinct pole or focus. The field of life is the same in each; in each it is their humanity. All persons form a single person, not as part for a whole, but

33 Kurzweil is an American futurist, transhumanist, computer scientist, and author (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ray_Kurzweil, n.d.)
as friends draw their life and character from the spirit of a common friend. They have a common identity. (Shutte, 2004, pp. 52-53)

We–each of us–are a mirror of the Other. Similarly, equating Ubuntu with Hanh’s (1999) conception of interbeing, Green (2004) writes, “We belong in a bundle of life. My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up with others. For Buddhist, this is what Thich Nhat Hanh refers to as ‘interbeing’” (p. 87). Green (2004) continues, “Interbeing, or ubuntu, is the human condition” (p. 87). We share a common humanity, which makes us always already responsible for one another (Waghid, 2014). This is akin to the Buddhist notion of immanence—the nonduality of being and the DeleuzoGuattarian (1987) notion of existing on a plane of immanence.

To further emphasize the misconception of a static self and reinforce the notion of impermanence, Kurzweil (2004) writes:

The cells in our bodies turn over at different rates, but the particles (e.g. atoms and molecules) that comprise our cells are exchanged at a very rapid rate. I am just not the same collection of particles that I was even a month ago. It is the pattern of matter and energy that are semipermanent (that is, changing only gradually), but our actual content is changing constantly, and very quickly. We are like the pattern that water makes in a stream. The rushing water around a formation of rocks makes a particular, unique pattern. This pattern may remain relatively unchanged for hours, even years. Of course the actual material constituting the pattern – the water – is replaced in milliseconds. The same is true for Ray Kurzweil. Like the water in a stream, my particles are constantly changing, but the pattern that people recognize as Ray has a reasonable level of continuity. This argues that we should not associate our fundamental identity with a specific set of particles but rather the matter and energy that we represent. (p. 404)

Kurzweil (2004), in agreement with Deleuze and Guattari (1987), contends that we are in fact not our bodies, but rather a DeleuzoGuattarian ‘Body without Organs (BwO)’, which “is not a dead body, but a living body all the more alive and teeming…a body populated by multiplicities” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 3) existing on a plane of immanence. What makes us who we are is not the physical, not our bodies, but something much deeper—our consciousness—hidden in the ontological strata (Hanh, 1999; Forster, 2010; Kurzweil, 2004).
Necessity of A New Paradigm

Forster (2010) contends identity and subjectivity are generally analyzed through one of two paradigms: objective and subjective approaches. The subjective analytical approach seeks to validate identity and subjectivity at the level of the individual via psychology and spirituality (Forster, 2010). The objectivist analytical approach, through observation of the subject, explores the manner in which an individual constructs their subjectivity given their particular environmental influences (Forster, 2010). While each of these analytical categories surmise the two dominant analytical paradigms, they fail in the wake of modernity and the certain uncertainty of postmodernism. More specifically, they both rely on the foundationalism of Enlightenment thinking, which has constructed certain knowledges as truth. In the postmodern age, “it can no longer be assumed that persons understand and attach the same meaning to what a certain discipline, or community, or faith, considers unquestionably true” (Forster, 2010, p. 4). The perturbation of these once taken-for-granted notions requires a new paradigm through which we reconceptualize the Western subject into what I term the Being-West.

A generous ontology. In agreement with Forster (2010), what is not needed is “a new set of incontestable foundational truths relating to [subjectivity], but rather, a more generous ontology!” (p. 4). What is a generous ontology? Forster (2010) states:

By this I mean an ontology that is open enough to learn from both objective and subjective discoveries, yet is not limited by the truths of these discoveries. Rather a generous ontology recognizes that truth is neither static, nor absolute and as such, identity is developmental and complexly related to aspects of being that are not only subjectively experienced or objectively observed. (p. 4)

A generous ontology, much like (re)thinking as (non)method, requires active engagement in and with the reality of being human. In other words, it requires every being-human to be in relationship with one another and actively engaged in the dance of life. Being implies motion,
action, and relationship; it is not passive, but rheomodic (Ramose, 2002; Forster, 2010). More succinctly, like being relationships

are living, dynamic, fluid and constantly changing. A relationship cannot be fundamentally ‘characterised’ or quantified, neither can it be wholly experienced or explained. Relationships require ‘generous’ discoveries and a constant interpretation to glean elements of truth – truths that may change from moment to moment. (Forster, 2010, p. 4)

A generous ontology has no end, but rather produces further provocation, new thoughts, more questions, new ontological perspectives, and alters one’s very consciousness or being-in-the-world. It is with Forster’s (2010) conception of a generous ontology in mind that I begin the task (what can be a lifelong undertaking) of (re)conceptualizing the Western subject through the generous onto-epistemologies of Buddhism and Ubuntu.

The Being-West

Mansfield (2000) elucidates the ‘self’ does not capture the sense of socio-cultural and political entanglement of which the concept of subject is pregnant. Conversely, I argue the notion of the subject does not capture the socio-politico-philoso-cosmological entanglement that comprises the concept of being. Therefore, I am retiring the use of the notion of the subject and resurrecting the long abandoned metaphysical and ontic conception of human as Being—as being-human. As Setiloane (1986) offers within an Ubuntuist cosmology “…the essence of being is participation in which humans are always interlocked with one another…the human being is not only a ‘vital force’, but a more ‘more vital force’ in participation” (p. 14). The Being-West reimagines the notion of self as interconnected always and in all ways to all things seen and unseen, material and immaterial. The Being-West is a bundle of intensities, a sacred interweaving, a body without organs mutually becoming through the linkage of assemblages...
always already caught up in a process of folding and unfolding, creation and dissolution (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Waldron, 2003; Hanh, 1999; Forster, 2010).

Jean Luc Nancy posed the following question to Derrida: “Who comes after the subject?” (Derrida, 1991, p. 96). This is indeed the question of our time, which Heidegger and Lacan both attempt to answer in their own way through a metaphysical formulation (Heidegger, 1962) and a liquidation of the subject, respectively (Derrida, 1991). I proffer, the Being-West is in a sense both a return to the pre-Enlightenment subject and an evolution proceeding from the Enlightenment subject. The Being-West disintegrates Descartes *ego cogito*, and answers the call of being—that is, answers the powerful and strange yet familiar call of itself as a Being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1962; Courtine, 1991). The Being-West is an ontological response to the unabashed epistemological discipline and violence of a world post-Enlightenment.

Taking Foucault’s (1984) call for a critical ontology of ourselves seriously, the Being-West is named such because it cannot divorce itself from history nor spatial, temporal, or geographical situatedness as a citizen of and having been subjugated to the epistemology, axiology, and methodology of the West. The Being-West, while attempting to transcend the ontological and epistemological violence, which the West has wrought and decolonize itself from the onto-cognitive imperialism of the West, continues to live, move, and have its being in a world West; therefore, even while attempting to transgress West it must persist in discovering and maintaining its place of belonging in the space/time of the West.

**Western Ideological Barriers to Burgeoning**

With the primary focus of this inquiry centering on a (re)thinking of American institutions of higher education and the fact that the being-human is situated in the West, there are a host of ideological barriers to a burgeoning of the notion of the Being-West, which must be
overcome in concert with a reconceptualization. More to the point, in America the “culture, history, and geographical context are inextricably intertwined in shaping behavior and in determining the collective and individual identity” (Holdstock, 2000, p. 81) of the society. America colonized by people seeking to assert their independence through a separation from a monarchy has emerged as a nation with an overwhelmingly individualistic nature (Hanks, 2008). The American, from the halls of government to hallowed halls of the Academy, is indoctrinated with an ideology of individualism, which runs counter, generally speaking, to both an indigenous African and Eastern worldview. Hanks (2008) reiterates, “We are a nation that prides itself on personal initiative and independent success. Our collective identity is not one of a united whole but that of an aligned many” (p. 122). Not only does America and the West pride itself on a culture of individualism, but this individualism along with competition and materialism is the criteria with which we now define ‘self’ (Myers, 1993; Hanks, 2008). Again, the culture of individualism, which has penetrated every corner of American society, is one of a litany of factors that has created and reified the illusion that we are separate.

The same too can be said for the American (Western) obsession with ethnocentrism, which Vontress and Epp (2001) reminds us that “culture should not be viewed separately from the rest of life; it is the compass of life” (p. 374). Speaking of Western psychology, but with applications to subjectivity and education, Hanks (2008) advocates for a more holistic approach to life—culture, personhood—in the West. Finally, the last barrier to the burgeoning of the Being-West or new modes of being is education, which in the West are bastions of white male European domination (Harvey, 2011). As Battiste (2002) avers and Myers (1993) reinforces “the intellectual imperialism of Western patriarchy has proven to be viciously intolerant of any perspective that breaks the bonds of its conceptual incarceration” (p. 4). Seeing that this inquiry
seeks, among other things, to privilege non-Western indigenous onto-epistemologies and
necessitates both an ontological responsibility to embody and an epistemological ability to
comprehend, Western onto-cognitive imperialism becomes a nearly impenetrable barrier to
burgeoning. Nearly impenetrable but not impossible.

In agreement with Slattery’s postmodern credo, the Being-West is an attempt to make
thinkable an ontological modality previously unthinkable. Slattery (2013) expresses:

Humanity must transcend modernity, according to the Center for a Postmodern World
(1990), in ways that include the following features: a post-anthropocentric view of living
in harmony with nature rather than a separateness from nature that leads to control and
exploitation; a post-competitive sense of relationships as cooperative rather than as
coercive and individualistic; a post-militaristic belief that conflict can be resolved by the
development of the art of peaceful negotiation; a post-patriarchal vision of society in
which age-old religious, social, political, and economic subordination of women will be
replaced by a social order based equally on the “feminine” and the “masculine”; a post-
Eurocentric view that the values and practice of the European tradition will no longer be
assumed to be superior to those of other traditions, or forcibly imposed upon other,
combined with a respect for the wisdom embedded in all cultures; a post-scientific belief
that, while the natural sciences possess an important method of scientific investigation,
there are also moral, religious, and aesthetic intuitions that contain important truths that
must be given a central role in the development of worldviews and public policy; a post-
disciplinary concept of research and scholarship with an ecologically interdependent view
of the cosmos rather than the mechanistic perspective of a modern engineer controlling
the universe; and, finally, a post-nationalistic view in which the individualism of
nationalism is transcended and replaced by a planetary consciousness that is concerned
first and foremost about the welfare of the earth. (p. 20)

The Being-West, or simply the being-human, emancipates self from the illusion of separateness.

It is a response to Slattery’s (2013) clarion call, it is an onto-epistemological revolution which
releases us from the chains of ontological and epistemological violence wrought by Western
patriarchal domination, and a return to the rheomodic\(^{34}\) nature of being within a dynamic and
interconnected universe. Now that the possible barriers have been illuminated, we return to a
discussion on the nature of the Being-West.

\(^{34}\) Ramose (2002) defines the rheomode as the “philosophical language of \textit{ubuntu}. The rheomode is
derived from the Greek verb ‘rheo’ meaning to flow. It is a ‘new mode’ of language…” (P. 233).
Who Is This Being-West?

The Being-West, following Heidegger’s (1962) postulation, is not an ‘I am’ but a ‘we are’. The Being-West is the double consciousness, an interdependent co-arising, a flow of energy, bundle of intensities; the knot of physicality, consciousness, and spirit; swept up and transfigured in the rhizomatic ballet of being-becoming that we understand as life. The Being-West disrupts the divide as human separate from the world and re-thinks itself as a being-in-world, that is, in relationship with all things (Heidegger, 1962).

Communal. Being-West embodies the generous onto-epistemologies of Buddhism and Ubuntu, and understands its being-ness as relational. Utilizing the words of De Quincey (2005), the Being-West embodies, knows, and intuits that

…we are definitely not alone …we don’t form relationships, they form us. We are constituted by webs of interconnection. Relationships come first, and we emerge as more or less distinct centers within the vast and complex networks that surround us. In this new view, we are noted in the complex web of life. Each of us is a meeting point, a center of convergence, for countless threads of relationship. We are moments in time and locations in space where the universe shows up — literally, as a phenomenon… In other words, in this “new story” we emerge as subjects from intricate networks of interrelatedness, from webs of intersubjectivity. (De Quincey, 2005, p. 182)

Within the new story of being-human, the division between you-I deteriorates; there is no ‘you’ and there is no ‘I’—we inter-are (Hanh, 1999). Being-ness is infinite, taking shape and form but for a moment in time/space and identifying in that moment as a particular composition, vibration, and reverberation of molecular intensities appearing then vanishing in the blink of an eye.

Inbetween-ness, interwoven with the infinite. The Being-West represents the inbetween-ness of being. Utilizing Martin Buber’s (1970) ‘I-Thou’ conceptual framework, primacy is neither bestowed upon the ‘I’ nor the ‘Thou,’ rather the Being-West has its being and mutual becoming in the inbetween-ness. The same can be said for the Ubuntist communal conception of personhood. Buber (1970) asserts:
When I confront a human being as my Thou and speak the basic word I-Thou to him, then he is no thing among things nor does he consist of things. He is no longer He or She, limited by other Hes and Shes, a dot in the world grid of space and time, nor a condition that can be experienced and described, a loose bundle of named qualities. Neighborless and seamless, he is Thou and fills the firmament…

Even as a melody is not composed of tones, nor a verse of words, not a statue of lines—one must pull and tear to turn a unity into a multiplicity—so it is with the human being to whom I say Thou. I can abstract from him the color of his hair or the color of his speech or the color of his graciousness; I have to do this again and again, but immediately he is no longer Thou. (p. 59).

Buber’s (1970) assertion speaks directly to the Buddhist perspective of the being interwoven with the infinite (Adams, 2012). It is an affirmation of the East’s conception of ever-changing essences—one never steps in the same river twice. The Being-West is the embodied denial of the Western attachment to human as “unitary, autonomous entiti[es], independent and isolated from the dynamically changing and contingent world around us” (Waldron, 2003, p. 146). To state it in the affirmative, the Being-West is the embodied recognition of being-human—an ever-changing living organism with illusory semi-permeable boundaries, who has its being in relation with all in the universe. The Being-West is the ontic crystallization of Right View, Right Thinking, African humanism, and Ubuntu saturated communalism.

**Non-anthropocentric.** The Being-West is non-anthropocentric, that is, it understands the subject as a creation of language. Be-ing, according to Ramose (2002), implodes the linguistic reduction of subject-object and breaks the silence of be-ing from which only then a discussion of being may follow. How does one conclude the Being-West as post-anthropocentric? One may come to this conclusion through an interrogation of the very formation of be-ing through language (Ramose, 2002). The structure of language is such that there is a noun, a verb, and an object. The noun, which functions as the subject or actor is engaged in act of doing (verb), which is directed toward a particular object. This too appears to be the sequencing of thought, which
according to Ramose (2002), following this pattern reveals “the separate and independent existence of the noun on the one hand and the object on the other” (p. 232). The disciplinary force of Western imperial cognitive domination—reason—would have us believe the “subject-object distinction is a fundamental and ineradicable ontological datum” (Ramose, 2002, p. 232). Within this framework of reasoning, the verb is simply a vehicle, a middleman of the subject and object, which reinforces an ontologically sound separatist logic (Ramose, 2002). “This places the doer, the noun or the subject, in the position of moulding and ordering be-ing. Be-ing as a wholeness is thus the object of the subject” (Ramose, 2002, p. 232). Within this linguistic framework, be-ing is molded by the doer and becomes reality, and dismisses the function of doing as a molder of be-ing. This dismissal of the doing—the verb—privileges the doer—the subject, and therefore fragments being as a wholeness (Ramose, 2002). This fragmentation, posits Bohm (1980), is a result of the Enlightenment’s divorce “between man and nature and between man and man” (p. 3). More pointedly, it is a product of the Cartesian *ego cogito*, which establishes a mode of thought that fragments body from mind, and (wo)man from the world in which we have our being. While it is easy to place the blame on Descartes, the ontological rupture was established and codified long before Descartes’ materialization in the flesh in the epochal narrative of the first man and woman—Adam and Eve—who after being warned not to do so eat from the Tree of Knowledge and come to privilege thought (the epistemological) over their infrangible being-ness with God (the ontological), and are then forever fragmented from the wholeness of their being-ness with their Creator. This narrative of the first ontological rupture used in the theocratic regime as warning actually served to reinforce the Cartesian *ego cogito, ergo sum* through the doctrine of Original Sin, which presupposes a nearly irreconcilable, eternal, and inherent ontological rupture.
So, why is the exercise of exploring the function of language important? Bohm (1980)

writes:

Being guided by a fragmentary self-world view, man then acts in such a way as to try to
break himself and the world up, so that all seems to correspond to his way of thinking. (p.
3).

As a beloved professor is apt to say, “language speaks us” (P. Hendry, personal communication,
January 2014) while at the same time makes certain thoughts unthinkable. Therefore, it is
through language—a creation of man born of a mode of thought—that this fragmentation of
being is both reified and “seems to have an autonomous existence, independent of his [or her]
will and of his [or her] desire” (Bohm, 1980, p. 3). In short, (wo)man is ignorant to the fact that
the proverbial hell in which we live is the product of our own making. Given that the result is a
product of our own making, we also have the ability to make it anew, to think a different
thought. The fragmentation of be-ing, avers Ramose (2002), which posits

the noun as the source of all activity in relation to be-ing also involves the idea that the
noun (subject) – in this case the human being – is the centre of the universe. This idea is,
however, questionable because in all probability the universe has got no centre at all.
(Ramose, 2002, p. 232)

In a universe that is alleged to have no center at all, the human cannot situate itself at the center;
however, the West utilizing language through an exercise of its power to make certain thoughts
thinkable and unthinkable has tenaciously promulgated the idea of human as center of the
universe, subject fragmented from verb, and being separate from doing. This view of a separate
and autonomous existence, according to Waldron (2003) and Hanh (1999) is the root of the
suffering of humanity. Similarly, the philosophy of Ubuntu holds that humanness can only be
achieved in and through relationship, interconnection with other beings. The very language that
has reified the fragmentation, also speaks to a long held belief in the necessity of a holistic mode
of thought. Exploring the etymology of the word ‘health,’ Bohm (1980) proffers:
It is instructive to consider that the word ‘health’ in English is based on the Anglo-Saxon word ‘hale’ meaning ‘whole’: that is, to be healthy is to be whole, which is, I think roughly the equivalent of the Hebrew ‘shalem’. Likewise, the English ‘holy’ is based on the same root as ‘whole’. (pp. 3-4)

The notion of wholeness as health reinforces the dissolution of dichotomous fragmentation with respect to our being-in-the-world and points to a rudimentary mode of thought—of being-human not as center, but as one component of a grand cosmological schema.

Ontologically and epistemologically, Ramose (2002) argues, language’s persistence of the subject, “as the cause of political and social organization, is based upon a false opposition between be-ing and becoming” (p. 233). More importantly, the recognition of being-becoming as “infrangible incessant motion,” as an onto-epistemology where order is born of chaos and no center exists establishes the Being-West as rhizome, as a line of flight enfolding and unfolding, linking with and detaching from a multitude of assemblages within the pantareic cosmic ether. Situated and indoctrinated as thinking-West, the Being-West’s mode of thought remains one of division as means to make sense of the world; however, no importance is disproportionately given to ontology or epistemology—they inter-are. The Being-West is never center, but recognizes itself as a holonic assemblage in a perpetual motion and intra-action with other Beings (Barad, 2007). The interdependency of subject-verb, being-doing are key insights of 

**Ubuntu** and Buddhism.

**Embraces certain uncertainty.** The Being-West embraces the certain uncertainty of life and in relationship with other Beings constructs an endless hermeneutic engagement, which necessarily gives way to an infinite number of meanings. Truth, or “true reality is a sacred interweaving of all these things – true reality is beyond one single quantifiable truth, it is generous” (Forster, 2010, p. 10). In the same vein, the Being-West recognizes identity as “a dynamic engagement and discovery of mutual identity and shared dignity – that is a generous
ontology” (Forster, 2010, p. 10). The Being-West is detached from the known, and is ontologically and epistemologically situated with the field of all possibilities (Chopra, 1994).

**Consciousness made manifest.** The Being-West recognizes itself and others as a manifestation of consciousness and consciousness is holonic (Forster, 2010). Within the Buddhist perspective, Hanh (1999) notes:

> In the year 255, Vietnamese Meditation Master Tang Hôi taught that our consciousness is like the ocean with the six rivers of our senses flowing into it. Our mind and our body come from consciousness. They are formed by ourselves and our environment. Our life can be said to be a manifestation of our consciousness. Because of the food that our consciousness consumes, we are the person we are and our environment is what it is. In fact, the edible foods we take into our body and the foods of our sense-impressions and intention all end up in our consciousness. Our ignorance, hatred, and sadness all flow back to the sea of consciousness. We should know the kind of food we feed our consciousness every day. When *vijñana* (consciousness) ripens, it brings forth a new form of life, *nama rupa* (mind/body). (p. 36)

Reiterated in Chapter 2 (see opening quote on p. 80), Buddhism asserts an inextricable linkage of an individual and collective consciousness (Hanh, 1999). Through the practice of mindfulness the Being-West is able to ripen its consciousness, which “brings forth a new form of life” (Hanh, 1999, p. 36)—a new mode of being. The embodiment of the communalistic philosophy of *Ubuntu* and the Buddhist notion of interbeing manifest a specific aspect of being or conscious awareness within the Being-West and metamorphs the once atomistic, individualist subject into the mindful Being-West. The Being-West, made manifest through consciousness, is holonic.

Holonic reality, explains Wilber (1995),

> …is not composed of things or processes; it is not composed of atoms or quarks, it is not composed of wholes nor does it have any parts. Rather, it is composed of whole/parts, or holons. This is true of atoms, cells, symbols, ideas. They can be understood neither as things nor processes, neither as wholes nor parts, but only as simultaneous whole/parts, so that standard ‘atomistic’ and ‘wholistic’ attempts are both ways off mark. There is nothing that isn’t a holon…Before an atom is an atom, it is a holon. Before a cell is a cell, it is a holon. Before an idea is an idea, it is a holon. All of them are wholes that exist in other wholes, and thus they are whole/parts, or holons, first (long before any particular characteristics are singled out by us). (pp. 33-34)
Given that consciousness is holonistic any change in being, thinking, and/or doing will affect all parts. What does this mean? The Being-West is not an individual, but exists in community—it is a part/whole, a holon of a greater dynamic, living organism; any change to one part of the whole or a whole of any part alters the entirety of the organism. If logic holds, then it follows that a change in consciousness (positive or negative) in one Being-West affects all of the Beings-West. This consciousness (positive or negative) is made manifest in reality, that is, the daily-lived experience of all beings-human. This is akin to Foucault’s (1972) claim regarding discourse’s ability to shape one’s subjectivity, thereby altering one’s lived experience and the practice Buddhism’s Noble Eightfold Path discussed in Chapter 3.

**Dwells in love.** The Being-West dwells in love, that is, is saturated in the Brahmavirharas or the Four Immeasurable Minds—love, compassion, joy, and equanimity (Hanh, 1999). Hahn (1999) asserts, “if you practice them, they will grow in you every day until they embrace the whole world” (p. 169). How much stronger the embrace of the world if these dwelling places of love were not simply practices, but saturated our entire being? Would not then the world become a place of more love, more compassion, more joy, and more equanimity?

While not always succeeding, the Being-West strives to abide in love. To say it another way, the Being-West dwells in a place of understanding, which Hanh (1999) suggests is simply love by another name. This releases the Western need to judge or measure, and allows the Being-West to meet all Beings exactly where they are and as exactly who they are. For the Beings finding their home in the West, dwelling in love is a continual act of courage (Freire, 1970). Using the words of Thomas Merton, the Being-West—in spite of being in the West—dwells in love and understands anew in each moment that “love is our true destiny. We do not find the meaning of life by ourselves alone—we find it with another” (hooks, 2000, p. 222).
An Onto-triadic Rheomode. Borrowing from the philosophy of *Ubuntu*, which to a degree has been colonized by the cognitive imperialism of the West (Battiste, 2002), and resonating with Hanh’s Buddhism, the Being-West is an “onto-triadic rheomode” (Ramose, 2002, p. 237)—onto-triadic in that being is tri-dimensionally engaged and rheomodic in that it is always moving away from fragmentation toward wholeness (Ramose, 2002; Bohm, 1980; Forster, 2010). More specifically, in keeping with Buddhism and *Ubuntu*, the Being-West as onto-triadic rheomode is always already engaged in a tri-dimensional dance of cosmic harmony with the living dead, the living, and those yet to come (Ramose, 2002). Drawing from the Buddhist tradition, Hanh (1999) writes:

> It would be sad if the wave did not know that it is water. It would think, Some day, I will have to die. This period of time is my life span, and when I arrive at the shore, I will return to nonbeing. These notions will cause the wave fear and anguish. We have to help remove the notions of self, person, living being, and life span if we want the wave to be free and happy. (p. 124)

To put it another, much like (re)thinking as (non)method (see Chapter 4), the Being-West is always already caught up and engaged in an absent present-past, a present-present, and an absent present-future (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2015). As illustrated by the quote above from Hanh (1999), the Being-West is engaged in a three dimensional onto-epistemological relationship and the rheomodic “understanding of entities as the dimensions, forms, and modes of the incessant flow of simultaneously multi-direction motion” (Ramose, 2002, p. 233). This understanding forms the basis of a Being-West metaphysics with its nascence in the marriage of Buddhist and Ubuntist philosophy.

**The Being-West in Embodied Philoso-Praxis**

Much like *ubuntu* is always oriented toward —*ntu*, and *Ubuntu* is lived and practiced in an effort for the being to achieve its humanness or *umuntu*, I argue too that an ontological
recalibration within the epistemologically privileging milieu of the West must engage in an embodied praxis. One of the many possible modes of being-becoming the Being-West, I offer, can be found in the intertwining of the practice of Buddhism’s Noble Eight Fold Path (Hanh, 1999), the Brahminharas, and southern Africa’s Nguzo Tani (Five Principles) (Kochalumchuvattil, 2010).

The Noble Eight Fold Path, discussed in detail in Chapter 3, focuses on the transformation of being-becoming through active praxis. The Noble Eightfold Path is a non-hierarchical interconnection of Right View, Right Thinking, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Diligence, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration (Hahn, 1999). The three broad categorizations of the Noble Eightfold Path are the attainment of wisdom (epistemological), moral action (ontological and axiological), and mediation or the metamorphosis of consciousness (onto-methodological) (Buddhism, n.d., Ortwein, 2013). The richness of the Noble Eightfold Path is that it does not privilege any of the ways of knowing over the other, but rather “each limb contains all seven” (Hahn, 1999, p. 50). They inter-are. In addition to the Noble Eightfold Path, the practice of Brahminharas or the Four Immeasurable Minds—love, compassion, joy, and equanimity—allow the Being-West to maintain its dwelling in love. The Brahminharas are discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

The Nguzo Tani or five principles, draws on the African-American tradition of Kwanzaa to cultivate a being-ness-in-the-world necessary to engage in and with the world, while also respecting the humanity of the other being-becoming Beings-West (Kochalumchuvattil, 2010; Pleck, 2001). The five principles include: kujichagulia (self-determination), ujimaa (collective work and responsibility), nia (purpose), kuumba (creativity), and imani (faith) (Kochalumchuvattil, 2010; Obijiofor, 2003).
Remembering the nature of personhood in the southern African cosmology is intersubjective and holonic, that is, the individual is maintained by and in relation to the community (and vice versa), *kujichagulia*, which is defined as self-determination or “an internal transformation of the African self from within” (Kochalumchuvattil, 2010, p. 119) constitutes the practice and cultivation of personal freedom toward responsible decision-making. Kochalumchuvattil (2010) supposes self-determination gives birth to a responsible being-human, a responsible Being-West. Responsibility, the ethical responsibility born of *kujichagulia*, coupled with the consciousness awakening practices of *ujimaa* allows the Being-West to recognize the other in the fullness of its the humanity (Kochalumchuvattil, 2010; Obijiofor, 2003). More importantly, it shifts the individualistic Western notion of responsibility for self to responsibility for all.

*Ujimaa*, or collective work and responsibility, furthers the cultivation of responsibility inherent in *kujichagulia* and sets the Being-West on a path of cultivating “a sound conscience, tak[ing] responsibility for his/her decisions and life choices and liv[ing] with a sense of accountability, fairness, and transparency” (Kochalumchuvattil, 2010, p. 119). Through the cultivation of responsibility and collective action not only is the Being-West transformed, but so too the community of Beings.

The consistent practice of *ujimaa* and *kujichagulia* rests heavily on both the Being-West’s individual and communal sense of purpose or *nia* (Kochalumchuvattil, 2010; Obijiofor, 2003). According to Kochalumchuvattil (2010),

*Nia* is a principle directed towards the realization of a vision where each individual self is able to determine and pursue their own goal. This goal should not be for selfish ends but must be concerned with the well-being of the individual self and that of the community. The cultivation of the principle of *Nia* is the interface between subjectivity and the community. (p. 120)
In essence, *nia* is the equated to the inbetween-ness of Buber’s (1970) ‘I-Thou’; it is an intersubjective becoming—individual and communal—whereby the action of the individual is directed toward the transformation of socio-politico-economic environments for the good of the whole (Kochalumchuvattil, 2010). While, I do not assert a causal relationship, it is commonly believed that from *nia* flows *kuumba*.

*Kuumba*, or creativity, is the harnessing of an individual’s “physical, mental, and spiritual energies…for creative purposes” (Kochalumchuvattil, 2010, p. 120). In light of the cognitive imperialism of the West (Battiste, 2002), this principle recaptures the creativity inherent in all Beings-West. For example, it counters the dominant Western narrative of White patriarchal artistic and knowledge production, and calls for a development of “new institutions and [a] restricting [of] the existing institutions to encourage creative thinking and learning” (Kochalumchuvattil, 2010, p. 120). *Kuumba* encourages that assimilation of one’s own cultural beliefs into new philosophies and knowledges (Kochalumchuvattil, 2010; Obijiofor, 2003). *Kuumba* locates the ability of knowledge production and creation at the site of each Being in every community; it flattens the knowledge production structure and infuses ethno-cultural vitality in the pursuit of thinking, learning, and producing.

Finally, *imani* or faith is the “development of an attitude of confidence, self belief, optimism and hope” (Kochalumchuvattil, 2010, p. 120). *Imani* for the Being-West is an unshakable hope in the dawning of a new day and it is an active engagement in, what Ramose (2002) terms, the ontology of the invisible—that which is unseen, but deeply felt. *Imani* is a transcendental ideal born of a prophetic spirituality of onto-epistemological improvement. *Ubuntu* (Forster, 2010; Eze, 2008; Ramose, 2002; Broodryk, 2006; Nafukho, 2006) and Buddhism (Hanh, 1999) are utilized in this inquiry as philosophical knowledges; however, both
have been elevated to a spirituality, so it is no surprise that faith and hope are an integral components in the being-becoming of the Being-West. It is also no surprise that only through the praxis of all five principles simultaneously does one achieve *umoja* (unity), which encapsulates *ubuntu* and catalyzes a being-becoming *umuntu* (Obijiofor, 2003; Ramose, 2002).

The generous onto-epistemologies of Buddhism and *Ubuntu* harnessed through the “philoso-praxis” (Ramose, 2002, p. 237) of the Noble Eightfold Path and the *Nguzo Tano*, respectively, orient being toward wholeness and sets the Being on a path of cosmic harmony through peaceful and just relations with all things/beings seen and unseen in the universe. Ramose (2002) perfectly expresses the interrelatedness of peace and justice; he offers, “Justice without peace is the negation of the strife towards cosmic harmony. But peace without justice is the dislocation of *umuntu* from the cosmic order” (p. 237). Through the philoso-praxis of the Noble Eightfold Path, the Brahmanvihairas, and *Nguzo Tani*, the Being-West becomes the embodiment and concrete realization of the perpetual striving of being-becoming more human and begins to dance in sync with the harmonious rhythm of the cosmos.

**Conclusion**

The subject, born of an Enlightenment regime mode of thought, created and reified through language, remains the most pressing concern of society (Derrida, 1991). However, within the current discursive regime, a move from humanism to post-humanism has been set in motion and has changed the question from ‘Who am I?’ to ‘Who comes after the subject?’ (Derrida, 1991). After conducting a genealogical analysis of Western subjectivity and exploring Buddhist and Ubuntist notions of subjectivity, I have concluded that subjectivity is not an ontological certitude, but an epistemological construction. The fragmentation of being through language has produced a false dichotomization of being and doing. The fallacy of an ontological
rupture is reinforced in the intersubjective, onto-epistemological notions that comprise Buddhist and Ubuntist philosophical traditions. (re)Thinking Western subjectivity through Buddhism and Ubuntu, I find that the conception of ‘self’ does not fully capture the socio-politico-philoso-cosmological entanglement of our being-in-the-world; therefore, I offer forth the Being-West. The Being-West is an onto-epistemological response to the unabashed epistemological privileging, disciplining, and violence in the world post-Enlightenment consumed by fear.

The Being-West is conceptualized as a holonic, interconnected bundle of intensities, a sacred interweaving, a body without organs mutually becoming in a linkage of assemblages always already caught up in an on-going process of folding and unfolding, creating and dissolving (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Waldron, 2003; Hanh, 1999; Forster, 2010; Ramose, 2002). Posing and attempting to answer the question: Who is this Being-West? I have concluded, but not indefinitely, that the Being-West can be characterized as: communal, the inbetween-ness, interwoven in the infinite, dwelling in love, non-anthropocentric, the embracer of uncertainty, consciousness made manifest, and an onto-triadic rheomode. The Being-West is a return to a pre-Enlightenment being-in-the-world, where one then had nothing to do but be, and an evolution of contemporary notions of subjectivity. Given the Being-West’s situatedness in the historicity and space/time West, the being-becoming of the Being-West is achieved through an intentional philo-praxis—the intermingling of Buddhism’s Noble Eightfold Path, the Brahmapirharas, and the Nguzo Tano (Ramose, 2002; Hahn, 1999; Kochalumchuvattil, 2010; Obijiofor, 2003). It is through this engaged philo-praxis, undergirded by the philosophies of Buddhism and Ubuntu, that being-becoming re-orients toward the realization of the Being-West, toward being more human, and toward active engagement in the universal web of interconnectedness.
(Re)reading the preceding segments through a Western lens, it would seem that much attention has been given to the single Being-West and very little credence eschewed for the collective, for a societal being-becoming. This re-reading would be false. The Being-West is holonic, which in biological terms holds:

Any change in an organism will affect all the parts; no aspect of a structure can be altered without affecting the entire structure; each whole contains part and is itself a larger whole. (Wilber, 1995, p. 17)

Therefore, the transformation of one Being-West affects all Beings-West and cannot help, but to alter the whole. Both the Being-West and society undergo a simultaneous and mutual metamorphosis. The being-becoming of the Being-West is a contemporaneous being-becoming. There is nothing that is not affected, no Being or being-ness left unchanged. What, then, is the state of education in the shadow of this totalizing ontological metamorphosis?
CHAPTER 6:
LET LEARN AND LET BE: (RE)THINKING HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AS ONTO-EPISTEMOLOGICAL WOMBS OF BEING-BECOMING

“When our understanding of what beings are changes historically, our understanding of what “education” is transforms as well.”

- Ian Thomson -

We live in the age of the ‘Multi-versity’35, that is, “an internally fragmented Uni-versity-in-name-only, where the sole communal unity stems from a common grievance about parking spaces” (Thomson, 2001, p. 251). Much like the Western fragmentation of the ontological and epistemological, the university too has become a fragmented entity that has lost sight of its communal and intersubjective goals of the ontological formation of its students and its epistemological aim of knowledge cultivation (Thomson, 2001; Harvey, 2011; Barnett, 2000, 2011). As Harvey (2011) and Barnett (2011) assert the modern university and institutions of higher education serve as socio-economic classifiers, sorting mechanisms, and ideological filters that impact culture through the (re)production of dominant ideology. Barnett (2011) asserts “a university has being” (p. 13) and like the beings who inhabit it, it too is a holonic being-in-the-world, which derives its composition from the being-ness of other Beings. The university has “possibilities, and they are infinite. It has multiple options. Each university could be other than it is,” (Barnett, 2011, p. 13) yet while each university could be other than it is–it is not. As illustrated in Chapter 1, the modern American university has always resided in the tensions of espoused principles and the operational realities of its situatedness in a social and political milieu; namely, the university promotes itself as a democratic and egalitarian institution, but in

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reality is hierarchical, practices racism, sexism, homophobia, discrimination, and prejudice. Institutions of higher education, asserts Harvey (2011), have failed on its moral societal obligation to live up to its original aim (Harvey, 2011); they have failed to live up to the principles they espouse. Not only are institutions of higher education failing students on the true aim of education—making strange the familiar and promoting an understanding of our shared being-becoming as human, but as I assert in Chapter 1, within society and every level of the educational system we continue to experience the effects of higher education’s past cowardice to traverse the terrain of moral injustice; namely, in a deficient understanding of our humanity as intersubjective. In tandem with Eric Ashby, I argue, institutions of higher education “must be sufficiently stable to sustain the ideal which gave it birth and sufficiently responsive to remain relevant to the society which it supports” (Altback et al., 2001, p. 4), and given the litany of socio-politico-cultural ills which I enumerate in Chapter 1—they are failing and failing badly.

In essence, today’s universities are market-driven institutions comprised of siloed “epistemological [sub]regime[s] characterized by fear” (Barnett, 2011, p. 25)—fear of the market, fear of the government, and fear of the students they were created to educate. Institutions of higher education operate in ways dictated by the market for the sake of its own survival; they have become suppliers in an environment driven by consumer demand—an education supermarket (Apple, 2013). In short, Heidegger’s critique of the way in which universities “increasingly instrumentalize, professionalize, vocationalize, corporatize, and ultimately technologize education” (Thomson, 2001, p. 244) has proliferated. In an attempt to illuminate the possibilities of being differently in the world, this inquiry has reconceptualized the Western subject, and through *Ubuntu* and Buddhism has conceived an onto-epistemological Being-West (Chapter 5). The Being-West, turns the Western subject on its head, and ontologically (re)thinks
the subject as an interconnected Being—a bundle of intensities, a sacred interweaving, a body without organs mutually becoming and interconnected in a linkage of assemblages always already caught up in a process of folding and unfolding, creation and dissolution (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Waldron, 2003; Hanh, 1999; Forster, 2010). The reconceptualization of the Western subject and the conceptualization of the Being-West through the generous and generative onto-epistemologies of *Ubuntu* and Buddhism mandate a contemporaneous metamorphosis of the educational milieu—higher education, in particular. It is true, as Thomson (2001) writes:

> Our very ‘being-in-the-world’ is shaped by the knowledge we pursue, uncover, and embody. [There is] a troubling sense in which it seems that we cannot help practicing what we know, since we are ‘always already’ implicitly shaped by our guiding metaphysical presuppositions. (p. 250)

In other words, a new ontological understanding must yield new epistemological and pedagogical perspectives. A new ontological understanding is akin to an ontological paradigm shift—an ontological revolution, which as Kuhn (1962/2012) avers, “…when paradigms change, the world itself changes with them” (p. 15). Following Kuhn’s (196/2012) assertion, the being-doing of institutions of higher education must change because the beings-human who inhabit them have embarked on their own journey of onto-transformation. Given the conceptualization of the Being-West, how is higher education re-imagined or (re)thought to both meet and challenge this new mode of being?

In agreement with Harvey (2011) and Thomson (2001), the modern university has failed to live up to its original metaphysical aim: to encounter knowledge, that is, to make strange the familiar and thereby open one up to new modes of being and new understandings of what it means to be a human being (Barnett, 2011). The idea of metaphysics as the base of understanding and function of the university, I argue in agreement with Barnett (2011), is deeply
connected to the idea of the university as “the transcendent university,” (p. 12) which presupposes the scholar through his or her “own cognitive efforts…can glimpse an entirely new mode of being” (Barnett, 2011, p. 12). Nostalgia in most cases is a lie, this notion of the transcendent university is equally as problematic in some respects as the mess we now find ourselves in; however, the idea of the transcendent university does offer certain possibilities. Currently, we find ourselves on the extreme end of the spectrum conceiving the university not as a place of higher learning, but as economic engine and supplier. (re)Thinking institutions of higher education with the onto-epistemologies of Ubuntu and Buddhism, I theorize that a return to the idea of a modified transcendent university situated in this space/time may provide the proper ideological counterbalance to the enterprising multi-versity (Barnett, 2011; Thomson, 2001). This counterbalance has the potential to re-enliven the equal privileging of ontology and epistemology, and re-ensoul of the endeavor of higher education towards an enhanced understanding of our shared humanity. First, this chapter looks to an absent present-past to illuminate the possibilities of an absent present-future with a discussion of aims of education from Plato to Heidegger, conducts an ontohistorical analysis of the philosophy of American higher education through the seminal documents that established the field of Student Affairs in higher education (American Council on Education Studies, 1937, 1949; NASPA, 1987), and concludes with an ontological (re)thinking of higher education institutions through Ubuntu and Buddhism, which I assert re-ontologizes higher education and re-essentializes being-becoming more human through the pursuit of higher learning. Slattery (2013) suggests within education “…the slightest perturbation has a significant impact on future patterns” (p. 271); I am emboldened by Slattery’s (2013) assertion and hopeful that this perturbation will catalyze a metamorphosis of higher education institutions as not only spaces of knowledge production and
acquisition, but also as fertile wombs of interconnected being-becoming and as the awakener of
conscious awareness of our shared humanity.

For What Purpose?: From Plato to Heidegger

What is the purpose of higher education? What is the idea behind the idea of the (higher)
education? Dewey (1902) would argue the goal of education is “not knowledge or information,
but self-realization” (p. 9); the transformation of self or the molding of being through the
knowledge we pursue is the goal of education (Thomson, 2001). Thirty years later, Dewey
(1938/1997) would add: “The history of educational theory is marked by opposition between the
idea that education is development from within and that is it formation from without” (p. 17).
This debate regarding the purpose and aims of higher education has been raging since the
founding of Harvard in 1636, continues today, and I predict will continue on into the unforeseen
future as society changes (Thelin, 2004). I argue that one must look towards an absent present-
past to understand the present-present, and the illuminate the possibilities and limitations of our
absent present-future; therefore, to answer the questions posed, I begin with a brief history on the
idea of the aims of Western education first presented in Plato’s “Allegory of Cave” (Plato,
1968/360B CE). The excavation of Plato’s cave leads perfectly into Heidegger’s notion of
ontological education (Thomson, 2001).

Plato’s (1968/360 BCE) recollection of the conversation between Socrates and Glaucon in
the “Allegory of the Cave” establishes for the West the components, method, and function of
education that has proliferated over two millennia. The classic allegory lays the foundation for
the aims of Western education. He writes:

“Next then,” I said, “make an image of our nature in its education and want of education,
likening it to a condition of the following kind. See human beings as though they were in an
underground cave-like dwelling with its entrance, a long one, open to the light across the
whole width of the cave. They are in it from childhood with their legs and necks in bonds so
that they are fixed, seeing only in front of them, unable because of the bond to turn their heads all the way around. Their light is from a fire burning far above and behind them. Between the fire and the prisoners there is a road above, along which see a wall, built like the partitions puppet-handlers set in front of the human beings and over which they show puppets.” (Plato, 1968/360B CE, p. 193)

Plato is establishing the belief that human beings come into the world chained by ignorance and, in the Buddhist sense, plagued with wrong perception. Unable to turn their heads, unable to properly perceive the world these prisoners are fooled by the shadows cast on the cave wall created by the fire that burns behind them. The prisoners believe these shadows to be other than what they are, which Socrates identifies as:

human beings carrying all sorts of artifact, which project above the wall, and statues of men and other animals wrought from stone, wood, and every kind material; as is to be expected, some of the carriers utter sounds while others are silent. (Plato, 1968/360B CE, p. 193)

Declaring that these prisoners are like us, Socrates avers:

“For in the first place, do you suppose such men would have seen anything of themselves and one another than the shadows cast by the fire on the side of the cave facing them?”

“How could they,” he said, “if they had been compelled to keep their heads motionless throughout life?”

“And what about the things that are carried by? Isn’t it the same with them?”

“What course.”

“If they were able to discuss things with one another, don’t you believe they would hold that they are naming these things going by before them that they see?” (Plato, 1968/360B CE, pp. 193-194)

Within the dialogue, Glaucon inquires as to the ability of the prisoners to see, and later their ability to hear as a means of releasing them from the false perception of the shadows as anything other than shadows. This establishes both the importance of the visual and the dialogical in the ability to reason, to know, and discern truth. If they were able to see and hear, Plato (1968/360B CE) avers, “Then most certainly,” I said, “such men would hold that the truth is nothing other
than the shadows of artificial things” (p.194). Through this dialogue between Socrates and
Glaucon, Plato (1968/360B CE) suggests one aim of education is the revelation of truth through
knowledge obtained by experience and reasoning. However, this is not all.

Plato (1968/360B CE) alludes the prisoner, now set free from the bondage of wrong
perception and freed from the shackles of ignorance remains conditioned by his or her former
condition. Their bodies wracked with pain from years of bondage and their eyes so accustomed
to the darkness, they are not able to stand upright or see clearly. They are stupefied by ignorance.
More to the point, he writes:

“Now consider,” I said, “what their release and healing from the bonds and folly would be
like if something of this sort were by nature to happen to them. Take a man who is released
and suddenly compelled to stand up, to turn his neck around, to walk and look up toward the
light; and who, moreover, in doing all this is in pain and, because he is dazzled, is unable to
make out those things whose shadows he saw before. What do you suppose he’d say if
someone were to tell him that before he say silly nothings, while now, because he is
somewhat nearer to what is and more turned toward beings, he sees more correctly; and in
particular, showing him each of the things that pass by, were to compel the man to answer his
questions about what they are? Do you suppose he’d be at a loss and believe that what was
seen before is truer than what is now shown?” (Plato, 1968/360B CE, p. 194)

Essentially, Plato (1968/360 BCE) asks: At the revelation of knowledge, would the prisoner turn
back to the (un)knowing of the cave? Would he bemoan his previous state as prisoner of the cave
now that he has revelation of the light of knowledge? Will the prisoner return to the cave to free
the other prisoners and pass on his knowledge? The prisoner-no-more is liberated; however, this
liberation, I argue, from one-hell leads to bondage in another. Plato’s (1968/360 BCE) prisoner
now free of the chains of ignorance remains bound in the place of unknowing, but moving ever
closer to the light of the sun he removes himself from the cave of unknowing into the light of
day; his eyes are opened to his condition and a different way of being-in-the-world. However,
the happiness of his new knowing-being is brief, he is bound anew in the gilded chains of the
responsibility of the knower and obligated to pass on his knowledge and liberate others. Freedom
Liberation—freeing one’s soul and the souls of others, then, becomes the metaphysical aim of the educative pursuit. Liberation is the knowledge and the practice of being differently in the world.

In the voice of Socrates, Plato (1968/360 BCE) writes:

“Then, if this is true,” I said, “we must hold the following about these things: education is not what the professions of certain men assert it to be. They presumably assert that they put into the soul knowledge that isn’t in it, as though they were putting sight into blind eyes.”

[…] 

“But the present argument on the other hand,” I said, “indicates that this power is in the soul of each, and that the instrument with which each learns—just as an eye is not able to turn toward the light from the dark without the whole body—must be turned around from that which is coming into being together with the soul until it is able to endure looking at that which is and the brightest part of that which is. And we affirm that this is the good, don’t we? [emphasis added]” (p. 197)

Plato (1986/360 BCE) establishes education as an onto-epistemological endeavor. His assertion that education must turn around the whole body “around from that which is coming into being together with the soul…” linguistically establishes a binary, but intuitively is recognition of the inseparability of body-soul and the inseparability of ontology and epistemology. Plato (1968/360 BCE) conceives the purpose of education as not solely about pouring knowledge into an empty soul vessel, but rather education is simultaneously a blossoming of the soul from within and a watering of the soul from without through the exposition of knowledge(s) of “that which is”
Plato (1968/360 BCE, p. 197)—the real, that which is real and not a shadow—or *a posteriori* knowledge. Later, Plato (1968/360 BCE) rejects the *a priori* knowledge of intuition, the senses, or embodied knowing and starts the West on the path of rationalism, which a millennium later would splinter into empiricism (Davis, 2004). Education, in the Platonic sense, is an ontological aim achieved through rational epistemological means. More specifically, education or knowledge should “draw [(wo)]men toward being” or cause (wo)men to “rise up out of becoming and take hold of being” (Plato 1968/360 BCE, p. 204). Following the “Allegory of the Cave”, Book VII of the *Republic* continues to elucidate the components of education, which echo our modern educational structure and curriculum—the arts, gymnasium, astrology, and mathematics (Plato 1968/360 BCE). Additionally, Plato (1968/360 BCE) lays out the system of education roughly adhered to in the West today with the education of children (elementary and secondary education), and the establishment of a graduated post-secondary education or university system. He writes:

“Then, after this time,” I said. “those among the twenty-year-olds who are given preference will receive greater honors than the others. And the various studies acquired without any particular order by the children in their education must be integrated into an overview which reveals the kinship of these studies with one another and with the nature of that which *is.*” (Plato, 1968/360 BCE, p. 216)

The nature of this graduated education is dialectical, Socratic. Additionally, Plato (1968/360 BCE) recalling Socrates establishes what we have come to know as graduate or doctoral education, whereby the men and women who are most steadfast in their studies “when they are over thirty, you will give preference among the preferred and assign greater honors” (Plato, 1968/360 BCE, p. 217). Later, Plato (1968/360 BCE) establishes disciplinary procedures for schools (p. 218). Finally, interpreting this translation of the *Republic*, in addition to teaching, it is
the responsibility of the learned men and women\textsuperscript{36} to actively engage in the life and leadership of the polis—to become engaged citizens of the world.

Indeed, Plato’s (1968/360 BCE) \textit{Republic} lays the foundation for our modern Western conception of education—it’s aims and purposes. Most notable for this inquiry is Plato’s insistence that education or knowledge is the vehicle by which human beings move from the perpetual striving of \textit{becoming} to what reads as a more static state of \textit{being}. Seymour (2004) parallels this understanding of education and contends, “Educating is about drawing forth the callings within our own deeper nature” (p. 33). Nevertheless, Plato (1968/360 BCE) establishes for the contemporary West the dominance of rationality over embodied ways of knowing, and the utilization of knowledge (episteme) as a means to an ontological end. Today, the ontological aims of education have been caste aside and the epistemological given a place of primacy within higher education. We have maimed Plato’s notion of education as both ontological and epistemological; however, Heidegger (1962b) utilizing Plato (1968/360 BCE) attempts to bring the ontological and the epistemological to a state of homeostasis with his notion of ontological education (Thomson, 2001).

\textbf{Onto-education: A Heideggerian Vision.} Utilizing Plato’s conception of education or \textit{paideia}\textsuperscript{37}, Heidegger (1927/1962, 1931/1998) deconstructs education and offers a poignant diagnosis of the current mess we now find ourselves in within higher education. As Thomson (2001) avers Heidegger does not set out to decimate Western educational institutions and neither

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\item \textsuperscript{36} Plato (1968/360 BCE) writes: “Don’t suppose that what I have said applies any more to men than to women, all those who are born among them with adequate natures” (p. 220).
\item \textsuperscript{37} Paideia: “—the classical Greek system of education and training, which came to include gymnastics, grammar, rhetoric, poetry, music, mathematics, geography, natural history, astronomy and the physical sciences, history of society and ethics, and philosophy—the complete pedagogical course of study necessary to produce a well-rounded, fully educated citizen” (Tarnas, 1991, pp. 29-30).
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do I; however, his goal was to “loosen up this hardened tradition and dissolve the concealments it has engendered in order to recover those primordial experiences which have fundamentally shaped its subsequent historical development” (p. 243). Heidegger’s primary goal in his deconstruction of higher education was to shed light on the long forgotten aspects of education elucidated in Plato’s (1968/360 BCE) allegory and notion of paideia on which the Western conception of education is based. In other words, Heidegger is advocating for a return to paideia or education in the Platonic sense, which is “a pure education [whereby] the soul itself is seized and transformed as a whole, while at the same time man is transplanted to the region of his essence and oriented to it” (Heidegger, 1962b/1931, p. 256). The Platonic notion of paideia, for Heidegger, opens up possibilities for a future of education that was once unthinkable (Thomson, 2001). Namely, re-essentializing the being of humans in the higher education milieu or what I term onto-education.

So what is Heidegger’s conception of education? Heidegger (1962b/1931) conceptualizes education as Bildung, which encompasses two overarching implications:

it means first of all forming in the sense of developing and molding a character. This “forming” however “forms” (molds) at the same time through its preconceived adaptation to a standard aspect which is therefore called the prototype. Education (Bildung) is above all molding and giving direction by means of a form. (Heidegger, 1962b/1931, p. 256)

Education for Heidegger is an ontological endeavor that shapes being by leading the learner, the human being, away from and then back to himself. Education, then, is also a moralistic endeavor, a process of unfolding character from within (Thomson, 2001). Reaching back to Plato’s (1968/360 BCE) allegory, education is also the process of revealing “unhiddeness in Greek, which is translated as truth” (Heidegger, 1962b/1931). Unhiddenness is always hiding in plain sight, yet one must have eyes to see. To summarize Heidegger’s (1962b/1931) connection between truth and education, he asserts, if education is liberation and liberation consists of
“turning-towards” (p. 259) the unhidden, then the “consummation of the essence of ‘education’
can therefore take place only in the realm and at the root of the most unhidden [i.e. the most
true]. The essence of education is founded in the essence of ‘truth’” (Heidegger, 1962b/1931,
pp. 259-260). Given my leanings toward postmodernism and its denial of an ‘essence’ of truth, I
am at once gripped by Heidegger’s education-truth theorem, and ready to reject it. At any rate,
he provides an interesting argument and another connection between Plato’s (1968/360 BCE)
allegory and Western education. Much like education, the ancient Greek understanding of truth
is much different from the contemporary Western understanding of truth as the congruence of the
sign with the signifier—the agreement of concept and thing. Heidegger (1962b/1931) owes this
understanding to Nietzsche who rejects the notion of an essence of truth and conceptualizes truth
as always becoming. In critique, Heidegger (1962b/1931) argues Nietzsche’s metaphysical
unthinking alters truth “from the unhiddeness of beings to the correctness of the glance. The
change itself takes place in the definition of the Being of beings as [idea]” (p. 267). This change
in the conceptualization of the nature of truth from essence to fluidity, according to Heidegger
(1962b/1931), also alters the very idea of being. Nietzsche’s metaphysical unthought perpetuates
a discourse of not being, but perpetual becoming, which implies the lack of a goal beyond the
notion of progress; thereby, setting higher education on its current path of technocratic
dominance and nihilistic ontotheology38 (Thompson, 2001).

38 Thomson (2001) explains ontotheology as Heidegger’s argument “that our metaphysicians’ ontological
understandings of what entities are ‘as such’ ground intelligibility from the inside-out (as it were), while
their theological understandings of the way in which the ‘totality’ of beings exist simultaneously secure
the intelligible order from the outside-in. Western history’s successive constellations of intelligibility are
thus ‘doubly grounded’ in a series of ontotheologically structured understandings of ‘the being of beings’
(das Sein des Seienden), understandings, that is, of both what and how beings are, or of ‘the totality of
beings as such’” (p. 247). Moreover, each ontotheological positionality grounds the various onthistorical
epochs (Thompson, 2001).
From Being to Entity. Conducting an “ontohistorical”\(^{39}\) (Thomson, 2001, p. 244) analysis of education, thinking with and through Bildung and Plato’s paideia, Heidegger “seeks to effect nothing less than a re-ontologizing revolution in our understanding of education” (Thomson, 2001, p. 254). Born out of his ontohistorical analysis of Western education, Heidegger understands that our current ontohistorical epoch is defined by a Nietzschean ontotheology that impacts educational institutions, which he argues come to embody the understanding of who and what beings are (Thomson, 2001; Heidegger, 1962a). Cogent to the argument being laid bare is Thomson’s (2001) interpretation of Heidegger’s critique of Nietzschean ontotheology, which contends Nietzsche’s conceptualization of the subject clearly demonstrates that he conceptualized ‘the totality of beings as such’ ontotheologically, an ‘eternally recurring will-to-power’, that is, as an unending disaggregation and reaggregation of forces without purpose or goal. (Thomson, 2001, p. 249)

Given the resonance between the Nietzschean subject and Buddhist conception of (non)subjectivity, I argue the only issue is the presumed lack of purpose or goal. In my appreciation, being-becoming given its multiplicitous nature is always moving bi-directionally—toward and/or away from a destination (a goal)—with intentionality. More importantly, Heidegger avers:

Our unthinking reliance on Nietzsche’s ontotheology is leading us to transform all beings, ourselves included, into mere ‘resources’ (BestandI), entities lacking intrinsic meaning which are thus simply optimized and disposed with maximal efficiency. (Thomson, 2001, p. 249)

\(^{39}\) Ontohistory is the “the history of being” (Thomson, 2001, p. 248). Each epoch, asserts Heidegger (1962), comprises a historical series of “ontotheological understandings of what and how beings are [emphasis in original]” (Thomson, 2001, p. 248).
The ontohistorical passage from Cartesian modernity to the Nietzschean postmodernity is marked by a technological enframing⁴⁰ of subjectivity, that is, the dehumanization of beings-human into expendable commodities or resources (Thomson, 2001). Moreover, within this ontotheoretical epoch, beings-human are reduced to entities, “programmable information, [and] digitized data” (Thomson, 2001, p. 249). Given that Heidegger’s critiques of higher education begins in 1911, culminates in 1929, and continues into the 1960s, this shift in what beings are and for what purpose they should be educated has proliferated over the last 100 years in the West. However, in America, the contemporary onto-historical shift is most evident in 1968 (Berrett, 2015)⁴¹.

Educating Entities: Training in Postmodernity. When our understanding of beings change, so too must the manner in which we educate them (Thomson, 2001). The onto-educational paradigm shift that occurred from modernity to postmodernity opens up a world of possibility of a different being of Beings, but limits who and what those beings may become. As I have argued throughout, the Cartesian notion of subjectivity and its understanding of beings as static, individual, and autonomous left much to be desired. Conversely, the postmodern subject or my evolutionary conceptualization of the Being-West is fluid, multiplicitous, rhizomatic, and interconnected. While Heidegger critiques Nietzschean postmodern ontotheology, I argue, the consummation of Descartes’ and Nietzsche’s subject has produced an awful marriage; hence, the reconceptualization as Being-West. This bad marriage has produced an ontotheology that makes possible higher education institutions that “increasingly instrumentalize, professionalize, vocationalize, corporatize, and ultimately technologize education” (Thomson, 2001, p. 244). It

⁴⁰Enframing in the Heideggerian sense is best understood as “a technological understanding of being…; an historical ‘mode of revealing’ in which entities increasingly show up as resources to be optimized” (Thomson, 2001, p. 249).
⁴¹See Chapter 1 (pp. 11-12)
has made possible a technological understanding of being and the creation of nihilistic, technocratic educational institutions concerned with the production of widget-beings rather than blossoming of beings-human. What understandings of education have made possible our current reality?

Heidegger emphasizes the West has falsely interpreted the Platonic notion of education. More specifically, the misinterpretation of paideia has yielded an understanding of education “as the transmission of information, the filling of the psyche with knowledge as if inscribing a tabula rasa or, in more contemporary parlance, ‘training-up’ a neutral net” (Thomson, 2001, p. 254). Human beings are not blank slates waiting to be filled or written on; we are always already being molded and educated from birth—the home is the first educational environment and mothers our first teachers (Solomon, 1985). We are always already caught up in the act of learning. The West’s atrophied understanding of education as knowledge transmission or acquisition is reflective of the “nihilistic logic of enframing” (Thomson, 2001, p. 254). What’s worse is that enframing through discourse has become normalized, so much so, that we are unable to recognize we are paralyzed by its power. Thomson (2001) writes:

Yet here again we face a situation in which as the problem gets worse we become less likely to recognize the ‘impact’ of this ontological drift toward meaninglessness can ‘barely be noticed by contemporary humanity because they are continually covered over with the latest information. (p. 254)

The discourse, which propagates enframing as normal and bombards subjects with quantitative data, is totalizing. Today, the purpose of higher education as anything other than workforce training for economic upward mobility is taken for granted and exemplifies the permeation of free market ideas within higher education42 (Berrett, 2015). The educational milieu, at all levels, has experienced an “ontological drift toward meaninglessness” (Thomson, 2001, p. 254)

42 See pp. 11-12 for the results of the Freshmen Survey conducted by the Higher Education Research institute at the University of California at Los Angeles.
perpetrated by neo-liberal ideologues and free-market capitalist evangelizers, who preach a gospel of education for economic mobility and use institutions of higher education as their bully pulpits of enculturation. Along with Heidegger via Thomson (2001), I call for an onto-educational revolution within Western higher education, a return in this space/time to the metaphysical presuppositions that undergird our very being-in-the-world. Looking to southern Africa and the East for a new educational paradigm, I echo Heidegger’s call for a real education. Heidegger declares, a real education:

lays hold of the soul itself and transforms it in its entirety by first of all leading us to the place of our essential being and accustoming us [eingewöhnt] us to it’. Genuine education leads us back to ourselves, to the place we are (the Da of our Sein), teaches us ‘to dwell’ (wohnen) ‘there’ and transforms us in the process. This transformative journey to ourselves is not a flight away from the world into thought, but a reflexive return to the fundamental ‘realm of the human sojourn’ (Aufenthaltsbezirk des Menschen). The goal of this educational odyssey is simple but literally revolutionary: to bring us full circle back to ourselves, first by turning us away from the world in which we are most immediately immersed, then by turning us back to this world in a more reflexive way [emphasis in original]. (Thomson, 2001, p. 254)

*Paideia* or real education is an onto-epistemological endeavor that seeks to make strange the familiar and the familiar strange for the purpose of “turning around the whole human being” (Thomson, 2001, p. 254). In light of Heidegger’s notion of real education (Thomson, 2001), ontologically (re)thinking higher education sparks a revolution whereby both the being-ness of the institution and being of each person that inhabits the institution is contemporaneously metamorphosed.

Heidegger’s (1962b/1931) ontohistorical analysis looks to an absent present-past to uncover the foundation of the West’s idea of education, and to deconstruct Western higher education. Heidegger’s deconstruction reveals the unhidden-ness of the disequilibrium between Plato’s metaphysical foundation and Nietzsche’s postmodern metaphysical unthinking (Thomson, 2001). Within the chasm of this edu-ontotheological disequilibrium has emerged,
asserts Heidegger (1962a, 1962b), a false interpretation of education and being. In fact, the current mess we are in within higher education is a result of these false interpretations. As opposed to Plato’s (1968/360 BCE) conception, education is now viewed as training and beings-human have been dehumanized—reconceived as widgets, cogs in a wheel, programmable data points to be utilized in the most efficient means possible for maximum economic benefit. Heidegger’s critique rings as true today as when he reached the pinnacle of his critiques of higher education in 1929; however, Heidegger wrote primarily of Western universities in Europe. As Hendry (2011) asserts, “History performs incredible epistemological acts” (p. 19) and most often acts of epistemological violence; therefore, to subvert the violence of a unidimensional ontohistorical analysis, we now move to an exploration of the aims and purposes of higher education in America before (re)thinking education with and through Buddhism and Ubuntu.

**The Aims of American Higher Education: An Ontohistorical Analysis.** In 1937, the American Council on Education met to take up the issue of student personnel work, or what has come to be known as the field of Student Affairs in higher education. Experiencing an increase in collegiate enrollment and recognizing the need to professionalize positions that were once the in loco parentis responsibility of individual Deans of Women/Men, the American Council on Education (ACE) found it necessary to develop a document that clarified the nature, role, and direction of student personnel work (ACE, 1937). Unknowingly, the drafters provide a peak into the dominant ontotheoretical suppositions of the space/time and philosophy of higher education. The American Council on Education would meet again in 1949 to update the document to meet the needs of the second large influx of college students following the passage of the GI Bill (Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944) in post-World War II America (Schuh, Jones, &
Harper, 2011; Thelin, 2004). As a student affairs practitioner, these are seminal documents and continue to guide student affairs practice; however, given the aim of this inquiry, little attention will be paid to the historical development of the field of Student Affairs. The Student Personnel Point of View documents serve as sites of ontohistorical analysis and interestingly document the (de)evolution of Plato’s (1968/360 BCE) metaphysical ontotheology within American higher education (Thomson, 2001; ACE, 1937, 1949; NASPA, 1987).

**From Uni- to Multi-versity.** The 1937 American Council on Education document, I argue, marks the turn or shift from the Uni-versity to the Multi-versity (Thomson, 2001). The drafters, experiencing “[t]he impact of a number of social forces upon American society following the Civil War,” (ACE, 1937, p.1) come to recognize the shift in higher education “away from the needs of the individual student to an emphasis, through scientific research, upon the extension of the boundaries of knowledge” (ACE, 1937, p. 1). This shift following the Civil War marks the first American ontotheological epoch, that is, a marked shift from the being of Beings to the epistemological objective of knowledge production. The document, eerily as relevant today, highlights of the pressures of faculty members to produce knowledge (research) to the detriment of the being-ness of their students (ACE, 1937). Therefore, the drafters and administrators of higher education institutions felt it necessary to appoint “a new type of educational officer to take over the more intimate responsibilities which faculty members had originally included among their duties” (ACE, 1937, p. 1); thus, the field of Student Affairs is born to tend to the being of students.

Excavating the ontological perspective in the historical, one comes to the realization that a very different discourse regarding the purposes of education was circulating in 1937. Illuminating the basic purposes of higher education, the drafters write:
One of the basic purposes of higher education is the preservation, transmission, and enrichment of the important elements of culture—the product of scholarship, research, creative imagination, and human experience. It is the task of colleges and universities so to vitalize this and other educational purposes to assist the student in developing to the limits of potentialities and in making his contribution to the betterment of society. (ACE, 1937, p. 1)

It appears that the basic purpose of higher education—knowledge production, preservation, and diffusion—to some extent has remained static; however, what has changed is the emphasis on the being of students alongside their intellectual pursuits. This philosophy of education speaks to the wholeness of students as beings-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1927/1962). Higher education, in the perspective of 1937, is aimed at a holistic onto-epistemological development of its students. Further, the creation of a Student Personnel corps speaks directly to a pre-Civil War understanding of the inseparability of ontology and epistemology. Prior to 1937, faculty members served as both educators and ontological sherpa’s tending to the ontological and epistemological needs of their students. The drafters confirm, “Until the last three decades of the nineteenth century interest in the whole student dominated the thinking of the great majority of the leaders and faculty members of American colleges” (ACE, 1937, p. 1). This shift in the philosophy of education would continue and reach an epochal pinnacle following the next American War, World War II.

Four years following the end of World War II, the American Council on Education (1949) would meet again to revise The Student Personnel Point of View report of 1937 and advance the work of student personnel professionals. More pointedly, The Student Personnel Point of View report of 1949 broadens the 1937 purposes of higher education to include three new goals:

1. Education for a fuller realization of democracy in every phase of living;
2. Education directly and explicitly for international understanding and cooperation;
3. Education for the application of creative imagination and trained intelligence to the solution of social problems and to the administration of public affairs. (ACE, 1949, p. 2)

Putting these additions in their historical context, these goals manifest higher education institutions as tools of nation building and societal growth, while continuing to “affect positively the education and development of each individual student” (ACE, 1949, p. 2). After joining the Allied Forces in the war against Germany to halt Hitler’s vicious assault on humanity, it is not doubt that higher education begins to embody the aims of democracy, international understanding, and sociological resolution toward the ultimate aim of, what I argue is the realization of, world peace.

Placing blame on the prototypical modern German research-centric university, the drafters assert that higher education in the early nineteenth century lost its way, that is, deserted the being of its student for epistemological dominance (ACE, 1949). More directly, they assert “[i]nfluenced by German models, American educators steered American higher education toward intellectualism” (ACE, 1949, p. 3). Seeking to distance themselves from anything German, they proposed a return to a colonial–holistic perspective of higher education that “gave as much attention to the social, moral, and religious development of students as to their intellectual growth” (ACE, 1949, p. 2). The onto-historical analysis of American higher education in 1949 is dominated by a philosophy of education that seeks to holistically develop the humanity and intellect of its students towards the ultimate goal of the growth of a democratic society (ACE, 1949). Specifically addressing the being or the being-ness of the student-in-the-world, they write:

The student is thought of as a responsible participant in his own development and not as a passive recipient of an imprinted economic, political, or religious doctrine, or vocational skill. As a responsible participant in the societal processes of our American democracy, his full and balanced maturity is viewed as a major end-goal of education, and, as well, a necessary means to the fullest development of his fellow citizens. From the personnel point of view any lesser goals fall short of the desired objective of democratic educational
processes and is a real drain and strain up the self-realization of other developing individuals in our society. (ACE, 1949, p. 2)

It appears higher education, following World War II, becomes a means of nationalist indoctrination, intellectual development, and societal assimilation. While I am critical of the dictatorial formation of a student’s being-ness in the world following the reception of an American higher education, I am pleased with the recognition of student as the intersection of multiplicities, an acknowledgment of agency, and a recognition of human interconnectedness in our associated mode of living (Dewey, 1916). Ontotheoretically, higher education in 1949 exhibited the influence of Plato, Heidegger, and Nietzsche and reinforced education as the means through which human beings made even more so could develop holistically for sake of nation building and peace keeping.

The second major ontotheological epoch, I argue in Chapter 1, is the shift from the equal privileging of ontology and epistemology to an economic epistemological regime set in motion by then-Governor Roland Reagan in 1968 in California and reinforced during his presidency in the 1980s (Berrett, 2015). More succinctly, the 1968 shift marks the beginning of higher education concerned with the epistemological aim of knowledge production, and the acquisition of knowledge for economic vitality—the economic epistemological regime—of which we are still living. It is also within this second ontheological epoch that we witness the solidification of the “Multi-versity” (Thomson, 2001, p. 251) with the development of education as an epistemological enterprise (NASPA, 1987; Barnett, 2011).

In 1987, fifty years after the original 1937 The Student Personnel Point of View was published, the National Association Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) issued an anniversary statement that did not revise the documents of 1937 and 1949, but served as “perspective written in 1987 to stimulate greater understanding of student affairs among leaders
in higher education” (NASPA, 1987, p. 1). Ontohistorically, society from 1949 to 1987 has undergone gargantuan changes such as: the Great Society policies of the Johnson era (1964-65), passage of the civil rights legislation, the Women’s Liberation movement, the Vietnam War, and the height of American protest culture (Thelin, 2004; NASPA, 1987). Concurrently, changes were occurring within the colleges and universities—higher education enrollments doubled in the 1950s and 1960s, faculty member supply was insufficient to meet the demand, and the federal government began their heavy investment in higher education via resources for facilities, research, and federal student aid (NASPA, 1987; Thelin, 2004). The times had changed and The Student Personnel Point of View documents were necessarily modified to reflect a new societal becoming (ACE, 1937, 1949; NASPA, 1987).

Keeping the additional goals of 1949 The Student Personnel Point of View document, the NASPA (1987) A Perspective on Student Affairs enumerates contemporary assumptions and beliefs regarding higher education, which has linked to form an edu-philosophical net. Briefly, they include:

- The Academic Mission of the Institution is Preeminent
- Each Student is Unique
- Each Person Has Worth and Dignity
- Bigotry Cannot Be Tolerated
- Feelings Affect Thinking and Learning
- Student Involvement Enhances Learning
- Personal Circumstance Affect Learning
- Out-of-class Environments Affect Learning
- A Supportive and Friendly Community Life Helps Students Learn
- The Freedom to Doubt and Question Must be Guaranteed
- Effective Citizenship Should be Taught
- Students are Responsible for Their Own Lives (NASPA, 1987)

The assumptions and beliefs listed in the NASPA (1987) document illuminate and reflect the societal changes that occurred in the 50 years between the writing of the 1937 and 1987 documents. The necessity to highlight a zero-tolerance for bigotry, the uniqueness of each
student, and declare the personhood of each individual is imbued with dignity, worth, and respect point toward a volatile, yet transformative 50-year period. Ontotheologically, the 1987 document signals the increasing role of higher education to fulfill the original aims of higher education with an emphasis on “…help[ing] individuals cope with significant life transitions — from adolescence to adulthood, from dependence to personal autonomy, from one occupation to another” (NASPA, 1987, p. 7). Today, while original aims of higher education continue to vaporously undergird higher education, I argue, it is the final phrase—“from one occupation to another” (NASPA, 1987, p. 7)—that has taken primacy over ontology and the traditional epistemological function of knowledge production. We now abide in an ontohistorical era of economic epistemological primacy, which for all intents and purposes has exiled the ontological in favor of technocratic dominance. Heidegger’s enframing prediction is our current reality (Thomson, 2001).

This brief ontohistorical analysis has demonstrated that higher education institutions are at once facsimiles of the society in which they are situated and vehicles of transformation for those same societies. If “our very ‘being-in-the-world’ is shaped by the knowledge we pursue, uncover, and embody” (Thomson, 2001, p. 250) and university’s have being (Barnett, 2011), then the reciprocal is also true—a transformation of the being of Beings can catalyze an institutional metamorphosis of being-becoming. If my logic holds true, the conceptualization of the Being-West catalyzes an institutional metamorphosis toward an onto-educational being-becoming. In agreement with Thomson (2001), when the being-ness of beings change, then so to must colleges and universities—the institutional wombs of being-becoming, where we become what are— transform.
To Transform As We Are Being Transformed: A Buddhist and Ubuntu-hued Onto-Educational Philosophy of Higher Education

In American higher education, we find ourselves both the perpetrators and the victims of an economic epistemological regime dominated by neo-liberal, technocratic principles and structurally by “nothing other than the optimal input/output ratio of a business” (Readings, 1999, p. 39), which leads us to a discourse of effectiveness and efficiency that deceptively circulates what can only be interpreted as “a criterion of excellence as a performativity in an expanded market, because there is no cultural content” (Readings, 1999, p. 38) or ontological understanding of the being of Beings (Heidegger 1927/1962; Thomson, 2001). As I invited in Chapter 4, imagine the world we would live in if higher education were primarily concerned with being-becoming, becoming consciousness, becoming more-human, becoming just society, and becoming radical love. Imagine higher education as an environment where communalism, dialogue, respect, dignity, and learning over knowledge acquisition thrive (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Kincheloe, 2001, 2004, 2008; Freire, 1970; Eze, 2008, 2010, 2011; Hahn, 1999). I assert a Buddhist and Ubuntu-hued onto-educational philosophy of higher education offers such possibilities.

It is important to insert a parenthetical remark, this (re)thinking of higher education through Buddhism and Ubuntu is designed to transform the being of Beings, and the being-ness of institutions of higher education. In agreement with Nakusera (2004),

depth transformation should not only happen structurally, because the need for attitude changes underlies much of the required change in an organization today, and therefore, if one can change or enhance a person’s understanding or a situation and ensure that the environment supports that change, it is likely that attitude and behavior change will follow (Von Hirchfeld & Downs, 1992). (p. 129)

An ontological transformation, I assert, will necessarily catalyze a structural transformation; therefore, this inquiry focuses solely on the human ontological transformation.
Again, the primary goal of this onto-educational philosophy of higher education, like the Heideggerian notion of *Bildung* (Heidegger 1927/1962), is the promotion of an education that attends to the molding of the *being* of Beings—onto-education. A Buddhist and *Ubuntu*-hued philosophy of higher education redistributes Eastern and southern African values into the Western context, while recognizing the issues of transferability and translatability, I contend there are a number of aspects in both onto-epistemological philosophies that once taken up at the site of the being-human could catalyze a new educational and societal becoming. Combined with the new being-ness of the Being-West, Buddhist mindfulness, The Four Noble Truths, and intertwined with the ubuntugogical aspects of dialogue and consensus building constitute this (re)thinking of higher education through a Buddhist and *Ubuntu*-hued onto-educational philosophy (Hanh, 1999; Bangura, 2005; Nafukho, 2006). (re)Thinking with and through Buddhism and *Ubuntu*, I now set about on a path of formulating an absent present-future onto-educational philosophy of higher education toward the cultivation of educating for humanity and the manifestation of beings-*more*-human.

**A Community of (Un)Learners.** First, the tenets of Buddhism and *Ubuntu* realign higher education institutions from *multi-* to *uni-*versity, that is, given the centrality of interconnectedness and interdependence (communalism) in both philosophical concepts, (re)thinking yields institutions of higher education as interconnected and interdependent communities of learners. The notions of community and learner are key to this first tenet. Community implies an interconnectedness and interdependence, which is integral to Buddhist and *Ubuntu* philoso-praxis (Hanh, 1999; Venter, 2004; Eze, 2008; Letseka, 2011). The notion of learner discards the traditional epistemological hierarchical designations of teacher and student; there are only learners in an onto-educational philosophy.
The community of learners inter-are (Hahn, 1999). In fact, the Ubuntist and Buddhist notions of community are conceptualized as beings-human entangled in a “vast, ever-expanding net of spiritual, psychosocial, biological and emotional relations” (Venter, 2004, p. 151). The conception of institutions of higher education as communal presumes interdependence, that is, the interdependence of beings-human and the various departments of the institution (sub-communities). Communalism is an awareness of interdependence. Even more so, it is an awareness of the institution as caught up in the success of the beings-human who comprise the community of learners. Unable to totally discard West, onto-educational philosophy recognizes the Western need for individuality; therefore, individuality is not lost but becomes a matter of degree. Moreover, the African conception of individuality can be understood as a “being-with-others” (Bangura, 2005, p. 33); an individual is only an individual in relationship with others (Bangura, 2005). The communalist foundations of an onto-educational philosophy within higher education assists in the development of harmonious human and non-human relationships, and enhances trust and dignity in human relations. In this perspective, the beings-human journeying deeper toward Beings-West who inhabit these institutions of higher education exhibit sensitivity and caring. In essence, they are beings-human with and for other beings-human in an environment that reciprocates and fosters care and concern for others. Institutions of higher education as communal—interconnected and interdependent—lead to social harmony and justice in educative relations (Venter, 2004; Waghid, 2014). This underlying understanding of the higher education ethos permeates the institutions’ and the learners’ very being-in-the-world. It is in community with other beings-human that one’s own being-humanness is made manifest and enhanced. As a Buddhist and Ubuntu-hued philosophy, onto-educational philosophy, has as it
chief aim the formulation of educated persons, who are made more human in relationship with others and within the institutional womb of *alma mater*.

What is an educated person? According to Waghid (2014) and Wiredu (2004), an educated person is not necessarily a person who has undergone the rigor of Western schooling or knowledge acquisition. Rather, just like the African sages mentioned in Chapter 2, an educated person in the African sense is one that possesses a knowledge of their culture, is tolerant and remains open to dialogical engagement, is moral, and has the ability to reason (Wiredu, 2004). Above, all an educated person is wise (Oruka, 1990, 2002; Wiredu, 2004; Waghid, 2014; Eze, 2008). This understanding of an educated person runs counter to the Western understanding of what it means to be educated, yet opens a range of possibilities. In loosening up the Western conception of an educated person, we come to recognize all people as ontologically and epistemologically graced with the wisdom to know and be known. Additionally, the African conception allows for a certain supra-cognitive lucidity, which suggests, “being wise is a distinct achievement over above merely knowing many things, whatever the things are that are known” (Wiredu, 2004, p. 18). In short, this lucidity allows one to recognize the existence of educated fools. Given this conception of an educated person, epistemology too must be reconceptualized.

Looking to Africa, Waghid (2014) and Wiredu (2004, 2005) assert an African epistemology is non-binary, that is, unlike a Eurocentric view of knowledge, an African epistemology and I would argue an Eastern epistemology are equally informed by cultural sagacity and Western ways of knowing; they are intertwined. For the Being-West, these knowledges inter-are (Hanh, 1999). In this view, knowledge is domesticated and like “education has to take into account the social context in which it unfolds; in other words, an Aristotelian view of education as simply a ‘social practice’ seems highly implausible” (Waghid, 2014, p. 39).
To put it another way, Waghid (2014) writes, “If there is an important truth in Buddha or Kant or Dewey or Heidegger or Quine, you can take it and add it to the truths that you have obtained in your own African tradition of thought” (p. 39). This understanding of epistemology is reminiscent of the entirety of this inquiry. Knowledge, like education and learning, is dependent upon the situatedness in which it unfolds.

What is a learner? Indeed, we are all learners; simply living is a process of learning (Bangura, 2005). In the Platonic sense, learning is the continuous process by which we traverse the soul’s act of becoming to achieve being (Plato, 1968/360 BCE). While the Platonic conception is appealing, it does not do justice to what I consider an inseparable ontological and epistemological posture. Learning is an active engagement in Right Mindfulness and Right Thinking (Hanh, 1999). Right Mindfulness, avers Hanh (1999), “accepts everything without judging or reacting. It is inclusive and loving” (p. 64). While Right Mindfulness allows an openness of being, it is the tension between and the friction generated by the “initial thoughts (vitarka) and developing thoughts (vichara)” (Hahn, 1999, p. 60) of Right Thinking where the learning occurs and the being-becoming Being-West must attempt to reside. More importantly, learning is a communal unfolding. Looking West, Heidegger (1976) defines learning as making “everything we do answer to whatever essentials address us at a given time” (p. 14). Learning is an active ontological and epistemological engagement with the matter at hand, unfolding in relationship with the community of learners and in the situatedness of the larger community. In the West, the classroom constructs a sub-community of learners, who through relationship and dialogue onto-cognitively reside in the tension between the initial and developing thoughts of Right Thinking. Within this sub-community of learners, the teacher presides as Chief Learner. Declaring teaching more difficult than learning, Heidegger (1976) pronounces:
Why is teaching more difficult than learning? Not because the teacher must have a larger store of information, and have it always ready. Teaching is more difficult than learning because what teaching calls for is this: to let learn. The real teacher, in fact, lets nothing else be learned than learning. The teacher is ahead of his[her] apprentices in this alone, that he has still far more to learn than they – he as to learn to let them learn. The teacher must be capable of being more teachable than his apprentices [emphasis added]. (p. 15)

Learning and teaching are inseparable. Heidegger (1976) confirms the assertion that learning and teaching are two sides of the same coin, and the university as a community of learners among whom the teacher/professor is simply the Chief Learner among learners. Interestingly, he also defines teaching as “let learn” (Heidegger, 1976, p. 15), which connotes the Buddhist notion of Right Mindfulness. However, Buddhistic mindfulness is less concerned with learning and more focused on unlearning. To this point, Waghid (2014) writes:

In essence, our deliberative actions in our teaching-learning encounters should also make us open to the unexpected, the uncertain and the unpredictable. In this way our teaching-learning encounters cultivate a kind of deliberation without any preconceived end-point or finality in mind. (p. 13).

Learning is a rhizomatic engagement producing lines of flight with stops and starts that end abruptly and begin unanticipatedly, it is the generation of onto-cognitive fissures and fusions that continue ad infinitum (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). The community of learners simultaneously “let learn” (Heidegger, 1976, p. 15) and let be; they let learn-be acknowledging the inseparability of epistemology and ontology. Thinking with Buddhist mindfulness, the community of learners is actually a community of un-learners. Transgressing West in metamorphosis to Being-West, the community of (un)learners through active engagement with the matter at hand and in community seek to unlearn West toward conscious awareness and dissolution of self as individual, static, autonomous. The clarion call, it could be argued, for the community of (un)learners is not let learn, but let (un)learn-be.
Moral. Communalism, conceived through Buddhism and *Ubuntu*, is inherently imbued with a requisite moral or ethical understanding. Bolstering this claim, Menkiti (2004) argues African morality “demands a point of view best described as one of being-ness–with–others” (p. 324). Ontologically (re)thinking higher education, reorients the understanding of institutions of higher education as not solely concerned with knowledge acquisition or transmission, but the moral development of all within the community of (un)learners. According to Wiredu (2004), education as a moral or ethical conception and the development of moral maturity are extremely important; it is a component of the embodiment of an educated person. Regarding the importance of moral maturity from a southern African perspective, he writes:

In Akan thought its importance in the making of an educated person is more fundamental than might first appear. This quality is not just needed as a special qualification; it is needed for being a person at all in the first place. The very concept of a person [who is deemed human] in Akan has a normative component that stipulates that to be deemed a person (*onipa*) one must demonstrate a sense of responsibility towards one’s kith and kin as well as to the wider community. (Wiredu, 2004, p. 20)

In agreement, Metz (2011) contends the highest moral obligation within the community of (un)learners is “to become more human” (p. 537). Again, moral maturity is a requirement for living in community, yet while it is a requirement for living in community it is within this very same community that moral maturity is developed. As I asserted earlier, the community of (un)learners is concerned with un-learning, which most assuredly occurs through trial and error, and mimesis. The trial and error of the (un)learning process requires another trait of an educated person – tolerance. Nevertheless, it is through the (un)learning process of trial and error that one achieves moral maturity and is then able to model the way for others in the community of (un)learners. No one reaches perfection, but is always engaged in a process of recalibration – trial and error.
Recognizing the moral maturity as a moving target, the Buddhist categorization of moral action within the Noble Eightfold Path contains: Right Action, Right Livelihood, and Right Speech\(^{43}\) (Hanh, 1999). Borrowing from statistical mathematics, one enters into a state of moral kurtosis, that is, one can get close to moral maturity, but never really reaches it because the situatedness is always in flux. However, Buddhism offers a philo-so-praxis for the onto-epistemological cultivation of morals through Right Action, Right Livelihood, and Right Speech. Right Action is “the practice of touching love and preventing harm, the practice of nonviolence toward ourselves and others” (Hanh, 1999, p. 94). Right Action is necessary for living and being in community, for being and keeping peace. Cultivated through mindfulness, Right Action points us toward an awareness that we are complicit in the physical and onto-epistemological violence of society, and encourages us to be generous, to practice responsibility, and to be mindful of consumption. Right Livelihood, in the community of (un)learners, reconceptualizes higher education as space/time in which the (un)learner discovers their soul’s purpose and is brought to the fullness of his/her humanity. This is the metaphysical dimension of the community of (un)learners influenced by Plato (1968/360 BCE) and Heidegger (1927/1962) coupled with the Ubuntu. The aim is to ensure that what the (un)learner does in life does not negatively affect who the (un)learner’s becomes. More succinctly, the (un)learner’s means of earning a living should not work against their ethical code or transgress their “ideals of love and compassion” (Hahn, 1999, p. 98). Finally, Right speech is explained as: “(1) Speaking truthfully. […] (2) Not speaking with a forked tongue. […] (3) Not speaking cruelly. […] (4) Not exaggerating or embellishing” (Hanh, 1999, pp. 84-85). As I assert in Chapter 3, finding its basis in Right Thinking, Right Speech is the verbal expression of our thinking; however, deep listening occupies the core of Right Speech (Hanh, 1999). Deep listening is simply listening with

\(^{43}\) See Chapter 3
compassion of which the fruit is healing (Hanh, 1999). Leading us to Right Action, Hanh (1999) declares, “to practice social justice and non-exploitation, we have to use Right Speech” (p. 93). In agreement with the central tenet of Ubuntu, Right Speech illuminates the importance of the dialogical to reduce suffering, increase understanding, and produce a harmonious environment within the community of (un)learners. Harmony is not the absence of conflict, but the presence of emotions, motives, and relationships oriented toward the edification of others and the good of the whole (Metz, 2011). Higher education, through this (re)thinking, is a community of mutual care—a formative space/time where Right Action, Right Livelihood, and Right Speech can be practiced and moral maturity cultivated through the (un)learning process of trial and error.

An onto-educational philosophy of higher education seeks to enlarge the (un)learners moral imagination by “harness[ing] a culture of humanity and responsibility in schools and contribute toward nurturing a politics of harmony in…education” (Waghid, 2014, p. 70). Essentially, the cultivation of moral maturity and the calling forth of the (un)learner in the process of becoming Being-West engenders moral imagination, and crystallizes the responsibility that each being-human has for the whole community of (un)learners and all of humanity. Utilizing the Derrida’s (1991) notion of responsibility, Waghid (2014) contends, “a person’s individual responsibility and the collective responsibility of the group or community are constituted by the inter-relations between the individual and the community” (p. 37). The (un)learner and the community of (un)learners are responsible for one another as beings-human, and anyone who eschews this responsibility is deemed “unbecoming of what it means to be a human” (Waghid, 2014, p. 37). Enacting responsibility requires understanding the needs of both the (un)learner and the community of (un)learners; this understanding is only reached through dialogue.
**Dialogical and Reflexive.** The community of (un)learners engages in dialogue and subsequently, reflexivity. It is through dialogue that we come to know and be known, that we come to understand. Dialogical engagement is both intentional speaking and deep listening (Hanh, 1999). According to Freire (1970/2000), dialogue characterizes an epistemological relationship, which (positively or negatively) shapes ontology. Remember, “our very ‘being-in-the-world’ is shaped by the knowledge we pursue, uncover, and embody” (Thomson, 2001, p. 250). Consequently, language is of extreme importance in an onto-educational philosophy. The words one speaks and the manner in which one speaks them within the community of (un)learners becomes “a way of looking at ourselves, for language is a picture of the ways in which we interact with our environment and our kind” (Wiredu, 2004, p. 24). Within the community of (un)learners language is the means through which cognition is developed, knowledge is communicated, produced, and acquired. In the Buddhist perspective, Right Speech leads to Right Thinking, which spurs Right Action—literally the life or death is in the power of the tongue (Hanh, 1999; Nakusera, 2004).

As I put forth in Chapter 1, an engagement in the dialogical, which Freire (1970/2000) classifies as an epistemological curiosity, leads to liberation from old regime thinking. Therefore, the introduction of an idea interrogated and problematized through dialogue, frees us from the prison of the known and transforms praxis, which Louw (2011) defines as an intentionality in thought, behavior, or action (Chopra, 1994; Freire, 1970/2000). This praxis constitutes a *habitus*, which gradually necessitates an ontological metamorphosis and catalyzes a new being-becoming (Louw, 2011). In a Buddhist and Ubuntu-hued onto-educational philosophical perspective, the importance of dialogical engagement within the higher education milieu cannot be underscored enough; it is one of the primary means through which the promotion of responsibility and
humanity are brought to fruition within the (un)learning community. Waghid (2014) avers, “dialogue should be presented as a practice that allows learners to open up to one another with the possibility that they [(un)learners] might even come to some kind of disagreement among themselves” (p. 76). Unlike the classrooms of the multi-versity, within the community of (un)learners (the uni-versity) dialogue is not policed by the Chief (un)Learner (teachers or professors). Instead, the community of (un)learners on their journey toward becoming Being-West recognizes (un)learning as the willingness to be with and in the contradiction, which is situated within the tension of the initial and developing thoughts. (un)Learning, then is the ability to onto-epistemologically reside comfortably in the uncomfortableness of onto-cognitive contradiction.

Intent on making strange the familiar, onto-educational philosophy focuses not on eloquent oration, but the ordinary colloquial and (in)articulate expression of all members of the community. An engagement in educated dialogue gives voice to those on the margins (Wiredu, 2004; Waghid, 2014; Freire 1970/2000). Dialogue, in onto-educational philosophy, is simply conceived as a conversation where everyone has a willingness to attentively listen to and for the essence of the expression—the content and message, and not the eloquence of expression (Waghid, 2014; Hahn, 1999). In a word, an onto-educational philosophy is dialectical, and encourages one and all within the community of (un)learners to practice respect. Naturally conflicts will arise with the community of (un)learners undergirded by the dialectical; the resolution of conflict requires respect and what Waghid (2014) terms “conversational justice” (MacIntyre, 1999, 105 as cited in Waghid, 2014, p. 49). Respect in this sense is not a blind acceptance of everything that one has to say; however, respect demands that we “hold others to the intellectual and moral standards that we [strive to] apply to ourselves” (Waghid, 2014, p. 12)
and to do anything less would signal a devaluing of their voice and personhood. In an onto-
educational philosophical perspective, challenge is a form of honor; it shows that what
(un)learners have to say is being taken seriously (Waghid, 2014).

In practice, onto-educational philosophy informed by *Ubuntu* regards (un)learners as
reasonable beings and recognizes their natural ability to make meaning of the various texts and
concepts. The (un)learner is able to communicatively express their thoughts and ideas and the
Chief (un)Learner (professor/teacher) is given to listening to the essence of those thoughts and
ideas while developing the student’s communicative capabilities. The key aspect of this
reasonableness is that both (un)learners and the Chief (un)Learners come to a place where
finality and certainty are but myth, and the real joy is found in grappling as community with an
idea or concept (Waghid, 2014). Highlighting the importance of reflexivity in the community of
(un)learning, Waghid (2014) offers a practical suggestion for university professors teaching
educational theory, he suggests “an understanding of critical pedagogy and reflexivity so that
they, in turn, can critically and self-reflectively evaluate concepts” (Waghid, 2014, p. 11). This
suggestion harkens to Pinar et al.’s (2008) notion of currere, whereby both Chief (un)Learners
and (un)learners are encouraged to practice self-reflexivity to achieve Right Thinking and Right
Action. In the onto-educational higher education milieu (re)thought through Buddhism and
*Ubuntu*, reflection is not enough; (un)learners must make a choice to do something with the
concepts they are learning and must attempt to put them into practice in their own way. In fact,
the community of (un)learners is obligated to utilize all they have (un)learned to model the way–
to model the recognition of our shared humanity through their interactions with other beings-
human. Within an onto-educational philosophical perspective, active engagement in dialogue and
the practice of reflexivity produces new imaginings and tensions from which springs the courage
to stretch beyond known boundaries—into the plane of immanence, which re-orient the (un)learner toward “the imaginative acquisition of knowledge” (Ramsden, 1992, p. 19) and a once unthinkable being of Beings (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

Democratic. Institutions of higher education, (re)thought through Buddhism and Ubuntu, are democratic or focus on building consensus for the good of the whole. They are democratic both in the Deweyan sense and as democracy is conceived in southern Africa. Dewey (1916) contends “[a] democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily an associated mode of living, of conjoint communicated experience” (p. 101). In the African perspective, democracy or consensus building is also way of living and being together in community, and is achieved through dialogue. Reiterating from Chapter 2, Bangura (2005) asserts African democracy operates through discussion toward the pursuit of reconciliation and agreement. Born out of mutual respect, consensus building is an authentic recognition of the personhood of each individual, our shared humanity, and the maintenance of harmony. Democracy or consensus building, according to Broodryk (2006), is synonymous with gathering underneath the shade of a tree and engaging in conversation until an agreement is reached. While harmony and agreement are the ultimate aims of consensus building, the engagement is not a total dissolution of conflict or a resolution to the satisfaction of a single individual, but it is the attainment of a resolution for the good of the whole community. The achievement of resolution necessitates members of the community of (un)learners practice deep listening.

Consensus building or democracy is synonymous with deep listening, which is the deepest expression of a culture of mutual care (Hanh, 1999). Living in a democratic community and practicing democracy is a continual exercise in compassion. Broodryk (2006) reminds treating others with respect and exercising compassion requires active and deep listening to the
words that others speak and the expression of the words they speak. Deep listening is not what commonly occurs in Western educational settings. In the West, subjects listen while formulating a rebuttal—this is not deep listening. Deep listening is done with the ears and the heart. Like the African system of democracy or consensus building, democratic living within the community of (un)learners is “about giving all a chance to express views and for all to listen and discuss standpoints, until everybody has reached agreement” (Broodryk, 2006, p. 14). In the community of (un)learners harmony or agreement is not always the end goal and cannot be a precondition for engaging in dialogue or debate; rather dialogue is a communal practice that opens up possibilities for the community as a whole and for oneself (Waghid, 2014). Practicing deep listening and Right Speech, the (un)learner begins to problematize the rigidity of their own beliefs and comes to understand the perspective of others. In the community of (un)learners, Right Speech necessitates the practice of conversational justice, which is the responsibility both the Chief (un)Learners and (un)learners to engage justly and respectfully in dialogue with one another (Waghid, 2014). More clearly defined,

> **conversational justice** requires among other things, first that each of us speaks with candour, not pretending or deceiving or striking attitudes, and second that each takes up no more time than is justified by the importance of the point that she or he has to make and the arguments necessary for making it. (MacIntyre, 1999, p. 111)

This concept is the basis for human engagement and for moral dialogical engagement within community. Conversational justice allows the members of the community to share their voice, encounter both the similarities and differences within and between one another, and demands the practice of mutual respect. Bolstered by Buddhist mindfulness, the practice of conversational justice “engender[s] dignified humane action, evoke[s] the potentialities of people, and cultivate[s] a community of shared face” (Waghid, 2014, p. 70). Imagine a community, a society, and a political arena where conversational justice and deep listening were practiced; listening to
what is said not who is saying it. Imagine the synergies, the points of mutual understanding that could be reached in the community writ large if we justly conversed with one another. The possibilities for meaningful, authentic human engagement are limitless.

Notwithstanding the benefits of practicing conversational justice, democratic education proffers Nussbaum (2002), “involves the cultivation of critical argumentation, reasoning and narrative imagination, that is to imagine what it would be like to be in the position of someone different from oneself” (p. 289). In other words, within a culture of conversation, the community of (un)learners practice “equity, tolerance, multilingualism, openness, accountability and social honour” ([SA] Department of Education, 2001, p. 3 as cited in Waghid, 2014, p. 72). Consensus building encourages an understanding of difference through dialogue and mandates the utilization of critical thinking in the engagement. Further, practical and ideological conflicts are bound to arise within community; living out democratic ideals within the community of (un)learners encourages reconciliation through dialogue (Wiredu, 2004). In this way, institutions of higher education serve as preparatory environments for living in community writ large. In a spirit of dialogue and through the practice of consensus building, the (un)learner comes to allow the existence of many ideas and perspectives without holding any one uncompromisingly in so far as the ideas meet the needs of the community, are moral, and recognizes the dignity of each being-human.

Humanizing. Finally, an onto-educational philosophy of higher education hued by Buddhism and Ubuntu leads all (un)learners from themselves and back to themselves in the context of the space/time in which they are situated. As Broodryk (2006) asserts, “knowledge is the challenge of being human so as to discover the promise of being human” (p. 24). Onto-educational philosophy holds education is one means through which (un)learners, and all humans
can come into the fullness of their humanity in relationship with one another and assist in
developing the necessary tools through which we are able to fully express our soul’s purpose.

Further, education allows us to realize: the global deficit of our shared humanity; and recognizes
that as a nation, a people, and a culture we have privileged some over others; we have given a
place of honor to the dominate race/group while erasing from hearts and minds the contributions
of others who are equally deserving of the respect of remembrance. Within the (un)learning
community, an onto-educational philosophy of higher education calls upon each of us broaden
our view of the world and the people, who inhabit it—to recognize the contributions of all
cultures and respect the personhood of each individual. Through the philo-so-praxis of the Four
Noble Truths, the Noble Eight Fold Path, and cultivation of the “Bodhichitta\(^{44}\) or “mind of
love,” (Hahn, 1999, p. 62), an onto-educational higher education philosophy (re)thought through
Buddhism and *Ubuntu* heightens the awareness that:

\[
\text{‘A person is a person through other people’ [which] strikes an affirmation of one’s}
\text{humanity through recognition of an ‘other’ in his or her uniqueness and difference. It is a}
\text{demand for a creative intersubjective formation in which the ‘other’ becomes a mirror}
\text{(but only a mirror) for my subjectivity. This idealism suggests to us that humanity is not}
\text{embedded in my person solely as an individual; my humanity is co-substantively}
\text{bestowed upon the other and me. Humanity is a quality we owe to each other. We create}
\text{each other and need to sustain this otherness creation. And if we belong to each other, we}
\text{participate in our creations: we are because you are, and since you are, definitely I am.}
\text{The ‘I am’ is not a rigid subject, but a dynamic self-constitution dependent on this}
\text{otherness creation of relation and distance. (Eze, 2010, p. 190-191)}
\]

This is *Ubuntu*. This is Buddhism. This is the cultural philo-so-praxis of the community of
(un)learners. An onto-educational philosophy of higher education engenders “communal
embeddedness and connectedness of a person to other persons” (Waghid, 2014, p. 10). In
essence, it recognizes the humanity of the Other through a recognition of humanity in oneself.

\(^{44}\) As discussed in Chapter 3, the Bodhichitta is cultivated when we seek to understand ourselves for the
aim of showering others with happiness (Hanh, 1999).
At the heart of an onto-educational higher education milieu permeated with the philosophical concepts of *Ubuntu* and Buddhism is a strong communitarian and interdependent nature. As discussed in Chapter 4 regarding the conceptualization of the Being-West, subjectivity as we understand it, as a whole does not go by the wayside rather it is our responsibility—ethically and morally—to act in a communitarian way. Moreover, to view our human relations with mindfulness through the lens of *Ubuntu*, according to Waghid (2014),

is to do so with an intersubjective human identity that does not dismiss the self-determined (autonomous) and responsible actions of individual persons. They act with their subjective selves in a self-determined and responsible manner towards others—that is they are in mutual action and interaction with others. I see myself reflected by and through the Other, which makes the Other a mirror that recasts my image to me; this suggests that there is some interconnectedness between the Other and me. (p. 29)

This notion is powerful for all beings-human, but most especially for Chief (un)Learners (teachers and professors) who, I posit, are shaping first the hearts then the minds of (un)learners—molding their being-ness-in-the-world. An onto-educational philosophy of higher education holds that the aim of higher education is to educate the heart and the mind. To perceive oneself and the Other as one and same radically alters the way in which we let (un)learn-be and how as beings-human we come into relationship with one another. All within the community of (un)learners recognize their interconnectedness and interdependence as beings-human not only as mirror, but as one-same. To this point, Cavell (1979) offers “the other is like oneself, that whatever one can know about the other one first has to find in oneself and then read into the other…[that is] conceive the other from the others point of view” (p. 29). All within the community of (un)learners have a responsibility, a moral obligation to all beings-human, which makes them answerable for what happens to them (Waghid, 2014). Cavell (1979) unknowingly incorporates the communal, dialogical, and consensus building pillars of an onto-educational philosophy of higher education as a means of humanization.
The community of (un)learners seeks to impart an understanding of the complexity of this world and humanity by making strange the familiar and the familiar strange to lead (un)learners away and then back to themselves (Dall’Alba & Barnacle, 2007). What does this mean? It means that institutions of higher education have an obligation to expand the mind, to enhance moral growth, to problematize and make question—to promote ontological, epistemological, and axiological development. The seed of this developmental process must be firmly planted at the site of the being-human, first. For instance, entrance into the community of (un)learners most often causes the (un)learner to call into question the philosophies, ideologies, and practices of their communities of origin making what was once very familiar seem quite strange. Inversely, within the community of (un)learners, the (un)learner is familiarized with notions that were once thought strange; thereby making the strange familiar. This process purposefully generates a onto-cognitive dissonance—the tension between the initial and developing thought—which begins to make possible new modes of being and new understandings of what it means to be a being-human. Indeed, we are shaped by the knowledge we pursue, but also by our ability to abide, to be in the generous fissure of contradiction (Thomson, 2001). This is a necessity of deepening our understanding of self as being-human and the humanness of the other beings-human within the community of (un)learners. “Moreover, central to one’s connection with the Other is the notion that one has to acknowledge humanity in the Other—and the basis for such action lies in oneself: ‘I have to acknowledge humanity in the other, and the basis seems to lie in me’” (Cavell, 1979, p. 433). So, through a Buddhist and Ubuntu-hued onto-educational philosophy of higher education, the community of (un)learners arrives at the understanding that we are human begins through and with other human beings, but the realization of that humanity is at the same time both personal and communal. In this sense,
the (un)learner has departed as ‘self’ and returned to its personhood as Being-West. The
(un)learner comes into the fullness of his/her humanity within the community of (un)learners
through the philoso-praxis of onto-education.

I recognize to simply say that (un)learners will come into the fullness of their humanity
by partaking in the community of (un)learners is vague. Here is what I mean in asserting an onto-
educational philosophy is humanizing. First, the (un)learners conceptualization of humanity or
humanness is developed in praxis, in active engagement in the life of the community, which
requires the recognition of the dignity of each being-human within the community. Dignity,
human dignity can only be developed in community and through a deep recognition of one’s
own and the other’s humanness (Metz, 2011). Understanding the dignity and personhood of each
being-human is a moral obligation and a practice in love. Love, I assert, is the key to blossoming
beings-humans into the fullness of their humanity. The love of which I speak is not _eros_,
sentimentality or mush, but agape—unconditional love, the liberating force that binds all beings-
human in common humanity. Love humanizes; it accepts the other in their otherness, but also
mandates equal dignity, equal respect, mutual care, challenge and support, tolerance, and
openness be extended to all beings-humans in the process of their being-becoming. As Hanh
(1999) reminds, love is simply understanding called by another name.

**Conclusion**

The onto-educational institution of higher education is communal, normative, dialogical
and reflexive, democratic, and humanizing. Ontologically (re)thinking institutions of higher
education with Buddhism and _Ubuntu_ reorients the aim from knowledge production and
acquisition to the fulfillment of their deepest moral obligation: providing an environment where
(un)learners can become more fully human by entering more deeply into community (Shutte,
2001). Mandated by the conceptualization of the Being-West (Chapter 4) as inextricably bound to other Beings-West, ontologically (re)thinking institutions of higher education through Buddhism and Ubuntu manifest what I term an onto-educational philosophy. An onto-educational philosophy of higher education re-ontologizes education, that is, shifts the higher education milieu from its current status of polytechnic institution characterized by an economic epistemological fear toward an un-fragmented or uni-onto-educational institution, where the shaping of the being of Beings holds equality with the production and acquisition of knowledge (Thomson, 2001). Thinking with Buddhist mindfulness, the university is reconceptualized as the community of (un)learners, where (un)learners not students come together to gain an understanding of the complexity of the world from not professors but Chief (un)Learners. The entirety of the community of (un)learners from the Administration to the faculty, staff, and members of facility services personnel are perceived as both (un)learners and Chief (un)Learners—each person is considered an educated person enshrouded in the wisdom of their various communal and cultural embodiments and (un)knowings. As members of the community of (un)learning, each being-human presents the opportunity for new ontological and epistemological possibilities that can benefit the whole of humanity. In essence, (re)thinking institutions of higher education through Buddhism and Ubuntu initiates a contemporaneous ‘individual’ and institutional metamorphosis. The community of (un)learners (university)—alma mater—in its being-ness is transformed into the institutional womb of being-becoming more human, which comes to birth the Being-West in the fullness of its being-humanness.

The Western onto-praxis of onto-educational philosophy within higher education provides a counterbalance to today’s enterprising multi-versity and returns to the notion of higher education as a space/time of holistic development of the being-human; a time when higher
education was concerned with both the being of Beings and the production of knowledge for the betterment of humanity. This re-ontologizing of education, through the generative onto-epistemologies of Buddhism and Ubuntu, in a sense re-ensouls the educative endeavor and re-joins all of the components of today’s mutli-versity toward one goal—Bildung: the molding and shaping of life-long (un)learners who understand the nature of our shared humanity and the fragility and strength of our being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1927/1962). As I asserted elsewhere, the attitudinal (onto-epistemological) transformation and the structural transformation must necessarily occur in tandem to yield a new mode of being for all within the community of (un)learners. The institution of higher education permeated by the philosophy of onto-education does not view its self as multi-, but uni-. In the onto-educational university, all departments, divisions, faculty, staff and students work together with common purpose—they understand the wholeness of the being-ness of the institution and the inseparability of the structural components to its being-ness. The university, as community of (un)learners, is always oriented toward sharing, equality, respect, and compassion. This orientation transcends the siloed, territorial and, at times, predatory nature of the multi-versity. In effect, the onto-educational university is unified by its shared commitment to the creation of a community of (un)learners who pursue excellence with a conscience and an understanding that all within the community are committed to the responsibility of improving the world and beings-in-the-world for the sake of all humanity.

In thinking about the current state of American higher education, I am frightened and enraged that we are all being conditioned to think, behave, process or not process in certain ways based on the dominate ideologies and discourse. Giroux (as cited in Pinar et. al, 2008) asserts that curriculum, and ideology in particular, structures the unconscious of students. Even more frightening is Apple’s (2013) assertion that we are the result of ideology and even now we are
under its spell. Institutions of higher education in the economic epistemological regime of fear
presumes that being-humans are not capable of becoming or rather controls their “becoming” in
order to fashion an ontology more congruent with the dominant political and economic
ideologies. This hidden curriculum, which is not so hidden anymore, serves as a mechanism of
the dominant culture to silence and to marginalize the ideas and voices of those who are not
willing to conform to the rules of the status quo (Pinar et. al, 2008).

An onto-educational philosophy of higher education focuses on the depth of our
humanity, looks critically at the systems and power structures of this world, seeks to always
disrupt hegemonic relationships, practices self-reflection and introspection, and that actively
works on behalf of justice which is critical to our time. Within the hallowed halls of institutions
of higher education, onto-educational philosophy attempts to recalibrate higher education to once
again concern itself with being-becoming, becoming consciousness, becoming just society,
becoming radical love, and becoming more-human. For too long we have allowed big business
and elites to rule the world, control our understanding, and perpetuate human oppression. It is
time for a new philosophical understanding, a new onto-epistemological perspective that
privileges justice, equity, community, and liberation of the bodies and minds of all beings-
human. Onto-educational philosophy, a Buddhist and Ubuntu-hued philosophy of education, is
one of the many possibilities of philoso-praxical transformation of the being-ness of institutions
of higher education and has the potential to catalyze a universal metamorphosis of humanity.

With our feet firmly rooted in the now, we must begin to imagine a better tomorrow, a new
tomorrow, and an education that recognizes on a deeply spiritual/humanistic level our collective
humanity. How can this be? How can we re-fashion ontology in higher education? We must act;
courageous praxis is the key that will unlock the door to our better tomorrow.
The cultivation of communalism, morality (ethics), dialogue and reflexivity, and a deeper understanding of our shared humanity in the conception of an onto-educational philosophy of higher education moves us collectively toward justice, mutual respect (love), the limitless imagining (hope) of what we are not yet but might become (faith). This ontological (re)thinking of higher education through Buddhism and *Ubuntu* reminds all within the community of (un)learners that we are always in the process of our being-coming. Waghid (2014) writes:

> All of us – in our incompleteness of culture and in our incompleteness of being – because for as long as we converse – and for as long as we absorb all that is around us, we are never complete. Every other that we encounter has the potential to bring new a new perspective and a changed perception…an enlargement of perspectives. (p. 67)

We must begin to model this way of being within higher education classrooms, the hallowed halls of the academy, within our places of worship, within our respective communities. Leading by example, we must practice in the mundane and (extra)ordinary curriculum of our everyday lives the tenets of *Ubuntu* and Buddhism encapsulated in an onto-educational philosophy. Ontology within higher education will transform as the understanding of the very being of the beings-human who inhabit the hallowed halls of institutions of higher education are transformed. As we open ourselves to the possibilities of being-in-the-world differently, we begin to pursue new knowledges and view old knowledges differently, which will undoubtedly catalyze an ontological metamorphosis. In short, as we are transformed, we transform.
“Education for humanity is awareness of both the problems and possibilities that we face and the proactive tools and courage to act together. It is the provision of educational tools and processes that make the world a better place for humanity through serving human needs and those of the community. It is an education dedicated to awakening and empowering our spiritual sensitivities, our relation to the human community, our connection to nature, and our values as human beings dedicated to a healthy society, present and future.”

- Henry M. Levin -

Beginning with the litany of horrors in Chapter 1 and ending with the news we consumed this morning, it would appear humanity is at war with itself. This is a troubling assertion, yet all evidence points to its affirmation. As I aver throughout this inquiry, education and higher education, in particular, is the chief culprit in the commencement and promulgation of this war. Education is complicit in the creation of the mess we now find ourselves. However, education is also the means through which we can come to peace, but not the same education. Hell, not even a better education, but a different education. The mind that got us into this mess cannot be the mind that gets us out of it (Seymour, 2011). Unless we begin to educate differently, to shift our onto-cognitive (being-thinking) positionalities about the purpose and aims of educating beings-human and recalibrate our understanding of what it means to be a being-human, then I am afraid the present war will rage on into an absent present-future. Even more, if we remain stuck in the onto-cognitive Western imperialist framework in which we currently reside, we will not be able to address the complexity or meet the realities of our very present-present nor our absent present-future. As LeGrange (2011) contends, Western hegemony is a result of the scientific and military violence it has inflicted on the peoples of the world. Western power obtained through physical violence has been sustained by epistemological violence, which has undoubtedly murdered the
indigenous ontology of its non-Western subjects. This violence begets violence, which begets violence of all varieties *ad infinitum*—this is the mess that we now find ourselves.

Mapping Harvey’s (2011)\textsuperscript{45} indictment of higher education institutions’ complicity in the current societal milieu and his assertion of their moral obligation and responsibility create a positive future society, I locate the site of this ontological (re)thinking at institutions of higher education and the beings-human that are impacted by them. More specifically, the hallowed halls of higher education institutions not only produce and disseminate knowledge to the world, but is where the very *being* of Beings is molded. It is from institutions of higher education that beings-human will go out into the world as teachers, doctors, lawyers, judges, law enforcement officers, policy makers, mayors, governors, and even as presidents of countries. It is within these hallowed halls that being is shaped and the world is (re/de)formed; the impact is unpredictable, but its effects last well into an absent present-future. Harvey’s (2011) contention coupled with Barnett’s (2011) declaration that a university “has *being* [emphasis in original]” (p. 13) and infinite possibilities, spurs an exploration of the other-than-ness of higher education institutions in our current space/time and within the reality of a very present-present. As I put forth in Chapter 1, education contains the possibility to *be* differently; however, we must (re)think Western taken for granted notions, values, and ideas about what education is and who human beings are to realize a new way of being-doing. More to the point, the assertion begs to question what higher education might become when ontologically (re)thought through Buddhism and *Ubuntu*—two non-Western onto-epistemological indigenous philosophies—toward an ontological revolution.

Currently, the Western higher education milieu can only be described as an economic epistemological regime of fear, where neo-liberal ideology and market-driven educational

\textsuperscript{45} See Chapter 1
discourse shapes and restricts thinking, and institutions of higher education are suppliers of consumer-driven demand—not institutions of higher learning, but supermarkets of economical knowledge acquisition (Barnett, 2011; Bacchi, 2000). Buddhism and Ubuntu provide a lens through which we can (re)think the possibilities of other-than-ness in the current higher education milieu. I theorize, in Chapter 1, the necessity of a contemporaneous reconceptualization of the Western subject and an institutional being-becoming—an ontological turn within higher education, which has the potential to “turn our current reality on its head” (Waldron, 2003, p. 146) or catalyze a new societal being-becoming. Again, I argue, the generative onto-epistemologies of Buddhism (East) and Ubuntu (South African) provide the rhizomatic node from which new ontological, epistemological, and axiological lines of flight may emerge in (re)thinking Western subjectivity and higher education to catalyze an educational and societal metamorphosis. This (re)thinking is an act of courage in a regime of fear.

Chapter 2 explores Ubuntu or humanness, the southern African philosophy of life (Ramose, 2002; Waghid, 2004; Eze, 2008, 2010). Counter West, Ubuntu cannot be achieved in isolation, but one only becomes a person through relationship with other people (Eze, 2010). According to Eze (2010), Ubuntu can best be explained as:

'A person is a person through other people' [which] strikes an affirmation of one’s humanity through recognition of an ‘other’ in his or her uniqueness and difference. It is a demand for a creative intersubjective formation in which the ‘other’ becomes a mirror (but only a mirror) for my subjectivity. This idealism suggests to us that humanity is not embedded in my person solely as an individual; my humanity is co-substantively bestowed upon the other and me. Humanity is a quality we owe to each other. We create each other and need to sustain this otherness creation. And if we belong to each other, we participate in our creations: we are because you are, and since you are, definitely I am. The ‘I am’ is not a rigid subject, but a dynamic self-constitution dependent on this otherness creation of relation and distance. (p. 190-191)
Ramose (2002) asserts an African’s life is anchored in *Ubuntu*, which mandates communalism, positive recognition of difference, and responsibility toward one another. Eze’s (2010)\(^{46}\) definition coupled with Waghid’s (2004) assertion that *Ubuntu* contains the possibility to “…engender dignified and humane action, evoke the potentialities of people, and cultivate a community of shared face” (p. 70) provide the philosophical matter necessary to both reconceptualize Western notions of subjectivity and (re)think higher education.

*Ubuntu* intensifies an understanding of the interconnectedness and interdependence of all living beings, and their indispensability in our collective being-becoming *more* human. This deepened understanding compels beings-humans toward a code of ethic that reinforces communal harmony, compassion, empathy, tolerance, kindness, and love. In a Western educational ethos that persistently dehumanizes, *Ubuntu* as philosophy and ethic, is re-humanizing and realigns the aims and purposes of education toward educating for humanity. Through an Ubuntu-hued understanding of subjectivity, we are made aware that we belong to one another, are responsible for another, and are co-creators of human being-becoming. Further, I explore the potential of Bangura (2005) and Nafukho’s (2006) notion of ubuntugogy in the (re)thinking of higher education. Ubuntugogy transcends Western pedagogical notions and reshap[es the learning environment to center dialogue and consensus building, and radically alters the Western being-doing of beings-human in the sub-community of the classroom (Bangura, 2005; Nafukho, 2006). Biko’s (1978) proclamation of *Ubuntu* as the great gift of Africa to the world rings true in this inquiry’s aim of (re)thinking higher education to educate for humanity and in reconceptualizing the Western subject. *Ubuntu*, in Tutu’s (2004) appreciation, reorients Western thinking: “*Ubuntu* does not say, ‘I think, therefore I am.’ It says rather: ‘I am human because I belong. I participate. I share’” (p. 27). Reiterated from Chapter 2, imagine a world

\(^{46}\) See Chapter 2
where education and learning were approached from an ubuntugogical perspective. Even more, imagine a society in the West not focused on self-interests, but communal interests. How different might our present-present and absent present-future be—our world, human relationships, and planet be differently?

Buddhism, I offer in Chapter 3, provides a unique vehicle for transformation. Not only does it promote mindfulness and awakens consciousness, but also allows for the practice of one’s root faith tradition alongside the teachings of the Buddha (Hanh, 1999). As a philoso-praxis, Buddhism is concerned with the present-present and holds nirvana can be attained in the here and now. Present transformation through the formulation of consciousness provides a complementary foil to the multi-directional nature of an Ubuntu philosophy. The teachings of the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, and the Four Immeasurable Minds constitute a transformational praxis that alone is powerful, but when East meets southern Africa the transformative potential intensifies. Finding similarities between Buddhist notions and Ubuntu, one comes to discover the interdependence, interconnectedness, and inseparability of all things including ontology and epistemology (Hanh, 1999; Ramose, 2002; Asakura, 2011; O’Sullivan, 2014). Conversely, unlike Ubuntu, Buddhism does not necessitate resolution or commensurability of contradictions, but allows one to sit comfortably in the uncomfortableness of the in-between. Following an exploration of Buddhist ontology, Chapter 3 concludes with a discussion on Hanh’s (2008) notion of Engaged Buddhism, which is integral to an understanding of its presence in every moment of life. Understanding that suffering in the world exists, Engaged Buddhism directs us not to run away from the suffering of the world, but promotes the courage to walk into the suffering of the world to transform it. In Hanh’s (2008) Engaged Buddhist’s renewal of the Four Noble Truths, he teaches transformation begins with self first and
then spreads outward to society (Sivaraksa, 2002). Buddhism provides an epistemology and methodology to transform collective ontology; in fact, there is no separation—they inter-are (Hahn, 1999). Interweaving Buddhist philoso-praxis and *Ubuntu*, catalyzes a reconceptualization of Western subjectivity and an educational metamorphosis.

The Western notion of subjectivity does not do justice to who we are as beings-in-the-world. Chapter 5 reconceptualizes the Western subject through Buddhism and *Ubuntu*, and metamorphs the subject from autonomous, separate, and individual to liberated, fluid, dynamic, and blissfully becoming in relationship with all things. (re)Thinking with generous ontologies of Buddhism and *Ubuntu*, the autonomous Western subject gives way to the Being-West, who is always already in communion with all things seen and unseen. Combining the Buddhist notion of interbeing with the intersubjective alchemy of personhood in an Ubuntist philosophy, the Being-West is made manifest. The Being-West is conceptualized as a bundle of intensities, a sacred interweaving, a body without organs mutually becoming through a linkage of assemblages always already caught up in a process of folding and unfolding, creation and dissolution (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Waldron, 2003; Hanh, 1999; Forster, 2010). For the Being-West, beings-human are made more so in relationship and participation. Moreover, I argue, the Being-West disintegrates Descartes *ego cogito*, and answers the call of being—the call of being differently in the world. The Being-West is an ontological response to the unabashed epistemological discipline and violence of a world post-Enlightenment.

Named in recognition of its geographical, historical, and counter-ideological situatedness, the Being-West seeks to decolonize itself from the onto-cognitive imperialism of the West, yet continues to live, move, and have its being in a world-West. Therefore, while attempting to transgress West it must persist in the process of metamorphosis while maintaining its place of
belonging in the space/time West. Clarifying the nature of the Being-West, I argue, it is the
double consciousness, an interdependent co-arising, a flow of energy, bundle of intensities, the
knot of physicality, consciousness, and spirit swept up and transfigured in the rhizomatic ballet
of being-becoming that we understand as life. Attempting to define the Being-West, I (re)think
its characteristics sifted through the philosophical matter of Buddhism and Ubuntu. This
(re)thinking yields the Being-West as: communal, an inbetween-ness interwoven with the
infinite, non-anthropocentric, the embracer of certain uncertainty, consciousness made manifest,
dwelling in love, and an onto-triadic rheomode. In short, our being-ness–in–the–world is
conceived as a holonic intersectionality of an absent present-past, a very present-present, and an
absent present-future. The being-becoming of the Being-West is multi-directional, multiplicitous,
rhizomatic, and always already caught up in the chaotic rhythm of the cosmic drum in
communion with all. In each beat we become, with each movement made anew—never same,
yet one-same.

Much like Buddhism, the Being-West is also a philoso-praxis. Given our current
subjugation to West, the metamorphosis toward Being-West requires the active engagement in
ontological and epistemological recalibration of each being-human. The Noble Eightfold Path—
Right View, Right Thinking, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Diligence,
Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration—fused together with the Nguzu Tani (five
principles)—kujichagulia, ujima, nia, kuumba, and imani—comprise a philoso-praxis for the
cultivation of a being-ness oriented toward wholeness and harmony (Hahn, 1999; Ramose, 2002;
Broodryk, 2006; Nafukho, 2006, Eze, 2008; Forster, 2010). Through this philoso-praxis, the
Being-West manifests as the embodiment and concrete realization of the perpetual striving of
being-becoming more human and begins to dance in sync with the rhythm of the cosmos.
Chapter 6 explores the aims of education from Plato to Heidegger, and utilizes seminal student affairs documents to conduct an ontohistorical analysis of the American philosophy of higher education. Ontologically (re)thinking higher education, through Buddhism and Ubuntu, institutions of higher education are (re)formed into onto-epistemological wombs of being-becoming Being-West. Suggesting that much like the Western fragmentation of ontology and epistemology, institutions of higher education are no longer uni-, but multi-versities that have lost sight of their original goals of ontological formation inseparable from epistemological cultivation. As Thomson (2001) avers, the multi-versity is “an internally fragmented Uni-versity-in-name-only, where the sole communal unity stems from a common grievance about parking spaces” (p. 251). (re)Thinking higher education with the onto-epistemologies of Buddhism and Ubuntu, I open up the possibilities for institutions of higher education to be differently in the world. The ontological (re)thinking of higher education yields an onto-educational philosophy that re-ontologizes higher education and re-essentializes the pursuit of higher learning as a means through which beings-human deepen their humanity. (re)Thinking an absent present-future onto-educational metamorphosis of higher education institutions, four primary philosophical pillars emerged. More specifically, institutions of higher education are: reconceptualized as a community of (un)learners; they are moral; they are dialogical and reflexive; they are democratic (in the African sense of the notion); and finally, they are humanizing.

In essence, a Buddhist and Ubuntu-hued philosophy of higher education (onto-educational philosophy) reorients the educative milieu to a space/time where learners can become more fully human by entering more deeply into communion with one another, which re-ontologizes the educative pursuit. Even more, an onto-educational philosophy shifts the higher education milieu from its current status of polytechnic institution characterized by economic
epistemological fear toward an un-fragmented or uni-onto-educational institution, where the molding of the being of Beings holds equality with the production and acquisition of knowledge (Thomson, 2001).

Finally, at the close of Chapter 6, I contend the cultivation of communalism, morality (ethics), dialogue and reflexivity, and a deeper understanding of our shared humanity in the conception of an onto-educational philosophy of higher education moves us collectively toward justice, mutual respect (love), the limitless imagining (hope) of what we are not yet but might become (faith). This ontological (re)thinking of higher education through Buddhism and Ubuntu reminds all within the community of (un)learners that we are always in the process of our being-becoming. I assert the (re)shaping of ontology within institutions of higher education is conducted through the circulation of discourse and an authentic modeling of humanity at the site of each being-human.

**Implications on Policy and Practice**

Given the nature of the inquiry, my belief that being-knowing-doing are inseparable, and theoretical underpinnings of the (non)methodology discussed in Chapter 4, I seek to avoid the reductionist tendencies of traditional research by cataloging intended or unintended policy implications. The aim of this study is to disrupt and (re)imagine the current discourse regarding the nature and purpose of higher education by introducing new imaginings and encouraging dialogue. An idea, I argue, precedes every action. To reiterate, the goal of this inquiry is not to produce a list of best practices or a prescription for metamorphosis; however, the goal is provocation of thought, meaningful dialogue, and the illumination of possibilities. According to Freire (1970/2000), dialogue characterizes an epistemological relationship that affects our being-in-the-world. Thus in a sense, dialogue is a way of knowing and should never be viewed as a
mere tactic…” (p. 17). An engagement in the dialogical, which Freire (1970/2000) classifies as an epistemological curiosity, leads to liberation from old regime thinking. Therefore, the introduction of an idea interrogated and problematized through dialogue, frees us from the prison of the known and transforms praxis, which Louw (2011) defines as an intentionality in thought, behavior, or action (Chopra, 1994; Freire, 1970/2000). This praxis constitutes a *habitus*, which gradually necessitates an ontological metamorphosis and catalyzes a new becoming (Louw, 2011). In that vein, we engage in a discussion of policy as discourse (Bacchi, 2000).

Critical to the analysis of this study is hermeneutics, which situates the importance of language; narrative is how human beings share and make sense of the world (Savin-Baden & Major, 2012; Hendry, 2010). The primacy of language is recognized by ‘policy as discourse’ theorist (Bacchi, 2000; Jones, 2009) and the ability of discourse to shape both what we know and what we can know now that was unknown before (Bacchi, 2000). Regarding discourse, Foucault (1972) reminds,

…[discourses] are not as one might expect, a mere intersection of things and word: an obscure web of things, and a manifest, visible, coloured chain of words; I would like to show that discourse is not a slender surface of contact, or confrontation, between a reality and a language (*langue*), the intrication of a lexicon and an experience; I would like to show with precise examples that in analyzing discourses themselves, one sees the loosening of the embrace, apparently so tight, of words and things, and the emergence of a group of rules proper to discursive practice. These rules define not the dumb existence of a reality, nor the canonical use of a vocabulary, but the ordering of things. “Words and things” is the entirely serious title of a problem; it is the ironic title of a work that modifies its own form, displaces its own data, and reveals, at the end of the day, a quite different task. A task that consists of not—of no longer—treating discourses as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak. Of course, discourses are composed of signs; but what they do is more than just use these signs to designate things. It is this *more* than that must reveal and describe. (Foucault, 1971/1972, pp. 48-49)

In this way, discourse, in the Foucauldian sense, shapes “what the subject is able and what the subject is permitted to say” (Bacchi, 2000, p. 51). However, the undercurrents of critical theory
inherent in policy as discourse, acknowledges the ability of an agentic subject to transgress, in so much as possible, the powers that dominate to create change (Bacchi, 2000). In short, policy as discourse, seeks to open the discursive field in the policy realm for the purposes of social change (Bacchi, 2000). Its importance cannot be underestimated in (re)creating the world in which we live and are allowed to imagine.

To illustrate policy as discourse at work, Jones (2009) provides the following example:

…in the South, for example, Chinouya (2007) examines the role played by the traditional African concept of **Ubuntu**, which sees knowledge and ways of life as intimately bound up with people’s interdependence and relationships with each other in response to HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe. (pp. 15-16)

The author argues the deeply embedded cultural idea of the onto-epistemological notion of **Ubuntu** served as a means for successful policy implementation (Jones, 2009; Ramose, 2002).

Pinar et al. (2008) contends the aim of “research is to stimulate self-reflection, self-understanding, and social change. Simply put…theoretical research is intended to provoke questions as much as it is to answer questions” (pp. 56-57). In addition to the provocation of questions, Stovall (2013) asserts theory should lead to a “commitment to on the ground work” (p. 295); social justice should be viewed as “experienced phenomenon” (p. 294), whereby scholars have an obligation to understand the context of the spaces within which they work; scholars must utilize an interdisciplinary approach and train others to do the same. To put it another way, theoretical discussions without action are dead. Hahn (1999) eloquently reminds,

> But at some point, all of our concepts and ideas must yield to our actual experience. Words and ideas are only useful if they are put into practice. When do we stop discussing things and begin to realize the teachings of our life, a moment comes when we realize that our life is the path, and we no longer rely merely on the forms of practice. Our action becomes “non-action,” and our practice becomes “non-practice” The boundary has been crossed, and our practice cannot be set back. We do not have to transcend the ‘world of dust’ (**saha**) in order to go to some dust-free world called nirvana. (p. 122).

In this way, the most lasting implication is for those whose consciousness has been (re)awakened
to begin to model the way—to model the recognition of our shared humanity through their interactions with other beings-human.

**Implications for the Community of (un)Learners.** Again, in keeping with the assertions and assumptions of (re)thinking as (non)method, I will not offer a listing of recommendations; however, I will posit a range of possibilities. The implication of a Buddhist and *Ubuntu*-hued onto-educational philosophy is an engagement in a philoso-praxis that alters all aspects of the life of the beings-human. For example, the Being-West displays: an understanding of shared humanity and interconnectedness, an ethic of mutual care for the all in the community of (un)learners, compassion, sharing, sympathy, empathy, mindfulness, recognition, encouragement, ability to communicate, respect and dignity of the personhood of each individual, responsibility for self and all within the community of (un)learners, understanding, tolerance, and equality. Additionally, the Being-West is the embodiment of the *Brahmavirharas* or the Four Immeasurable Minds and is imbued with compassion, joy, equanimity, and love (Hanh, 1999). Taking up Hanh’s (1999) assertion that all transformation begins first at the site of the ‘individual’ being-human and infiltrates the community-at-large, imagine society writ large inhabited by those educated in onto-educational institutions or educated by those who have attended onto-educational institutions of higher education.

First, imagine a higher education institution president who is instilled with an understanding of onto-educational philosophy. His/her decisions are not based on self-interest, but for the good of entire community of (un)learners. Even more so, he/she does not make the decision alone, but receives feedback and input from the community to ensure agreement and lessen strife. He/she ensures that the decision does not dehumanize members of the community of (un)learners, but seeks to uphold the dignity and respect of all persons in the community.
While the higher education institution president is important to the micro-community, imagine the being-ness of the macro-community—the politicians, judges, teachers, professors, law enforcement officers, clergy and those who have been criminalized in the West—if they were educated for humanity in an environment that valued their humanity and modeled differently how to be-in-the-world with others. These members of the community, educated differently in an environment undergirded with an onto-educational philosophy would see no separation between themselves and the beings-human they come in contact with everyday. Not only would these beings-humans be epistemologically well equipped for their respective professions, but also they would be ontologically or spiritually equipped to deal with the being-ness of others. For example, a Buddhist and Ubuntu-hued onto-education would engender the following in beings-human: self-awareness, the courage to face suffering and pain, a recognition of difference as generative, a holistic view of the world, a strong social justice orientation, dialogue toward reconciliation, and compassion (Lantieri, 2004).

For the onto-educated politician, the practice of conversational justice (MacIntyre, 1999) and the compassion of deep listening would radically alter the game politic. Politicians from each side would be given to reconciliatory dialogue toward harmony and for the betterment of all in society. The narrow self-interested, presentistic, atomistic nature of Western politics would transform into an endeavor for communal good. I am not advocating for an era of communist politics; however, I am imagining the benefits of the current capitalist-dominated political party system, reconstituted as moderate democratic socialism. The vitriolic discourse and the verbal violence may lessen considerably.

For the onto-educated judge, the restoration of communal harmony through reconciliatory dialogue is more important than punishment. Gade (2012) writes:
Instead of pursuing punishment, you are more interested in restoring relationships. That is fundamental to ubuntu because ubuntu does not focus on what has been done to you, ubuntu focuses on how we can be restored together as a community, so that we can heal together. Ubuntu does not only concentrate on the pain that has been caused to me, but also recognizes the damage that has been done to you. In the course of what you are doing to me, you are also hurting yourself (interview on 26 November 2008). (p. 493)

The power to punish remains, but the necessity of punishing diminishes among those educated in onto-educational institutions of higher education (Foucault, 1977). Again, the aim becomes restorative justice, communal harmony, recognition of the suffering of the perpetrator and the suffering inflicted upon the victim. Further, Ubuntu holds that we are not only responsible for one another, but we are mirrors of the Other. This onto-educational understanding of punishment and an understanding of their being-ness as Being-West would alter the very being-doing of law enforcement and the judiciary alike. It would radically alter the way they communicate and deal with all those they come into contact with.

Possibly, it is the teacher/professor who has the most responsibility in the world. It is their very being-ness within all levels of education that shapes the hearts and minds of the beings-human, whose being-ness will come to shape our world. The onto-educated teacher/professor (Chief (un)Learner) recognizes they are forming not only the minds, but the hearts of beings-humans. Unlike our current reality, the ontological and epistemological are equally privileged. Even more, the Chief (un)Learner recognizes each being-human as their responsibility—their brother/sister/child/mirror—and truest reflection of themselves. The sub-community of (un)learners are treated equally and difference is treated as generative, which should lessen the instances of discrimination or prejudice. The chief (un)learner also practices the courage to let (un)learn-be and assists his/her (un)learners in traversing the sometime harsh terrain of life (Heidegger, 1976). For instance, I often ask teachers: Do you love your students? Do you see yourself in your students? The response of the answer to this question is devastating
for the society as a whole and negatively shapes the hearts of (un)learners. Love and mutual care are the products of the (un)learner and Chief (un)Learner relationship informed by an onto-educational philosophy.

The following example illustrates the necessity of an onto-educational philosophy of education. For example, a recorded interview of K-12 educator Suzanne Lepeintre is circulating the internet (Liberty & Justice for All, 2015), where she speaks candidly about the treatment of Black male elementary school students at the hands of white female teachers. Lepeintre, who is white, states:

…culture informs everything that we do and most white people, because we live in a country where we see ourselves everywhere and everyday; our culture is validated everywhere and in everyday. We don’t understand how our cultural values are brought into the classroom. When a white boy walks into the room, we understand him. We have similar cultural values. We understand how to behave, how to talk, how to respond to one another. If I am a white woman and he is a white boy, he can see me as his mother and I can see him as my child that positions him to know not only that he is right in the world, but that he deserves to feel comfortable and that he is really claiming his rightful place in the world to be a leader. A white boy who walks in the room and is animated and moving around and maybe even a little cheeky—is smart. Isn’t he smart, isn’t he cheeky. He is almost looked at as boys will be boys. A boy of color, especially an African-American boy who walks in the room exhibiting the same behavior walks in and you say, “Uhmm… I might need to keep an eye on him. And that I really believe is our internalized racism that we are afraid of these young boys. And I’m talking young boys—4 years old and above. Instead of the teacher looking at him/herself and saying, “What is going on with me that this same behavior that this same behavior creates fear in me instead of admiration?” We pathologized the boy’s color.” (Liberty & Justice for All, 2015)

Clearly, we need new cultural values; however, this is the reality of our very present-present. The teacher corps which is largely white and female in a country whose demographics are majority Black and Brown must be transformed. This typical white supremacist, Western behavior is a by-product and continuation of the West’s ontological murder through epistemological violence. The ontology of little Black boys in American classrooms are being negatively molded and their being-becoming stifled at the hands of teachers who do not recognize difference as generative,
who have not done the work of critical reflexivity, and most assuredly do not practice compassion. These teachers have no love for students who are perceived as different. Love and understanding are the core of an onto-educational philosophy.

In practice, the implications of the new insights gleaned from the study are potentially transformative and far-reaching within the fields of higher education, student affairs, and education, in general. Darling-Hammond (2010) and United Nations University (2009) provide illustrations of the global impact of engaging similar ideas in practice. The effect on theory, policy and practice of student development and the field of Student Affairs has transformative potential. For example, over the last year in the field of student affairs, I embarked on the creation of a program titled, “Dinner and Discussion” at a Research I university located in the southern United States. Putting into practice the philosophies, tenets, and values of Ubuntu and Buddhism, I designed the grant-funded program to engage student organizations on disparate ends of the stereotypical identity spectrum. The program was designed for students of each of the organizations to come together over a meal to discuss themselves, campus life, and societal issues. These discussions were to yield more than trivial dialogue on current events, but demonstrate in a very subtle way that this person, these people that you have been avoiding due to conformist campus discourse are no different from you. The goal was to illuminate and catalyze an understanding of a shared humanity. This programmatic example illustrates an enactment of idea-in-praxis.

Additionally, in a blog post titled, “The Issue We See is Not the Problem We Have: The Great NASPA–Yik Yak Debacle of 2015,” (Robinson-Morris, 2015) I attempted to utilize discourse in critique of and to advocate for changes in both student affairs policy and the philosophical foundations of the field. More specifically, I argued for a true modeling of
humanity for our students. However, recognizing the risks associated with the modeling of our humanness approach to policy advocacy, I offered the following words of encouragement:

I’m certain that you are reading this and asking two questions: How—within the confines of university rules, human resource protocols, and restrictive societal norms—am I to model the fullness of my humanity? Is this not a huge risk? First, just live. Live fully, presently, and awake. Second, of course it is a risk; Gert Biesta (2014) asserts “that education always involves a risk” (p. 1). (Robinson-Morris, 2015, para. 10)

The risk is worth it. The risk of leaning into the turn, that is, adopting the onto-epistemological position theorized in this study is counterbalanced by the harmonizing reward of the dignity and respect of the personhood of each individual and a recognition of our interconnectedness. Dewey (1902) argues each student “…represent[s] the dawning of a flickering light that will shine steadily only in the far future” (p. 14). How many students have their "flickering lights" extinguished before they have the opportunity to enkindle within themselves the fire of education, of success, and before believing that they too can step courageously and triumphantly into the joy of their own purpose? Even more important, how many students have received the light of destructive ideologies and will pass on the dimming light of destructive thinking to the impressionable minds of their students and children? Finally, with a deep and abiding understanding that each of us already are all that we want to become, the goal in education and human relationships is a new being-becoming catalyzed by a “critical ontology of ourselves” (Foucault, 1984, p. 50) and humanity.

**Thoughts on the Plateau**

In keeping with the (non)methodology (Chapter 4), this inquiry provides no conclusions. In fact, there is no beginning and no end, we arrive on a new plateau, we arrive at middle to (re)think, and to let (un)learn-be in a multi-directional manner. Onto-educational philosophy, undergirded with the onto-epistemological matter of Buddhism and *Ubuntu*, is a philoso-praxis
in love. Love liberates beings-human in the present-present and is an act of creation of the beings-human who are to be made manifest in the absent present-future. Onto-education calls us out of the depths of ourselves in love and sends us back to ourselves to love more deeply with the recognition that we are one-same. Love in the face of fear is courage.

This inquiry encompasses a “critical ontology ourselves” (Foucault, 1984, p. 50), a history of the present-present, taking in account an absent present-past, and looking critically with hope toward an absent present-future of higher education to make good on its moral obligation and responsibility to set humanity on a new course through education. Abiding in the present-present and always affected by an absent present-past, I encounter a generative fissure of nascency between the two, which realizes the being-human as a site of onto-courage in the midst of epistemological fear. This generative fissure introduces not agency per se, but the courage to be differently—onto-courage—in an environment where fear of difference is its own stronghold.

Hanh (2008) declares that we fight not against men, but ideologies. As I have contended elsewhere, our present-present higher educational milieu can be characterized as an epistemological regime of fear—fear is simply an idea made manifest in behavior. Love does not and cannot exist in a regime of fear, but love must be introduced to transform fear. Courage—from the heart; it is from the heart, first, that we must educate to the heart of our brother/sister living in fear. If you are reading this, I call on you to practice onto-courage right where you are. I call on you to utilize the generous, generative, and humanizing onto-epistemologies of Buddhism and Ubuntu to be differently-in-the-world, in your homes, in your classrooms, in your educational institutions.

As you begin the process of metamorphosis toward the Being-West, remember the Being-West dwells in love. This means the heart-mind is always inclined toward love. Again, not
eros, not inauthentic sentimentality or mush, but agape—the unobstructed, unconditional, open force that binds us all in community. The depth of me calls to the depth of you to practice ontocourage, to practice radical love toward a revolutionary being-becoming. One act of courage provokes another.

“Radical love demands that we utilize dialogue as a means of subverting dominant positionalities, since [love] ‘cannot exist in a relation of domination’” (Freire, 1993, p. 89 as cited in Douglas & Nganga, 2013, p. 64). Love–metta and radical–in the educational domain compels us to disrupt hierarchy, to move beyond domination, and shatters narrow self-interest (Hinsdale, 2012; Oliver, 2000; hooks, 2000; Hanh, 1999). When a system tightens its reigns, fails to hear the cry of its subjects or denies freedom to those struggling against its oppressive force(s), then love compels us toward revolution!

Kristeva (2000) suggests love is a requisite of social revolution and hooks (1994) reminds, “The moment we choose to love we begin to move towards freedom, to act in ways that liberate ourselves and others” (p. 250). Not the ‘right to bear arms,’ Boston Tea Party revolution, but an educational revolution that utilizes “problem-posing education...[as] revolutionary futurity” (Freire, 2000, p. 84). Freire (2002) asserts problem-posing education recognizes human beings “in the process of becoming” (p. 84) with the prophetic hope to “transcend themselves” (P. 84). Deleuze (1990) argues:

They say revolutions turn out badly. But they’re constantly confusing two different things, the way revolutions turn out historically and people’s revolutionary becoming. These relate to two different sets of people. Men’s only hope lies in a revolutionary becoming: the only way of casting off their shame or responding to what is intolerable. (para. 4)

In the face of the intolerable circumstances we now find ourselves in, the dialogical and prophetic possibilities (Freire, 2000) offered by Ubuntu (Eze, 2010; Waghid, 2013; Ramose,
2002) and Buddhism (Hahn, 1999), and the relational attitudes and practices mediated through the *Brahmaviharas* offers a means of cultivating radical love to bring about an ontological revolutionary becoming to “disentangle the threads of complicated [educational and] social relations” (Hinsdale, 2012, p. 36). De-centering West and awakened to an interconnected, intimately interwoven world where we are but mirrors of one another and love reigns supreme, there is no choice but to be-do differently—to align our epistemology, methodology, and axiology with our transformed ontology—this is our revolutionary being-becoming, our personal and institutional ontological metamorphosis. Transfigured, metamorphosed by (re)thinking, we arrive again differently just as we started on a new plateau burgeoning with new lines of flight, new rhizomatic becomings toward an ever-present absent present-future.
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VITA

David W. Robinson-Morris received his Bachelor of Arts degree in Communications–Public Relations from Loyola University New Orleans in 2006, and his Master of Public Administration degree with a concentration in Non-Profit Leadership and Public Policy from the University of New Orleans in 2011. He is a graduate of Galveston Ball High School.

A college senior at the time Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans, David returned to Loyola to complete his undergraduate studies and began interning in the city of New Orleans Mayor’s Office of Economic Development to do his part in the rebuilding of one of America’s greatest cities. Following graduation in April 2006, he was hired as the Communications Liaison for the Mayor’s Office of Economic Development and was soon after promoted to Publicist in the Mayor’s Office of Communication. Shortly thereafter, David was promoted to Senior Publicist in the Mayor’s Office of Communications, where he served as chief spokesperson for the Mayor’s Office of Planning and Development and the departments under its umbrella. Upon his departure in 2007, the Mayor of New Orleans commended him with a municipal proclamation for his work within the departments most critical to the recovery and rebuilding of New Orleans following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina.

In 2007, David returned to his alma mater, Loyola University New Orleans, to serve as the Associate Director of the Office of Alumni Relation (then the Office of Alumni and Parent Relations). For four years as Associate Director, he managed 25 alumni chapters across the country, nine local alumni committees, the young alumni board, administered four scholarship programs, and travelled throughout the country engaging alumni in the great work of the institution. It was at Loyola that David began to recognize his love for higher education and the dream of pursuing a doctoral degree was born. From 2011-2013, David served as the first
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In the fall of 2013, he accepted a Graduate Assistantship with the LSU Community University Partnership in the Office of Equity, Diversity, and Outreach, where he was responsible for grant writing, newsletter development, and the management of Literacy Lagniappe—a literacy enhancement initiative at Buchanan Elementary School. Feeling the need to impact more directly the lives of undergraduate students, in the fall of 2014, he accepted a position as the Graduate Assistant for Service in LSU Campus Life. In LSU Campus Life, Robinson-Morris organized service opportunities for LSU students and served as an advisor to several student organizations.

Currently, he serves as a Research Assistant in the LSU School of Education. In this role, he assists with special research projects and serves as the first editor of the LSU Higher Education program magazine, *Geaux Higher*. While attending LSU, he has served as the Fundraising Chair for the LSU Black Graduate and Professional Student Association, conference planning team member for the National Black Graduate and Professional Student Association, founding Vice President of the Higher Education Student and Professional Association at LSU, Social Chair of the Curriculum Theory Graduate Collaborative, member of Bergamo Graduate Student Council, International Council on Urban Education (ICUE) conference planning team member, and panelist for the LSU University Hearing Panel. Scholarly service includes: serving as a conference proposal reviewer for Division J and Division B of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE), and NASPA; manuscript reviewer for the Journal of Curriculum Theorizing (JCT), and copy editor for the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) online publication, *Developments*. 
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