

Spirituality and Nature in the Transformation to a More Sustainable World: Perspectives of South African Change Agents

by

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Photo: H. Lockhart

How do we turn from the ruins of the culture of death and destruction, to the culture that sustains and celebrates life? We can do it by breaking free of the mental prison of separation and exclusion and see the world in its interconnectedness and non-separability, allowing new alternatives to emerge.

(Shiva, 2002:30)

DECLARATION

By submitting this dissertation, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the owner of the copyright thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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ABSTRACT

The central premise of this thesis is that humans are disconnected and alienated from Nature and it proposes that we need to attempt to restore this connection in order to overcome the current socioecological crises which threaten our survival as a species on the planet.

In response to the research question as to whether a spiritual relationship with Nature could assist in the transformation to a more sustainable world, this study examines the concepts of Nature and spirituality and the relationship between them and, in particular, explores the spiritual practices and human-Nature connections experienced by six South African change agents. The objectives of this exploration are to present individual stories which could be used as case studies in learning for sustainability and to promote and encourage deeper conversations about what a more sustainable world might look like.

Given the argument that our disconnection and alienation from Nature is at the crux of the planetary polycrisis and that we face a crisis of spirituality with regards to our relationship with Nature, this thesis explores the concept of Nature in depth, taking into consideration different cultural interpretations, environmental ethical positions and perspectives of Nature held in ancient times. Some of the key arguments as to why humans are disconnected from Nature (science, loss of indigenous knowledge, colonialism, capitalism, globalisation, religion and technology) are presented and I consider the implications of the human-Nature disconnection.

A comprehensive literature review presents the key sociological crises, including climate change, ecosystem degradation, inequality and poverty, peak oil, urbanisation and food insecurity, which underpin the planetary polycrisis, and also discusses sustainable development, which arose as an attempt to respond to the planetary polycrisis. I argue that mainstream sustainable development is anthropocentric and perpetuates consumption by means of the current economic system.

In light of my research question I propose that spirituality could serve as a bridge between humans and Nature. The understanding of spirituality which informs my approach implies a heightened awareness or consciousness, the capacity for deep reflection and compassion, and a profound sense of what it means to part of the web of life – to be another living, breathing, sentient being in Nature without the hierarchies which are often dictated by religious forms of spirituality. It is a spirituality integral to daily life, which informs the decisions about the way we live, and which is expressed through action, i.e. spirit-in-action.

While I acknowledge the role that religion could play in the transformation to a more sustainable world, I highlight a number of practices, including mindfulness, meditation, rituals, poetry, re-learning from

indigenous knowledge and wisdom, and restoration, which could perhaps assist in moving towards a deeper connection with Nature. In reflecting on what kind of transformation is needed I refer to complexity theory and systems thinking, and earth jurisprudence as examples of transformative paradigms.

Given that this is a qualitative study, I have used heuristic inquiry, reflexivity, narrative and poetics in my research approach and conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with six South African change agents (three women and three men). I have documented their stories as narrative summaries, focusing particularly on their spirituality with respect to their relationship with Nature. I have then considered the emerging themes which point to what might be required in order to create sustainable futures.

While there are issues of contention surrounding each of the concepts of Nature, spirituality and sustainable development, the change agents agree that there is a definite relationship between them and that they could help to direct our lives towards sustainability. Irrespective of how each of these concepts is defined, it seems that we need to be thinking about what *kind* of lives we want to live and what *kind* of lives future generations will be able to lead on a planet with a limited carrying capacity.

As to whether a spiritual relationship with Nature could assist in the transformation to a more sustainable world, it seems that it is not so much a relationship, but a deep understanding and conscious awareness or knowing of the interconnectedness and interdependence between Nature, spirit and the essence of being human.

Based on the input from the six change agents, I recommend a number of shifts within individual human consciousness, in our communities and within broader society to promote sustainable living. Other recommendations include the possibility of ecopsychology playing a greater role within the sustainable development discourse and ongoing research to continue to provoke conversations about the human-Nature connection and the implications this has for sustainability.

While this work is clearly an academic investigation, it has also been a personal undertaking in that I have explored my own spiritual journey, considered my relationship with Nature, and learned more about my role as a change agent in the transformation to a more sustainable world.

OPSOMMING

Die sentrale veronderstelling van hierdie proefskrif is dat die mens afgesonder en vervreemd geraak het van die Natuur en beveel aan dat ons poog om die konneksie te herstel ten einde die huidige sosio-ekologiese krisis te kan oorkom wat ons oorlewing as 'n spesie op die planeet bedreig.

In antwoord op die navorsingsvraag of 'n spirituele verhouding met die Natuur kan bydra tot die transformasie na 'n meer volhoubare wêreld, ondersoek hierdie studie die konsep van die Natuur en spiritualiteit, en die verhouding tussen die twee konsepte, en dan veral die spirituele praktyke en mens-Natuur-konneksies wat ses Suid-Afrikaanse agente vir verandering meegemaak het. Die oogmerke met hierdie verkenning is om individuele verhale aan te bied wat as gevallestudies gebruik kan word om insig te kry in volhoubaarheid, en om dieper gesprekke oor hoe 'n meer volhoubare wêreld daar kan uitsien te bevorder en aan te moedig.

Gegewe die redenasie dat ons afsondering en vervreemding van die Natuur die kruks van die globale polikrisis is en dat ons 'n spiritualiteitskrisis beleef wat ons verhouding met die Natuur betref, ondersoek hierdie proefskrif die konsep van die Natuur in diepte, met inagneming van verskillende kulturele interpretasies, omgewingsentriese vertrekpunte en perspektiewe oor die Natuur in die antieke tyd. Sekere sleutelargumente wat aandui waarom die mens afgesonder geraak het van die Natuur (wetenskap, verlies aan inheemse kennis, kolonialisme, kapitalisme, globalisering, godsdiens en tegnologie) word aangebied, terwyl ek die implikasies van die mens-Natuur-afsondering oordink.

'n Omvattende literatuurstudie behandel die sleutel sosiologiese krisisse, met inbegrip van klimaatsverandering, ekosisteemagteruitgang, ongelykheid en armoede, piekolie, verstedeliking en voedselonsekerheid, wat die globale polikrisis onderlê, en ondersoek volhoubare ontwikkeling wat ontstaan het in 'n poging om op die globale polikrisis te reageer. Ek voer aan dat hoofstroom volhoubare ontwikkeling antroposentriese is en verbruik volgens die bestaande ekonomiese stelsel voortsit.

In die lig van my navorsingsvraag doen ek aan die hand dat spiritualiteit 'n brug tussen die mens en die Natuur kan vorm. Die interpretasie van spiritualiteit, wat die beweegrede vir my benadering is, veronderstel 'n verhoogde bewustheid of bewussyn, die vermoë tot diepe refleksie en medelye, en 'n wesentlike begrip van wat dit beteken om deel van die lewensweb te wees – om 'n lewende, redelike wese te wees wat asemhaal in die Natuur, sonder die hiërargieë wat dikwels deur religieuse spiritualiteitsvorme voorgeskryf word. Dit is spiritualiteit wat 'n integrerende deel van die daaglikse lewe is, wat die beweegrede is vir die besluite waarvolgens ons leef, en wat uitgedruk word deur aksie, i.e. gees-in-aksie. Alhoewel ek

die rol erken wat godsdiens kan speel in die transformasie na 'n meer volhoubare wêreld, lig ek 'n aantal praktyke uit, nl in-die-oomblik-wees (oplettendheid), meditasie, rituele, poësie, her-leer uit die inheemse kennis- en wysheid-skat, sowel as herstel, wat moontlik kan help om 'n dieper band met die Natuur te vorm. Wanneer ek reflekteer oor watter tipe transformasie nodig is, verwys ek na kompleksiteitsteorie en sisteemdenke, en aardjurisprudensie as twee voorbeelde van transformerende paradigmas.

Aangesien dit 'n kwalitatiewe studie is, het ek heuristiese ondersoek, refleksiwiteit, narratiewe en poësie in my navorsingbenadering gebruik en semi-gestruktureerde diepte-onderhoude met ses Suid-Afrikaanse agente vir verandering (drie vroue en drie mans) gevoer. Ek het hulle verhale as opsommings van narratiewe opgeteken, en gefokus op hulle spiritualiteit in verhouding tot die Natuur. Daarna het ek opkomende temas oorweeg met aanwysers van wat moontlik nodig is om 'n volhoubare toekoms te skep.

Alhoewel daar verskillende standpunte is oor die konsep Natuur, spiritualiteit en volhoubare ontwikkeling, stem die agente vir verandering saam dat daar 'n definitiewe verwantskap tussen die konsepte bestaan en dat dit kan bydra om ons lewe tot volhoubaarheid te rig. Ongeag van hoe elkeen van hierdie konsepte omskryf word, blyk dit dat ons moet kyk na watter *soort* lewe ons wil leef en watter *soort* lewe toekomstige generasies op 'n planeet met 'n beperkte dravermoë sal kan leef.

Op die vraag of 'n spirituele verhouding met die Natuur kan bydra tot die transformasie na 'n meer volhoubare wêreld, blyk dit dat dit nie soseer 'n verhouding is nie, maar 'n diepe begrip vir en werklike bewustheid, of kennis, van die onderlinge verbondenheid en interafhanklikheid tussen die Natuur, die gees en die essensie van menswees.

Gebaseer op die inset van die ses agente vir verandering beveel ek 'n aantal skuiwe binne onself, in ons gemeenskappe en in die wyer samelewing aan om 'n volhoubare bestaan te bevorder. Ander aanbevelings sluit in die moontlikheid dat ekopsigologie 'n groter rol speel in die volhoubareontwikkelingsdiskoers en voortgesette navorsing om deurentyd gesprekke oor die mens-Natuur-konneksie aan te moedig, asook die implikasies wat dit vir volhoubaarheid het.

Alhoewel hierdie werk duidelik 'n akademiese oefening is, was dit ook 'n persoonlike onderneming deurdat ek my eie spirituele reis onderneem het, my verhouding met die Natuur in oënskou geneem het, en tot insig gekom het van my rol as agent vir verandering in die transformasie na 'n meer volhoubare wêreld.

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Photo: H.Lockhart

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to:

My parents, Ian and Shona Lockhart, who gave me the gifts of a love for Nature and a questioning mind,
and instilled in me values and principles to live by.

And four leafed friends who were chopped down in their prime.

A prayer/meditation for the trees

The trees will whisper their last words
Their scars carved on my heart, their leaves
Forever imprinted on my eyes
Their stumps an ache in my limbs
Their roots twisting in my gut.

The trees will hear our names, written on the wind
They will know who was friend or foe
They will make the last judgement call.

“Forgive them for they know not what they are doing”.

But unforgiving She is,
Nature will have Her day
Nature will have Her say

She will be there at the end of the day
In our final hour when all is
Said and done
And Her will
Will be done.

12 August 2010

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

COP17	17th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
FAO	Food & Agriculture Organisation
FLOW	For Love of Water
GDP	gross domestic product
GMO	genetically modified organism
GNH	gross national happiness
GNP	gross national product
HDI	Human Development Index
IAASTD	International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development
IPCC	International Panel on Climate Change
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
IZWA	Institute for Zero Waste in Africa
MDGs	Millenium Development Goals
MEA	Millenium Ecosystem Assessment
NGO	non-governmental organisation
SAFCEI	Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute
SANBI	South African National Botanical Institute
SANParks	South African National Parks
SWAN	South Asia Women's Network
UN	United Nations
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNCSD	United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development
WWF	World Wildlife Fund
ZERI	Zero Emissions Research Initiative

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1. Background

Our enormously productive economy...demands that we make consumption our way of life, that we convert the buying and use of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfaction, our ego satisfaction, in consumption (Lebow, cited in Durning, 1995:69).

Human consumption has reached disproportionate levels and is responsible for the degradation of the environment and rapidly diminishing natural resources. According to Assadourian, “consumption has grown dramatically over the past five decades, up 28 percent from the \$23.9 trillion spent in 1996 and up sixfold from the \$4.9 trillion spent in 1960 (in 2008 dollars)” (2010:4). Deforestation, overfishing, climate change, water scarcity, pollution, soil degradation, poverty and inequality are just some of the issues facing humanity as a result of increasing consumption. Together with an expanding population which is projected to reach ten billion by 2100 (United Nations, 2011), globalisation is also contributing significantly to rising consumption levels.

This thesis will argue that the root of these issues is the separation of humans from Nature – the view that we are not part of Nature, but exist in a superior position from which we can dominate, conquer and exploit it to meet our own needs (Sessions, 1995; Franz, Mayer, Norton & Rock, 2005). As a result of industrialisation and modernisation, we have become disconnected and alienated from Nature. Many of those who have running water, flush toilets, electricity, weekly garbage collection and private vehicles do not think twice about where their water originates, where their sewage goes, what is required to boil kettles or power televisions, where their garbage ends up or the environmental impact of the emissions produced by their vehicles. In our quest for efficiency, speed and comfort, we have separated ourselves from Nature with disregard for the value of Nature in its own right (Williams & Millington, 2004).

For the first time in human history, the majority of the world’s human population is urbanised (Swilling, 2008a) and living in cities where the pace is fast and competitive. Everything is expected to occur and be instantly experienced with little opportunity for reflection. According to Cilliers, “this move away from reflection to immediate response has profound implications for our understanding of what it is to be human” (2006:108). Batchelor substantiates this, arguing that “an unawakened existence, in which we

drift unaware on a surge of habitual impulses, is both ignoble and undignified” (1997:6). This has implications for our behaviour, particularly in the consumer-oriented, materialistic society in which we live. Okri states that “we must bring back into society a deeper sense of the purpose of living. The unhappiness in so many lives ought to tell us that success alone is not enough. Material success has brought us to a strange spiritual and moral bankruptcy” (2008). Robinson’s view echoes and supports this:

In the absence of soul and of connection we experience a profound loneliness and emptiness. This emptiness in turn leads to cultural distress. This distress is transmitted through social and economic inequities, war and other forms of violence, and community and family dysfunction to the most vulnerable members of society, manifesting itself in a host of societal and psychological disorders, that we see every day on our streets and in our consulting rooms (2009:26).

Together with others around the globe including the late Wangari Maathai, Satish Kumar, Joanna Macy, Jane Goodall and Gary Snyder, it seems to me that we need to restore our spiritual relationship with Nature if we are to survive as a species. As Cilliers points out, “Nature is no longer the passive object of human [observation and] exploitation, but is part of the set of relationships that makes humans what they are” (1998:122). We need a spirituality which requires us to reflect deeply on our place in the world and to heighten our consciousness of the interconnectedness of all life on earth. Norberg-Hodge suggests that we need “a spiritual awakening that comes from making a connection with others and with nature. It requires us to see the world within us – to experience more consciously the great interdependent web of life, of which we ourselves are part” (2000:13). Macy and Young Brown argue that we need “to motivate people to ask ‘deeper questions’ about their *real* wants and needs, about their relation to life on Earth and their vision for the future” (1998:47).

It has been suggested that spiritual renewal is needed for the transformation to sustainability. As Swartz argues: “The answers to our global dilemma must fundamentally be sought not in any new technologies that emanate from the same mindset, but in a renewed mind and in a different pattern of spirituality” (2010:ii). According to Orr, “By whatever name, something akin to spiritual renewal is the *sine qua non* of the transition to sustainability” (2002:1459). He substantiates this, saying, “...a deeper spirituality would lead us to a place of gratitude and celebration. It would also energize us to act” (2002:1459).

Maxwell corroborates: “spiritual awakening promotes a profound sense of earth stewardship that can form the foundation of a new ecological ethic” (2003:260).

While mainstream discourse in the sustainable development arena seems to focus on areas such as renewable energy, climate change, ecological economics, sustainable agriculture, and urban design and planning, it seems to me that an acknowledgement of the spiritual dimension of our lives and to restoring our connection with Nature is wanting within this discourse. There are a number of possible reasons for this, including the fact that rational, scientific thinking still dominates our western worldview; the conviction that we can apply technological solutions to most problems; and the fact that we work in fragmented and specialist ways. Given that spirituality is understood and practised by people in different ways and that it is generally regarded as something personal and private, perhaps fear of inciting conflict and further polarisation, and being considered too evangelical are further reasons for the evasion of spirituality in the mainstream discourse. However, according to Ver Beek, “the result of this silence is a failure to explore and understand an integral aspect of how [we] understand the world, make decisions, and take action” (2000:31). He goes on to say that “interventions which ignore spirituality, intentionally or unintentionally, affect not only people’s spirituality, but also areas such as environment, gender relations, and community interdependence” (2000:36).

Drawing on literature in the fields of sustainable development, spirituality, ecopsychology, deep ecology, environmental ethics, complexity theory, poetry and indigenous knowledge and customs, I will explore the relationship between spirituality, Nature and sustainability. My original intention was to do an empirical study to establish whether there is a positive correlation between mindful meditation as a spiritual practice and size of ecological footprint as an indication of sustainable behaviour. I had fallen into the trap of believing that empirical, quantitative studies are the only valid means of investigating concepts and understanding the world!

However, with input from two professors and guidance from my supervisor, I have instead used the stories of six South African change agents who are working for change in the social and environmental arenas and documented their spiritual journeys as well as considered their relationship/connection to Nature.

While I am aware that the notion of spirituality is a sensitive one and that there is no one 'right' spiritual path, I hope that, by exploring a number of perspectives on spirituality in relationship to Nature and sustainability, this research will contribute to a better understanding of the role of spirituality in our relationship with Nature, provide insights which can be integrated into the development of programmes for sustainability practice, and encourage deeper conversations about the possibilities for creating sustainable futures.

1.2. Why this research?

The view of nature which predominated in the West down to the eve of the Scientific Revolution was that of an enchanted world. Rocks, trees, rivers, and clouds were all seen as wondrous, alive, and human beings felt at home in this environment. The cosmos, in short, was a place of belonging. A member of this cosmos was not an alienated observer of it but a direct participant in its drama... (Berman, cited in Reason, 1993:5).

The central premise of my thesis is that humans are disconnected from Nature and that we need to attempt to restore this connection in order to overcome the current socioecological crises which threaten our survival as a species on the planet.

The human-Nature disconnection has largely been ascribed to three dominant periods in human history: the scientific revolution which began in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the shifts in religious traditions and the proliferation of Christianity, and colonialism which pervaded territories outside of Europe.

As a result of the influence and scientific insights of Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, Newton, Bacon and Descartes: "The notion of an organic, living and spiritual universe was replaced by that of the world as a machine, and the world-machine became the dominant metaphor of the modern era" (Capra, 1982:54). Nature, once revered and enchanted, became an object for humans to dominate and exploit, measure and reduce. Laing argues that, with modern science, "Out go sight, sound, taste, touch and smell and along with them has since gone aesthetics and ethical sensibility, values, quality, form; all feelings, motives, intentions, soul, consciousness, spirit. Experience as such is cast out of the realm of scientific discourse" (cited in Capra, 1982:55). Science became the only valid way of acquiring 'true' knowledge

and making sense of our world. However, as Harding points out, "...now, some 400 years later, we have the dazzling technologies and scientific theories which are so much part of the cultural scene in the modern world; but we have lost contact with our deep animistic reverence for rocks, mountains, streams, rivers, and indeed for the whole of nature as a living intelligence" (2006:28).

Religion, and in particular Christianity, has been criticised for the separation of humans from Nature and for its anthropocentric approach. According to Sessions, "religious traditions became more anthropocentric as they changed to reflect changes in ways of life from hunting and gathering to pastoral and urban...while Taoism and certain other Eastern religions retained elements of the ancient shamanistic Nature religions, the Western religious tradition radically distanced itself from wild Nature and, in the process, became increasingly anthropocentric" (1995:159). White argues that "Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions...not only established a dualism of man and nature, but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends" (1967:4).

The colonialists introduced western thinking, modern science and Christianity across the globe. In the process they dominated and exploited Nature and indigenous people and their cultures. Robbed of their resources, their beliefs, their sacred sites and in many instances their entire way of life, indigenous people were left destitute and demoralised by activities which can only be described as crimes against humanity (Hawken, 2007). In the African context, Swartz argues: "Post-colonial Africa's societies, its governments and economic systems, are still held hostage by [the influence of western civilization] introduced through the medium of colonialism" (2010:7). Campbell and Robins suggest that we reflect on two questions with regard to indigenous people: "Have we any idea what was done by colonisers of this continent to destroy this indigenous heritage? And, can we begin to appreciate the depth of humanness demonstrated by the fact that many indigenous Africans remain open to sharing the remains of this knowledge despite the cultural genocide in its legacy?" (2009:1)

Renewed interest in the human-Nature connection is gathering momentum. From quantum physics, complexity theory and systems thinking to ecopsychology, deep ecology, biomimicry and a revival of indigenous wisdom, a shift is slowly taking place. According to Goodwin, "...consciousness is definitely on the scientific agenda, qualities are now emerging in various areas of scientific study, and animism is on the horizon, though still out of bounds for most scientists" (2007:32). Given that we are faced with mounting socioecological crises, a growing number of individuals and organisations around the world

are increasingly cognisant of the fact that we can no longer perpetuate dualist notions and that we need to approach the crises with a different way of thinking. Harding says, “More and more people are waking up to their deep connection to the intelligence of the cosmos, and are seeking to find ways of living that do not violate their rediscovered ecological sensibilities” (2006:28). In so doing, these people are looking at different ways of being and working in and for the world. Macy and Young Brown suggest that a “...shift is happening...[a] cognitive revolution and a spiritual awakening” (1998:21).

With the above in mind, I wanted to explore the human-Nature relationship and, in particular, consider whether a spiritual relationship with Nature could assist in the transformation to a more sustainable world. In order to delve into this notion, I undertook to interview six people whom I felt (rather than knew for certain) might experience such a relationship and might harness its qualities to find meaning and purpose in their work as well as enhance their effectiveness as change agents. This, together with my own story, provides the backdrop to my argument and the rationale for this research.

1.3. My motivation and interest

*I believe in planet home
In the buzzard and the buck
In one world
In one sanctity
In reverence of our shared place
Twirling, turning, blue and fragile through space (McIntosh, 2003:26)*

Having lived the first twelve years of my life in Zimbabwe where I had the privilege of spending time on farms and in the bush surrounding Lake Kariba, I developed an appreciation of Nature at an early age. Early memories include collecting tadpoles from nearby dams and watching them grow into adult frogs, spending a week on the Zambezi River where we camped under the stars and heard the cackle of hyenas and the haunting calls of fiery-necked nightjars, exploring rock pools on the KwaZulu-Natal south coast, and horse-riding on my own through mist-drenched maize fields at dawn. From a young age I not only had a deep wonder and curiosity about other living beings, but also experienced a sense of belonging and ‘being at home’ in Nature.

While I was fortunate to have many experiences in Nature as a young child, I recalled one in particular while thinking about and writing this thesis. My father took us on a walk through the Mucharara Valley in Kariba one afternoon.¹ At a point in the walk we reached a dense area of trees where the late afternoon sunlight was filtering through the canopy. My father stood still and looked up into the trees and said, “It is like God’s cathedral isn’t it?”

In my early teens my family immigrated to South Africa where we took up residence in Pretoria. Nature seemed very far away in this big sophisticated city where the emphasis was apparently on appearances and material gain. I felt uprooted and displaced not only from the country of my birth, but also from that which had sustained and given me so much pleasure during my formative years. However, as an adolescent at that time, it was regarded ‘uncool’ by one’s peers if one showed any enjoyment in Nature and in ‘environmental’ activities, and so I ‘disconnected’ from Nature and pursued the dominant materialistic lifestyle which falsely promised peer acceptance and inclusion.

Despite the denial of Nature in my teens, I have always had an interest in environmental issues as well as the human-Nature relationship, particularly from a psychological point of view. As part of my Honours degree I studied environmental psychology, and in recent years, I have had an emerging interest in the field of ecopsychology.

I currently live in Cape Town where Nature is a significant part of both my personal and professional life.

In my workplace at the Two Oceans Aquarium I am surrounded by Nature and animals. Recently it dawned on me that, although I am responsible for imparting information about the animals and plants to others, there are times when I have not even bothered to see the live organism about which I am writing! This insight concerned me as it alerted me to the fact I do not spend enough time watching and reflecting on the plants and animals which are so much a part of my daily life.

As I have got older and become more aware of global environmental issues, I have become increasingly concerned about the state of our planet and the exploitation of and disregard for Nature. I am also deeply disturbed by the ignorance and apathy which persists in many societies with regards to environmental issues and the lack of awareness and/or understanding that we are destroying that which

¹ The Valley is named after the mucharara tree (*Pterocarpus antunesii*) which produces yellow flowers virtually overnight.

we depend on for our survival – in essence we are destroying ourselves. I am frustrated by the lack of political will and leadership shown in South Africa as well as at multinational gatherings e.g. the various United Nations Climate Change Conferences such as the one held in Copenhagen, Denmark in 2009 and more recently in Cancun, Mexico in 2010.

But I am also excited by the shift in consciousness which appears to be taking place across the globe and the fact that the new generation, referred to by Chang (2010) as the ‘Transition Generation’ not only sees the world differently, but also tends to be more positive, imaginative and innovative about the issues which are facing us. There also appears to be a groundswell of people asking deeper questions and talking about ‘another world being possible’. These include Paul Hawken, David Suzuki, Vandana Shiva, Stephan Harding, Fritjof Capra, Alex Steffen, Mark Swilling, Eve Anneck, Ian McCallum and Cormac Cullinan among many, many others.

In line with where I found myself professionally and wanting to know more about the burgeoning field of sustainable development, I embarked on Bachelor of Philosophy degree in sustainable development. I entered the programme with a strong ecocentric bias and a naïve notion that sustainable development was first and foremost about saving the environment. But I quickly realised that for many people, sustainable development is about humans, particularly those who are living in abject poverty and who are cut off from the means to live quality lives. I then appreciated that sustainable development is not just an environmental issue, but that it also encompasses economic, political, social and moral dimensions. This was a serious and much-needed wake-up call and challenged my naïve, idealistic and narrow view of the world.

Much of what has been written about sustainable development in academic articles or within the popular press has been dominated by factual information and ‘gloom and doom’ scenarios. The response to the challenges is very much an intellectual response – hence the apparent obsession with technological fixes and the intense political debate regarding the crises. As I read through the literature and listened to the discussions, I had a sense that perhaps something is missing in the mainstream understanding of sustainable development. It seems to me that the focus is heavily anthropocentric and that Nature is only considered in terms of its value to humans rather than having an intrinsic right to exist. I started to ask questions and to explore a little deeper, thinking about my own relationship with Nature and what it means to me. I came across literature which resonated with my thinking and

discovered that there are many people around the world who have been thinking about our relationship with Nature and who recognise that a spiritual revival is essential if we are to create a more just and equal world in which *all* beings have the opportunity to flourish.

I have worked with a number of individuals who appear to be working ‘from the heart’ rather than the head alone and showing that there *are* different ways of being in the world. These people are bold enough to ask deeper questions and to do things differently. They recognise that “to salve the world’s wounds demands a response from the heart (Hawken, 2007:188). Some of these people feature in this story while others I have ‘discovered’ during my explorations and have been sufficiently intrigued to find out more from them.

I will attempt in this thesis, while clearly an academic investigation, to explore my own spiritual journey, to consider my relationship with Nature and to learn about my role as a change agent in the transformation to a more sustainable world. It is also an opportunity for me to gain a more profound understanding of some of my own beliefs and practices with regards to Nature. I will, however, attempt to make explicit my assumptions and biases in this personal journey.

I need to state upfront that I am neither religious nor do I regard myself as deeply spiritual. This journey is therefore a personal challenge to ask deeper questions: *Who am I? What can I know? What can I hope for? What ought I to do? What makes a worthwhile life? What makes a good society?*

It is a reminder to heed Apollo’s call to:

Know thyself
Do no thing in excess
Honour the gods
(McCallum, 2005:25).

It is also about what Plotkin refers to as a “transpersonal experience – ...a mystic affiliation with nature, experienced as a sacred calling...” (2008:3).

In this thesis I will describe the world as if it is something ‘out there’ and as though I, as an observer, am separate from and independent of this reality, whereas in actual fact I am immersed in it. I am a white,

middle-class, middle-aged educated woman living in suburbia with all the infrastructure of a modern home. As such I am implicitly and explicitly implicated in the predicament we face on a global scale. My perspective of sustainable development and what needs to be done to ensure a more equitable world is influenced by and reflects my position in society.

There were many times throughout the writing up of the thesis when I experienced something that was more than just 'writer's block'. When I was struggling to focus my thoughts and to convert them into coherent sentences, I knew I had get away from my computer and spend time in Nature in order to connect with the heart of the subject matter of my thesis. I would spend simple moments just sitting outside with a cup of tea, watching the birds and clouds overhead, or would paddle out into the middle of the vlei close to where I live and allow myself to drift with the breeze at sunset. I started keeping a Nature diary of sorts, noting various sightings and experiences in my garden. These times reminded me of what I was trying to say and reconnected me to the story I wanted to tell.

Two events occurred during the time of completing the thesis in which I was directly confronted with what my relationship with Nature means to me. The first was when four big trees surrounding the house which I rent were cut down. It was not my decision to remove the trees and I felt intense anger and grief during this time, not only because my privacy and sense of sanctuary were violated, but also because of the lack of respect shown to the trees as living beings. This act gave me a very minute inkling of what indigenous people must feel when ruthless developers come in and devastate their land.

The second was the proposal by Royal Dutch Shell to mine for gas in the ancient shale rock of the Karoo. Having undertaken an annual pilgrimage to the Karoo for over ten years, I consider it, particularly the area around Nieu Bethesda, my soul-scape with its wide open spaces, big skies, fresh air and starry silence. Shell's proposal will have devastating consequences for the land and its inhabitants, for water supplies in this already arid region, and for the many people who make a living in the Karoo from farming and tourism. Yet the proposal is being 'sold' to South Africa in sustainable development terms:

South Africa is faced with the challenge of being able to meet future energy demands of an expanding economy coupled with continuously improving standards of living. Developing a natural gas energy supply to help meet this growing demand would be of considerable value to South Africa, especially as natural gas is the cleanest of the fossil fuels. It can be

used to generate electricity to power homes and businesses. It is also used for cooking, heating and transport fuels.²

At the time of writing the South African government placed a moratorium on shale gas exploration until additional studies have been done.

1.4. Significance of study

As I have already pointed out, it seems that spirituality and our relationship with Nature are not readily or overtly discussed in mainstream literature on sustainable development. Our economic system is currently based on an anthropocentric approach in which Nature exists only to serve human needs.

Science and technology are still predominantly regarded as the only legitimate ways of knowing, measuring and providing solutions. We tend to consider individual components and fail to acknowledge the multidimensional relationships and interactions between them. We need to adopt a transdisciplinary approach if we are to make sense of them. Morin argues this point, stating that “Specialised knowledge...extracts an object from a given field, rejects the links and interconnections with its environment, and inserts it in the abstract conceptual zone of the compartmentalised discipline, whose boundaries arbitrarily break the systemicity (the relation of a part to a whole) and the multidimensionality of phenomena” (1999:1).

Perhaps spirituality can provide a bridge which is desperately needed between human systems and ecological systems in order for us to create a more sustainable and just world. It could also provide us with “a consciousness and an intelligence that can redefine our sense of history, our sense of Nature and our sense of co-existence” (McCallum, 2005:158).

Because spirituality is regarded as something personal and sensitive in nature, it is not readily or easily spoken about. If we are to introduce a spiritual intention in our learning for sustainability we will need to do this in a way that doesn’t come across as evangelical or alienating. People may need to be gently invited to engage with the subject matter in a meaningful way. For this reason a more pragmatic

² Du Toit, J. (julie@karoospace.co.za). 28 January 2011. Fw: SHELL BACKGROUND DOCUMENT. Email to H. Lockhart (helen.lockhart@aquarium.co.za).

approach is required which reveals spirit-in-action. This is possible through story and in particular through the stories of individuals who work for change in a profound way.

As Ver Beek suggests, “Given its pervasiveness, power, and influence, increased attention to spirituality will result in more insightful research and more effective programmes” (2000:40).

1.5. Context – South Africa

Context matters. We are often too quick to think that a ‘one size fits all’ approach is the solution to problems, whereas a multiplicity of solutions is required, given the complex world in which we live.

Much of the literature I have referred to has been written by people in the USA, the UK and Europe, but during my research I came across the recent work (2010) by Swartz, a South African, who explored “the role of aesthetic relational values in sustainable development” with particular reference to Africa.

However, the perspective in much of the literature is influenced by the fact that the authors live in developed countries. I live in South Africa, a developing country which faces many challenges on many levels. It is also a country with a rich history, strong indigenous influences and a Constitution which entrenches the rights of people to have access to an environment which promotes their well-being. As such I am interested to see how South African change agents make sense of the social and environmental challenges within the sustainable development context which need to be overcome if we are to move towards real transformation.

1.6. Research question

I am aware that spirituality is a vast topic and that the human-Nature relationship is complex, taking into account psychological, social, cultural, political and economic factors.

I am interested in exploring the relationship between spirituality and Nature in the transformation to a more sustainable world and, in particular, the spiritual practices and human-Nature connections experienced by six South African change agents.

Therefore my research question is: *Could a spiritual relationship with Nature assist in the transformation to a more sustainable world?*

1.6.1. Sub-questions

Sub-questions arising from this question include:

- What is spirituality?
- What characterises a 'spiritual' person?
- What is Nature?
- What is sustainable development?
- What is/constitutes/characterises a spiritual relationship with Nature?
- How and why are people generally considered to be 'disconnected from Nature'?
- How does this disconnection manifest in our daily lives and what implications does it have for sustainable development?
- Among the change agents identified, is there an association between spirituality and a connection with Nature?
- Can one have a relationship with Nature and not be spiritual?
- Can one be spiritual and not have a relationship with Nature?
- Do spiritual people necessarily behave in sustainable ways?
- What kinds of practices could assist in enabling a spiritual relationship with Nature?
- How do these practices inform one's work?
- What role could organised religion play in the transformation to a more sustainable world?
- How do sustainability change agents work for change and what motivates them to do so?

1.7. Objectives

The objectives of my research are as follows:

- to explore whether a spiritual relationship with Nature could assist in the transformation to a more sustainable world;
- to present individual stories which could be used as case studies in learning for sustainability; and
- to promote and encourage deeper conversations about what a more sustainable world might look like.

1.8. Clarification of concepts

Sustainable development, spirituality and Nature are all contested concepts and there is a multiplicity of ways in which they have been defined and discussed. A review of the literature has produced the following definitions:

1.8.1. *Sustainable development/sustainability*

Acknowledging that all living beings, including humans, animals and plants, are part of a complex system in which the ability to thrive individually is intrinsically linked to the ability of others to thrive, sustainable development recognises the rights of all present living beings, including humans, animals and plants, to live a quality life of sufficiency without compromising the ability of future generations of all living beings to live a quality life of sufficiency while remaining within the carrying capacity of the earth.

1.8.2. *Nature*

Nature is not something 'out there' or something separate from human life. It is inescapably part of who I am and I am part of it. For the purposes of this thesis I have defined Nature as: all of life, both animate and inanimate, both 'human-made' and 'natural', for that which is human-made is derived from natural resources. Humans are Nature – there is no separation or distinction.

1.8.3. Spirituality

Spirituality in the context of this thesis implies a heightened awareness or consciousness, the capacity for deep reflection and compassion, and a profound sense of what it means to part of the web of life – to be another living, breathing, sentient being in Nature without the hierarchies which are often dictated by religious forms of spirituality. I am not referring to an esoteric spirituality, but rather to a spirituality which is integral to daily life, which informs the decisions about the way we live, and which is expressed through action, i.e. spirit-in-action.

1.8.4. Change agent

A change agent is an individual who acts as a catalyst for change and transformation by questioning the status quo, working innovatively towards a vision of a better future and inspiring others through action. A change agent is conscious of the interconnectedness of the world we live in and insists on systemic change. These individuals could also be referred to as activists or social entrepreneurs. According to the Ashoka Foundation: “Social entrepreneurs often seem to be possessed by their ideas, committing their lives to changing the direction of their field. They are both visionaries and ultimate realists, concerned with the practical implementation of their vision above all else” (2011). The same could be said of change agents.

1.8.5. Transformation

Transformation in the context of this study refers to a radical change in “the structure of the industrialised society, the fundamental pattern of consumption and the values informing and perpetuating it” (Hattingh, 2001:7) and “a radical shift in our perceptions, our thinking, our values” (Capra, 1996:4).

1.9. Research methodology and design

Since this is a qualitative study I have used heuristic inquiry, reflexivity, narrative and poetics in my research approach and conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with six South African change agents (three women and three men). I have documented their stories as narrative summaries, focusing

particularly on their spirituality with respect to their relationship with Nature. I have then considered the emerging themes which pointed to what might be required in order to create sustainable futures.

I chose a story approach because we have relied on science to provide the answers for too long and have “responded with scientific and technological approaches, but haven’t listened enough to practical wisdom” (Hattingh, 2009a). Stories, using first-person narrative, are a means to move beyond dualist thinking and to “give expression to a range of attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviours which may be overlooked or silenced” (Warren, 1998:262). Individual stories are also a powerful means of speaking to the heart of issues and rendering the subject matter more accessible.

The thesis is written in the first person because it is a personal journey as well as an academic exploration. It embraces that which Romanyshyn refers to as ‘alchemical hermeneutics’: “that spirit of research which acknowledges that one is called by soul to follow a certain path of inquiry, which, when it is honored, holds together the tension between personal interests, aims, intentions, and complexes of the researcher and the ‘others’ in the work, the ancestors who carry the unfinished business of the soul in the work” (2007:261).

1.10. Thesis outline

My thesis is structured as follows:

Chapter Two: Literature review presents a comprehensive review of the literature to provide a context for my research. I offer an in-depth discussion of the human-Nature relationship; present the latest data and information on the current state of the planet, both in environmental and social terms; provide a critical overview of the mainstream understanding of sustainable development, and consider how spirituality may assist in the transformation to a more sustainable world by acting as a bridge between humans and Nature.

Chapter Three describes the *research design and methodology* which I applied in order to gain insight into my research question. In this chapter I explain the process of heuristic inquiry which I followed; introduce the six change agents and describe how I selected them and collected material from them

(interviews); provide a rationale for the presentation of the interviews as narrative summaries; explain how I went about interpreting the material, and consider the ethical implications of this research.

Chapter Four presents detailed *narrative summaries* of each of the interviews with the six change agents.

Chapter Five: Transformation to a more sustainable world presents a discussion of some of the pertinent insights, which I have grouped together as themes, from the interviews with the change agents.

Chapter Six: Conclusion, recommendations and closing reflections contemplates my research question and draws some conclusions in terms of the research objectives. Several recommendations are offered in terms of future research and learning in sustainability. In closing, I reflect on my experience of this research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

...we can choose whether to remain in the narrow, objectivist mode of consciousness that has contributed to the crises, or to act from a deeper, wider mode of consciousness in which we experience our unity with the whole of Gaia and hence understand the importance of radically changing our way of being in the world (Harding, 2006:225).

2.1. Introduction

Guided by my research sub-questions, this chapter provides a comprehensive review of the literature as a means of exploring existing knowledge and as an attempt to gain an understanding of the key concepts (sustainable development, Nature and spirituality) which underpin my research.

In the opening section (2.2.) I look at the human-Nature (dis)connection and discuss the cultural interpretations of Nature, environmental ethics, Nature in ancient times, how humans have become disconnected from Nature and the symptoms which manifest as a result of this disconnection. I then present the planetary polycrisis (Section 2.3) which we currently face as evidence of our disconnection and reviewing a number of reports that outline some of the most critical socioecological challenges. Section 2.4 looks at the response to this polycrisis in terms of sustainable development: I provide a brief historical overview of sustainable development as well as grappling with the questions of what we are trying to sustain and what kind of human development we are referring to. In the following section (2.5) I consider spirituality and its meaning, the kinds of practices which could help us to reconnect with Nature, and the role of religion. The final section (2.6) provides a brief discussion regarding transformation and some examples.

2.2. Human-Nature (dis)connection

We have to stop speaking about the Earth being in need of healing. The Earth does not need healing. We do. Our task is to rediscover ourselves in Nature. It is an individual choice. And how or where do we begin? We begin exactly where we are right now, when we look at the world as a mirror, when we discover that our sense of freedom and authenticity is linked to the well-being and authenticity of others – and that includes the animals, the trees and the land (McCallum, 2010).

2.2.1. What is Nature?

To me, nature is the convergence of lives, of eras, and especially of people, who together form a reverence to life. We would not be 'life' if we did not share it with the other lives on Earth (Menchú Tum, cited in Lippe-Biesterfeld & Van Tijn, 2005:9).

It is a community of life (Mische, cited in Lippe-Biesterfeld & Van Tijn, 2005:258).

Nature is the phenomenon of circulation and revitalization of love and thanks (Emoto, cited in Lippe-Biesterfeld & Van Tijn, 2005:148).

Language matters. In the opening sections of this thesis I drew on the language used in mainstream sustainability discourse. Some of this terminology includes 'environment', 'ecosystem',³ 'ecosystem services', 'natural resources', 'natural capital', and 'environmental management'. As Banerjee suggests: "One consequence of conceptualizing nature as environment is the abstraction of singularity from the multiple meanings of nature, ranging from the essence or character of an object; the physical world around us; living and nonliving things; the specific ecology of places; notions of wilderness and ruralness; and the aesthetic or spiritual values assigned to nature" (2003:152).

Others refer to the planet as the Earth or Gaia. Earth seems to imply something 'out there' - it conjures up the image of our planet from space and, in viewing it from afar, I feel detached – which is problematic since it is this detachment which we need to somehow overcome. Although Gaia is a term

³ It is worth noting here that 'ecology' has its roots in Greek: 'oikos' meaning 'house'.

synonymous with James Lovelock who formulated the Gaia hypothesis and is increasingly used in mainstream academic discourse,⁴ it still has ‘New Age’ connotations in some circles as it has been adopted by “environmentalists and religiously inclined people [who are] attracted to the idea of a native goddess with power...giving Gaia a distinctly nonscientific connotation” (Margulis, 1998:118). Given my argument I am wary of anything which might be interpreted as New Age, but this reflects the conflict which has dogged me while exploring the subject matter of and writing up this thesis: on the one hand I am trying to present an argument in a language which will be accepted as academic and rigorous, and on the other hand, I am crucially aware that I somehow need to balance this with the assumptions and statements that I am making within this argument so that I can be true to this topic. As Harding requests, “consider yourself a conspirator in the effort to find a new language for breathing life back into our experience of the Earth...” (2006:39).

I have chosen to use ‘Nature’ as opposed to any of the above terms. I did not want to use the language of science, economics, conservation and politics. I want to bring Nature ‘back from the dead’ and to resurrect it as something deserving of our attention and our respect, in correlation with Nicolescu’s assertion that “...the time for the resurrection of Nature has come” (2002:60). Some may argue that, by using Nature, I have done exactly that which I am arguing against, i.e. I have set it up as something distinct from humans, but for the purposes of this discussion, I think it is a necessary act: instead of reducing it, I have magnified it to augment my argument, to emphasise its importance and to reinitil a sense of respect. Further, naming is not only a means of identifying and connecting: it is also how we measure value and convey significance, i.e. Nature *matters*. I believe this allows for both a personal engagement with Nature and a recognition that it has its own identity beyond our wants, needs and uses of it.

Cilliers offers the following paradox: “Although we use language to make sense of the world, it is not adequate to describe the world” (2009). From a postmodern perspective language cannot adequately describe Nature since it will always be a subjective and a cultural representation of Nature. But this does not mean that Nature does not exist: it does exist independently of our perception, interpretation and exploitation of it for without it we would cease to exist. However, “Nature is that which Humanity finds itself within, and to which in some sense it belongs, but also that from which it also seems excluded in the very moment in which it reflects upon either its otherness or its belongingness” (Soper, 1995:49).

⁴ According to the Gaia hypothesis, the earth is self-regulating complex system.

According to McCallum, “There’s only nature and the very human expression of it. Nature then, is not something out there. We are of it and in it” (2010).

Nature is a contested concept and worthy of a discussion on its own. Ask any group of people ‘What is Nature?’ and a wide diversity of answers will be given. Below are some of the responses I received from colleagues when I asked them in an email ‘What does Nature mean to you?’ (see Appendix L).

Nature includes everything in the world, both animate and inanimate but, because we have become dislocated from a great part of it, we nowadays tend to think of nature being ‘out there’, the ‘wild’, the ‘untamed’.

Everything that was not created by man and in itself has a uniqueness and beauty beyond our comprehension.

Every single creature, cell, cycle or life form that all mysteriously work together to make this planet work.

To me Nature is everything that is not manmade, so that includes me. I am Nature and Nature is me. If I destroy Nature I destroy myself and if I care for Nature I care for myself.

A sense of something outside myself, sculpted and refined by God’s vision and will, that I cannot control and is larger than me and the sum of my actions.

Nature is the source from which all learning stems.

The lack of any agreed upon understanding of and terminology used with respect to Nature is problematic. According to Palmer, citing Macnaghten and Urry, “there is no singular ‘nature’ as such, only a diversity of contested natures; and...each such nature is constituted through a variety of socio-cultural processes from which such natures cannot be plausibly separated” (2003:33). Norton refers to the lack of understanding “as a theoretical crisis, in language and world, [which] causes paralysis and miscommunication...[resulting] in no single coherent consensus regarding positive values, no widely shared vision of a future and better world in which human populations live in harmony with the natural world they inhabit” (1991:7).

While many people tend to think that Nature is only found in 'wild' places where humans are few and far between, my understanding of Nature is that it is not something 'out there' or something separate from human life. It is inescapably part of who I am and I am part of it. For the purposes of the thesis I define Nature as: all of life – both animate and inanimate, both that which is made by humans and that which is 'natural', for the former is ultimately derived from natural resources. Humans are Nature – there is no separation or distinction.

Perhaps, we need a new language as McCallum suggests:

If we are serious about rediscovering ourselves in Nature, we are going to need a language that speaks for science and soul, that narrows the gap between subject and object, that slips between yes and no. We will need a language that continually reminds us of where we have come from and of what we have to do if we are to become ecologically intelligent. For the time being, the only language I know that can begin to do this is poetry (2005:18).

Wilderness

*Have we forgotten
that wilderness is not a place,
but a pattern of soul
where every tree, every bird and beast
is a soul maker?*

*Have we forgotten
that wilderness is not a place
but a moving feast of stars,
footprints, scales and beginnings?*

*Since when
did we become afraid of the night
and that only the bright stars count?
Or that our moon is not a moon
unless it is full?*

*By whose command
were the animals
through groping fingers,
one for each hand,
reduced to the big and little five?*

*Have we forgotten
that every creature is within us
carried by tides
of earthly blood
and that we named them?*

*Have we forgotten
that wilderness is not a place
but a season
and that we are in its
final hour?
(McCallum, n.d.)*

While “poetry is one of the best ways that people have to bring the Earthly into language” (Peters & Irwin, 2002:8), ultimately we cannot get away from language to describe Nature because as Gill argues, “We are beings who relate to each other and to the earth through language and symbols. Language and symbols break oneness with the earth through creating a distance from it, a distance that allows conceptualisation, reflection and shared understanding (2002:185).

2.2.2. Cultural interpretations of Nature

The concept of Nature is understood differently in different cultures and our definitions of Nature are culturally bound. “What is called nature in one culture at one time may be viewed very differently in a different culture influenced by different political, historical and social factors. Ideas about ‘nature’ or the ‘environment’ are thus inevitably changing and culturally relative” (Palmer, 2003:33). According to Greider and Garkovich: “Cultural groups transform the natural environment...through the use of

different symbols that bestow different meanings on the same physical objects and conditions” (1994:2).

At least three broad cultural perspectives of Nature can be identified: western, eastern and African perspectives. Reflecting the work and philosophies of Galileo, Bacon, Descartes and Newton amongst others, the western perspective remains the dominant one and has proliferated across the world through colonialism, religion particularly Judeo-Christianity, and globalisation. The western perspective is predominantly modernistic and mechanistic, i.e. Nature, as a machine, can be reduced to its individual parts and exists for the purpose of human use and exploitation. Humans and Nature are considered separate from one another: “Nature can be known and conquered by scientific methodology, defined in a way that is completely independent of human beings and separate from us” (Nicolescu, 2002:59).

It is this worldview which Capra regards as outdated, yet “dualistic thinking and the pursuit of progress seem in no way diminished, despite the shadow these dominant ideas have cast across the globe” (Ashwell, 2010:60). Arising from the west, mainstream sustainable development clings to the western perspective of Nature: “contemporary discourses of sustainable development are plagued by the same modernistic assumptions of rationality in their reliance on scientific inquiry and the separation of people from the biophysical environment” (Banerjee, 2003:153).

In comparison to the dualist western worldview, the eastern perspective does not separate humans from Nature. Instead humans are part of a dynamic whole. According to Lao Tzu in the *Tao Te Ching*, “The virtue of the universe is wholeness, it regards all things as equal” (cited in Suzuki, 2007:275). The eastern perspective arises mainly from China, Japan and India, and is influenced by Confucius, Lao Tzu and the Buddha amongst others. With the idea of two archetypal poles, yin and yang, being central to Chinese philosophy, it is believed that “the human organism is a microcosm of the universe; its parts are assigned yin and yang qualities, and thus the individual’s place in the great cosmic order is firmly established” (Capra, 1982:312). Life exists in a continuous flow of dynamic interaction, with yin and yang setting the boundaries for cyclical patterns: as one peaks, the other retreats in an ebb and flow of never-ending change and constant transformation: this is the ultimate reality known as the Tao – the Way.

According to the Buddhist tradition,⁵ humans and Nature inter-exist in a co-dependent relationship of mutuality and interdependence. It “is not just a question of ‘linking’ with Nature, caring for Nature or ‘going back to Nature’. It is that we *are* Nature and Nature (everything) is us”⁶ (Edmond-Smith, 2010:149). This is what is referred to as ‘inter-being’. A Thai monk, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, puts it this way:

The entire cosmos is a cooperative. The sun, the moon, and the stars live together as a cooperative. The same is true for humans and animals, trees, and the Earth. When we realize that the world is a mutual, interdependent, cooperative enterprise...then we can build a noble environment. If our lives are not based on this truth, then we shall perish (cited in Swearer, 2004).

According to Campbell and Robins, “There are at least nine broad groups of indigenous people in South Africa. Each has different ideas on the relationship of people and the environment” (2009:2). However, broadly speaking, in the African worldview, “...the universe is both visible and invisible, unending, and without limits” (Mebratu, 1998:497). Aspects of Nature and humans are regarded as one and the same: “The African is taught not to say that a tree is a tree. It is I” (Mutwa, cited in Lippe-Biesterfeld & Van Tijn, 2005:76). According to Ashwell, “Everything in the cosmos: people, ancestral spirits, and the natural world, is part of the Divine and as such, fundamentally connected and interdependent” (2010:61). Mebratu states: “For African tradition, man is not the master in the universe; he is only the center, the friend, the beneficiary, the user. For this reason he must live in harmony with the universe, obeying the laws of natural, moral and mystical order” (1998:498). Mutwa explains:

When you are taken away from nature and see trees as trees and no longer as part of yourself, you lose that power to feel...When I was in the West, I lived in a strange society where people feel with their brains. But a person who lives with nature...feels with a second part of his body – (pointing to his abdomen) down here. It is a feeling a mother or father has when something threatens his or her baby. ...We must return to that feeling, a complete feeling of being one with everything else (cited in Lippe-Biesterfeld & Van Tijn, 2005:82).

⁵ “Buddhism is a religion and a philosophy, but most of all it is a way of life” (Nairn, 1999:3). The Buddha is not revered as a deity, but is rather a teacher, guiding the practitioner to the attainment of enlightenment which is “a state free from negative or conflicting emotions, free from any sense of duality, free from any form of negativity or ignorance” (Nairn, 1999:23).

⁶ Emphasis in the original.

2.2.3. *Nature through the lens of different environmental ethical positions*

Environmental ethics provide a lens through which we view Nature. Hattingh identifies twelve different environmental ethical positions (see Figure 2.1.).

Instrumental value theories, which include conservationism and preservationism, are anthropocentric, viewing Nature purely as a resource to serve humans. “Instrumental value is value assigned to something because of its usefulness, as a means to an end” (Palmer, 2003:16). Intrinsic value theories consider Nature as having intrinsic value, i.e. it is “not a means to an end, but rather...an end in itself” (Palmer, 2003:16). The transformational theories, which include deep ecology and ecofeminism, are regarded as radical theories. These theories “may differ on what is to be transformed [but] they all agree that transformation should address the root causes of our environmental problems” (Hattingh, 1999:77).

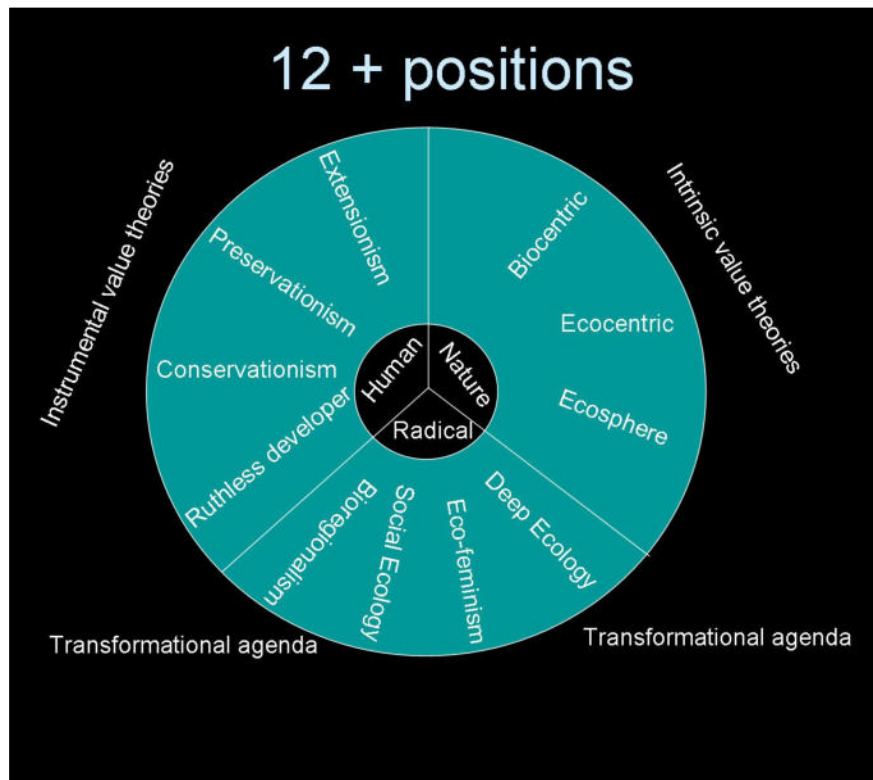


Figure 2.1. Twelve environmental ethical positions (Source: Hattingh, 2009)

I am not going to discuss the details of each position, but I have highlighted the key positions that are relevant to my argument and their underlying assumptions in Table 2.1. I will refer to deep ecology and bioregionalism further on. (See pages 88 and 90 respectively).

<i>Environmental ethical position</i>	<i>Key assumptions</i>
Ruthless developer	Extremely anthropocentric; no limits to growth; economic growth at all costs; exploitative; short-term thinking; science and technology will be able to fix all problems; focuses only on present generation of humans; Nature is 'super-abundant'
Conservationism	Moderately anthropocentric; recognises limits; longer-term focus; wise-use of resources and avoids wasting resources; science and cost-benefit analysis to maximise use of resources; considers next generation of humans; sustainable development sits here for the most part
Preservationism	Still anthropocentric as it looks to what humans can gain from Nature; leaves Nature pristine, intact and untouched by humans; Nature seen as life-support system, early warning signal, biodiversity store, recreation space, symbolic monument, therapeutic space. Associated with non-consumptive values, e.g. spirituality, psychological health
Ecocentric	Nature has intrinsic value; ecological rather than value-laden scientific approach; balance and harmony of Nature; humans part of the community of life; holistic as opposed to mechanistic approach
Deep ecology	Nature has intrinsic value; rejects materialism and consumerism; all aspects of Nature are valued equally irrespective of usefulness to humans; recognises interconnectedness of all life; Nature is an extension of self and self an extension of Nature
Ecofeminism	Patriarchy is at root of the problem: Nature and women have been dominated and exploited by men; capitalism, science and technology are not gender neutral; relationships are key; ethic

	of care, nurture and mutual co-operation
Bioregionalism	Humans are alienated from place in which they live; need to live in place/region in small, sustainable communities; respects diversity of ecological and social relationships; rejects capitalism, globalisation, technology and industrialisation; uses indigenous knowledge and wisdom; “emphasises poetic living... [and] is therefore mystical, visionary and spiritual in character” (Hattingh, 1999:78)

Table 2.1. Environmental ethical views on Nature

2.2.4. Nature in ancient times

According to Ashton:

The ancient people of the earth lived dynamically within the ebb and flow of the natural world, belonging as much to each other and the human community of life, as they did to the sun and the moon and the cyclical rhythms of nature around them. Because they depended on nature for all their essential needs, they upheld a sacred reverence for the earth that took into cognizance the give and take of the living order (2010).

In ancient times Nature was revered and imbued with spirit and magic. “The earliest humans watching lightning flare in the sky or angry, storm-driven waves thunder against a sheer cliff face, could not doubt that the earth was spirit as well as matter” (Time Life Books, 1991:31).

Ashwell contends that

in Europe during the Middle Ages humans were considered to be part of nature. At that time, the order of nature was conceived of as a Great Chain of Being, with an infinite number of links arranged hierarchically, from the lowliest form of life to the most perfect creature. In this model, nature (which included humans) was separate from God or the supernatural. Humans occupied a fairly modest position in the chain below ethereal beings and angels (2010:59).

Ancient peoples, including the Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, Celts and the First Peoples of the Americas, Australia, New Zealand and Africa, were polytheistic in that they deified Nature and worshipped various gods and goddesses. Trees, rivers, mountains and animals were imbued with spirits, and places such as groves and springs were regarded sacred. People regularly offered their gods and goddesses gifts and sacrifices in order to make special requests or to assuage them. Rituals and festivals in honour of the gods and goddesses were part of the fabric of life. According to Mutwa: "People used to speak of gods and to give them shape, all the better to love them, all the better to respect them" (1996:66). Merchant elaborates on this point: "The relationship between most peoples and the earth was an I-thou ethic of propitiation to be made before damming a brook, cutting a tree, or sinking a mine shaft" (1992:41). The oft-quoted Chief Seattle says: "Every part of this earth is sacred to my people. Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark wood, every clearing and humming insect is holy in the memory and experience of my people" (cited in Merchant, 1992:121). In many indigenous cultures, "...nature is truly alive, and every entity within it is endowed with agency, intelligence, and wisdom; qualities which in the West, when they are recognised at all, have commonly been referred to as 'soul'" (Harding, 2006:20).

Gods, goddesses and spirits also featured in the cosmology of the San, the First People of southern Africa. For example,

To the |Xam, the deity is represented by |Kaggen, the Mantis. |Kaggen is variously responsible for the creation of the Moon and the animals, and for the maintenance of human sociality. Unlike the Moon, he is not prayed to. He is a trickster figure, but one with the power to bring the dead back to life and to change himself and other animals into different forms. There are other deities too, notably !Khwa, the Rain (Brörmann-Thoma, 2009:23).

The First people of Australia "traditionally have a strong physical and spiritual bond with the Australian landscape through the Dreaming. This is the time of creation when the mystical and powerful ancestors of the Aboriginal people moved over the featureless earth and sea, and formed the environmental features found today" (Bayet, 2005:498).

However, in the course of history, “visible gods became an invisible God. Animism was replaced by theism...God moved from being outside us to being inside and then to being everywhere” (McCallum, 2005:53).

2.2.5. How have we become disconnected from Nature?

While the ancients were deeply connected to Nature through their beliefs and rituals, many people today across the world no longer experience this connection. The ancient bonds between people and Nature have been broken and the sense of the sacred lost and replaced by environmental destruction, consumerism and greed. There are a number of reasons for this, including the role of western science, the loss of indigenous knowledge and beliefs, colonialism, capitalism, globalisation, religion, specifically Judeo-Christianity, and technology. Each of these is worthy of an in-depth discussion, but this is obviously beyond the scope of this thesis. I will simply highlight some of the key arguments in each case.

2.2.5.1. The role of western science

As mentioned previously, the scientific revolution was brought about by the work of Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, Bacon, Descartes, Newton and others. As a result of their influence, Nature was no longer viewed as an organic whole, but reduced to its ‘mechanical’ and numerical parts, which could be manipulated and controlled. Bacon suggested that we “torture nature’s secrets out of her” and “once enslaved, [she will] take orders from man and work under his authority” (cited in Harding, 2006:26). Descartes introduced the ‘nature as machine’ metaphor and, according to Harding, “his belief in mechanistic reductionism was so extreme that he urged his students to ignore the screams of vivisected animals, for such sounds were, after all, little more than the creakings and gratings of a complicated machine” (2006:27).

According to Max-Neef: “For Galileo and Newton, the language of Nature is mathematics. Nothing is important in science that cannot be measured. We and Nature, the observer and the observed, are separate entities. Science is the supreme manifestation of reason, and reason is the supreme attribute of the human being” (n.d.:3). Emotion and subjective sensory experience were discounted as being non-scientific and irrelevant to gaining an understanding of the world.

Macy and Young Brown argue that “classical science veered away from a holistic, organic view of the world to an analytical and mechanical one...Separating mechanism from operator, object from observer, this view of reality assumed that everything could be described objectively and controlled externally” (1998:40). According to Nicolescu, “the only knowledge worthy of its name must therefore be scientific, objective; the only reality worthy of this name must be, of course, objective reality, ruled by scientific laws” (2002:13). Thus, “feeling, intuition, consciousness and spirituality are...banished from the realm of science” (Max-Neef, n.d.:3).

Goodwin speaks of the impact of science on our relationship with Nature and says:

We were acutely aware that the way of knowing the world developed by western science was a very limited, though powerful one, driven by the desire to gain control over nature. This works, but gains control through abstraction and reduction, which separates the knower from the known and tends to alienate rather than unite them through an empathic relationship of respect and acknowledgement (2007:156).

However, as Jung argues:

Through scientific understanding, our world has become dehumanized. Man feels himself isolated in the cosmos. He is no longer involved in nature and has lost his emotional participation in natural events, which hitherto had a symbolic meaning for him. Thunder is no longer the voice of a god, nor is lightning his avenging missile. No river contains a spirit, no tree means a man's life, no snake is the embodiment of wisdom, and no mountain still harbors a great demon (Jung, n.d. in Sabini, 2002:79).

While science is vital and has afforded us many great opportunities, it also seems to have stripped away the magic and beauty of Nature. Although it has offered us insights into the lives of the multitude of species with which we live, it has reduced them to utilities in human terms. It has also diminished our ability to experience Nature in the fullness of our human-ness: we are not just rational, intellectual beings who seek to experience the world through logic, reason and measurement; we are also feeling, intuitive, soulful beings who have the capacity to respond with our hearts and as humane beings. As Goodwin points out, “there were three major taboos that defined the boundary between what was scientific and therefore denied reality, and unscientific territory, the unreal. These were consciousness,

qualities and animism” (2007:31). In essence, science has denied us of what it means to be fully human in our relationship with Nature.

Further, science has de-contextualised Nature by reducing it to its parts. Linear thinking means that patterns, interconnections or relationships are considered less significant, if considered at all. Capra argues that “overemphasis on the scientific method and on rational, analytic thinking has led to attitudes that are profoundly antiecological...Rational thinking is linear, whereas ecological awareness arises from an intuition of nonlinear systems” (1982:41). As Goodwin puts it: “What we are actually looking for is lives of meaning through relationship” (2007:13).

Furthermore, those working in the natural sciences and those in the human sciences have tended to work independently of one another. This is problematic in that it keeps humans and Nature separate as though each exists independently of the other. Environmentalists and those working on behalf of human development often regard each other at extreme positions, which results in conflict.

What is needed is not more conflict, but a recognition of interconnection and collaborative relationships. As Swilling so cogently puts it:

As social scientists realise that future social transformations will be determined and constrained by sustainability challenges, they need to learn about the dynamics of natural systems (including evolution) from their colleagues in the natural sciences. When they do, they will discover a new language for comprehending social reality that could revitalise their disciplines...Equally, as the impact of unsustainable practices starts to affect the bulk of humanity as negatively as it does the poorest two billion, then the work of the natural scientists becomes the key to the survival of the species. However, the chances of this being done in an ethical way are substantially reduced if this science is not rooted in an appreciation of the deep connections between the human species and the natural system (2002).

2.2.5.2. The loss of indigenous knowledge and beliefs

Western science has also robbed many people of their connection with Nature and subverted indigenous wisdom. This is evident across the globe in First People communities – from the Native

American Indians to the Aborigines and the San in southern Africa. It has also assumed that indigenous knowledge is inferior and lacking in rigor and rationality. According to Brodnig and Mayer-Schönberger, “Western scientists and ‘experts’ have tended to regard TEK [traditional environmental knowledge] as methodologically questionable, anecdotal, or at best – of localised importance” (2000:2).

However, as Cullinan points out, “much of the wisdom of these communities is already lost and the remnants that are still available to us are in many cases fast disappearing, due to the persistent and overwhelming advance of the dominant cultures” (2002:92). The loss of Nature has run parallel with the loss of indigenous cultures. According to LaDuke, “over 2000 nations of Indigenous peoples have gone extinct in the western hemisphere, and one nation disappears from the Amazon rainforest every year” (2005:489). She argues that “there is a direct relationship between the loss of cultural diversity and the loss of biodiversity”.

2.2.5.3. The role of religion

Religion, and in particular Judeo-Christianity, is often cited as having played a role in the disconnection of humans from Nature. The reference to the now infamous verse in Genesis (1:28), “Multiply and fill the earth and subdue it; you are the masters of the fish and birds and all the animals”, is believed to have been internalised and acted out by humans, resulting in a ‘dominate and conquer’ mentality which has perpetuated to this day. While Mebratu is cautious in his approach and argues that “we must attend with care to the full range of writings and practices that religious traditions offer” (1998:497), White contends that “especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen (1967:4). He argues further that “Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions...not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends” (1967:4). However, as Razak points out, “earth-based, female reverencing, animist and polytheistic worship is a subterranean ocean that runs beneath the mighty rivers of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam” (2009:94).

Through colonialism, Judeo-Christianity also subjugated many indigenous traditions and cultures:

In Antiquity every tree, every spring, every stream, every hill had its own genius loci, its guardian spirit. These spirits were accessible to men, but were very unlike men; centaurs, fauns, and mermaids show their ambivalence. Before one cut a tree, mined a mountain, or

dammed a brook, it was important to placate the spirit in charge of that particular situation, and to keep it placated. By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects (White, 1967:4).

Along with Nature, entire communities of people were subdued and controlled in the name of Christ and civilisation. Maathai claims that “from the moment they set foot on foreign shores, colonial forces demonized and marginalized the religious practices of those they conquered and occupied” (2010:95).

2.2.5.4. Colonialism

Colonialism and development as economic growth are regarded as having exploited Nature, women and the cultures of indigenous people. According to Mies and Shiva, “the capitalist patriarchal world system...is built upon and maintains itself through the colonialization of women, of ‘foreign’ peoples and their lands; and of nature, which it is gradually destroying” (1993:2). Capra emphasises that the “exploitation of nature has gone hand in hand with that of women, who have been identified with nature throughout the ages” (1982:40). This exploitation, of both Nature and women, has been propagated through science and Judeo-Christianity. Shiva asserts that maldevelopment, which she equates with economic growth and the domination of men over women and Nature, is a fragmented, reductionist, dualist perspective [which] violates the integrity and harmony of man in nature, and the harmony between men and women. It ruptures the cooperative unity of masculine and feminine, and places man, shorn of the feminine principle, above nature and women and separated from both. The violence to nature as symptomised by the ecological crisis, and the violence to women, as symptomised by their subjugation and exploitation, arise from this subjugation of the feminine principle (1998:273).

2.2.5.5. The role of technology

Technology, associated with the mechanistic worldview, is a means through which Nature has been controlled, manipulated and exploited:

Separating ourselves from what we call nature by describing it as an objective, mechanical world governed by laws that we discover has allowed us to develop ingenious innovations and inventions in science and technology. However, this form of creativity has confronted

us with our awesome power to disturb natural cycles on the planet in ways that now threaten our cultural way of life (Goodwin, 2007:18).

Thus, while technology has benefited us in many positive ways and has increased the standard of living of millions of people, it “is severely disrupting and upsetting the ecological processes that sustain our natural environment and are the very basis of our existence” (Capra, 1982:235). “Technologies – such as axes, guns and bulldozers – transform trees, animals and rocks into ‘natural resources’” (Merchant, 1992:9).

Those who have access to technology no longer have to ‘go into Nature’: they buy their food from supermarkets instead of growing it themselves, water comes from a tap instead of having to be collected from a water body, vehicles are used to get to places instead of walking and medicine is dispensed from pharmacies in tablet form rather than in herbal applications. Further, Nature is experienced passively through television, the Internet and books and magazines, rather than through active exploration in which it becomes a physical and sensory experience.

However, technology is regarded by many as the salvation of the planetary crisis: “Those who believe that technology can fix any problem are confident that our rate of innovation will ensure that we will be able to duck and dive and weave fast enough never to be pinned against the ropes and knocked out of existence” (Cullinan, 2002:37). However, Mészáros warns against this: “To say that science and technology *can* solve all our problems, in the long run⁷...is much worse than believing in witchcraft; for it tendentiously ignores the devastating social embeddedness of present-day science and technology” (cited in Foster, 2009:22). There is a cost to technological advancement: “While some people believe that humans will find solutions to many problems through technology, the pace of technological change continues to disrupt the lives of hundreds of thousands of people” (Deval, 2001:21). An example to illustrate this point is the Lesotho Highlands Water Project – the dam was built mainly to supply Gauteng with water while the citizens of Lesotho have barely seen the benefits of the dam⁸ – neither in terms of water supply nor in monetary terms. In addition, hundreds of people were displaced from their villages when the dam was built and are now living in areas where the land cannot support them and the social fabric of their communities has been destroyed.

⁷ Emphasis in the original.

⁸ Lesotho is an independent kingdom; Gauteng is a province in South Africa.

As I continue to ponder the question as to why we are disconnected from Nature, I wonder whether there is perhaps an evolutionary reason: are we humans perhaps genetically predisposed to act in such a detached, superior manner? If we were so deeply connected and considered all living beings as equal, then surely we would not be able ‘use’ them with such ease for our own survival. Irrespective of whether we regard Nature from an anthropocentric or an ecocentric position, we need to use and consume Nature to survive: thus perhaps our superiority complex is necessary for survival. While I raise this argument, I do not agree with it as I believe that human consciousness and spirituality allow us to transcend the evolutionary argument. McCallum supports this: “Yes, the human animal is a deeply biological being, but we are psychological beings also, creatures that reflect, fantasize, hope, intuit, pray, bless, blame, care, cheat, love and who look for the meanings in things” (2005:16).

It is not possible to see each of the above possible reasons for the fracture in the human-Nature connection in isolation nor can they be regarded as the only reasons. A non-linear dynamic interplay between each aspect described above, as well as a multiplicity of other factors, results in a series of causes and effects in which causes become effects which become causes.

2.2.6. What are the symptoms of the human-Nature disconnection?

The human-Nature disconnection manifests itself in a wide range of ‘symptoms’ at different scales: from disorders and pathologies at individual and community levels to disturbances at the societal/cultural level and ultimately on a global scale, culminating in the planetary polycrisis with which we are confronted and which I will describe in more detail in the following section (2.3.).

2.2.6.1. Individual symptoms

On an individual level, a variety of disorders and pathologies have been associated with a decrease in contact with Nature (Riebel, 2001; Robinson, 2009; Louv, 2005). These include depression, anxiety, stress and a variety of other health issues, including hypertension and obesity. Levels of obesity in developed countries are high and are increasing in developing countries such as China and South Africa (GlaxoSmithKline, 2011; Prentice, 2006; Popkin, 2001). While other factors are involved in increasing obesity levels such as rising levels of income, changes in transportation and dietary changes (such as increased consumption of too much sugar and fat, particularly in highly processed foods – another way

in which we are disconnected from Nature, i.e. the very food we eat), it is also suggested that people are less engaged in outdoor activities and participate less in physical exercise. Instead there is a greater tendency to spend time in front of computers and televisions, in shopping malls and on mobile phones (Pergams & Zaradic, 2006; Pretty, 2007). Conversely, it has been shown in numerous studies that contact with Nature is associated with a range of mental and physical health benefits (Maller et al., 2005; Ryan et al., 2010; Townsend & Weerasuriya, 2010).

Louv coined the term 'nature-deficit disorder' to describe "the human costs of alienation from nature, among them: diminished use of the senses, attention difficulties, and higher rates of physical and emotional illnesses" (2005:34). It is not only individuals who suffer from this disorder, but families, communities and even cities. McCallum refers to 'homesickness' which he believes "is one of the most overlooked conditions in modern psychiatry" (2005:15). He continues: "Often presenting as a restless depression, homesickness and a loss of wildness are the same thing. So is a loss of soul".

2.2.6.2. Symptoms manifest in communities

Increased urbanisation and the associated slum conditions in which many people are forced to live result in a paradox: these people are aware of the interconnectivity of all life because they physically experience the challenge of being disconnected from Nature through its absence. Living in crowded conditions in degraded environments where they have little or no access to Nature, e.g. clean water, and if they do have access, it comes at a cost, those living in slums and informal settlements also bear the brunt of natural disasters such as flooding: for these people Nature often brings more discomfort to add to the material poverty they already experience.

The apartheid system in South Africa also meant that people were physically disconnected in that they were not only denied access to parts of Nature, e.g. beaches, picnic sites in forest areas and nature reserves, but many people were forcibly removed and relocated to degraded areas on the outskirts of cities. Today, although everyone now has access to natural areas, the costs of getting there are often prohibitive.

The exploitation of Nature and subsequent demise of plant and animal species in southern Africa has resulted in a conservationist approach such that systems have been put in place to 'sustainably manage'

remaining populations of species. This approach has produced a number of dilemmas. Game parks and reserves are a means to manage and preserve Nature, but “...the unity of place, man and beast...a life of whole and integrity...is gone” (Turner, 1995:42) from these places. Many of these game areas are now exclusive and only accessible by the wealthier minority. Not only is this elitism a form of discrimination, but local people no longer have free access to these areas except as employees and in many instances as poachers as they no longer have ‘legal’ access to Nature upon which they relied for their livelihoods. Even those from the local middle classes may not be able to afford a visit to certain private game reserves and parks because the fees are prohibitive, e.g. the Timbavati Game Reserve in Limpopo Province and the Sanbona Wildlife Reserve in the Western Cape province.

Other efforts to manage Nature have been through quota systems, e.g. in the fishing industry in South Africa and have resulted in people being disconnected from that which has provided them with a livelihood for generations. In this case it was decided to redistribute quota allocations in an effort to ensure more equitable access to marine resources. However, “the better informed, politically connected and economically astute members of the fishing communities” (Van Sittert et al., 2006:106) stood to gain more from this new arrangement, which meant that some people who had fished all their lives were cut off from legal access to marine resources. Further, the quota system brought in a significant number of people (foreigners included) who had no previous history with the sea. As a result of the changes in the quota system, tensions arose in the community, resulting in fragmentation among community members: “The quota system has turned everyone into individuals – it’s all about me (*ek en ek alleen*, meaning ‘me and me alone’) – whereas the traditional way of life was about community” (Titus interview).

2.2.6.3. *Socio-cultural discord*

At a societal/cultural level the current global economic system represents the greatest disconnect as it is based on the illusion that Nature, and that which it provides, is limitless. Markets do not reflect the total, real costs of products – either in environmental or social terms. If these were included, many of the large corporates would not be able to claim the kind of profits they do. Increasingly there is a call to ‘put a price tag on Nature’ in an effort to include the real costs of goods. However, as Simms points out:

By putting a price on nature, hopefully it makes it less likely that we will treat the world, and its natural resources, as if it were a business in liquidation. Yet there is a point when it

becomes meaningless to treat the ecosystems upon which we depend as mere commodities with a price for trading. For example, what price would you put on the additional ton of carbon which, when burned, triggers irreversible, catastrophic climate change? Who would have the right to even consider selling off the climate upon which civilisation depends? The avoidance of such damage is literally priceless (2010).

To paraphrase Einstein's famous maxim: we cannot apply the same thinking in trying to come up with a solution as that which got us into the planetary crisis in the first place.

Our economic system feeds the consumer culture and vice versa. People across the world aspire to the modern, western lifestyle, which is based on materialism and the acquisition of 'things': "In 2008 alone, people around the world purchased 68 million vehicles, 85 million refrigerators, 297 million computers, and 1.2 billion mobile (cell) phones" (Assadourian, 2010:4). In this almost global culture, identity, social status, meaning and happiness are linked to material goods. We are under the spell of a false illusion that promises more happiness and status if we own big houses, drive fast cars, have the latest cell phone technology and wear designer-branded clothing. According to Wachtel, "having more and newer things each year has become not just something we want but something we need. The idea of more, of ever-increasing wealth, has become the center of our identity and our security, and we are caught up by it as [is] the addict by his drugs" (cited in Kanner & Gomes, 1995:78). Besides the detrimental impact on Nature, consumerism has alienated people from one another and a sense of community has been lost. "Members of the consumer class enjoy a high degree of personal independence unprecedented in human history, yet hand in hand comes a decline in our attachments to each other" (Durning, 1995:72). Families spend less quality time together; people working together in large companies don't know each other's names and neighbours don't greet one another.

Disconnected from Nature by our consumptive behaviour and the busy lifestyles we lead to make more money to consume more goods and services, there is little opportunity for reflection in and of Nature. With less time for reflection, more consumption occurs and we are trapped in a vicious perpetuating cycle.

Besides various forms of addiction manifesting as symptoms of the human-Nature disconnection, Metzner also suggests that “we as a species are suffering from a kind of *collective amnesia*.⁹ We have forgotten something our ancestors once knew and practiced – certain attitudes and kinds of perception, an ability to empathize and identify with non-human life, respect for the mysterious, and humility in relationship to the infinite complexities of the natural world” (1995:61).

It is important to point out that, while I have separated them here for the purposes of this discussion, the symptoms are in fact interconnected and it is not possible to deal with the issues on an individual and community level without also considering what is happening at a societal/cultural level and vice versa.

Alluding back to Capra’s call for a new worldview or a paradigm shift, he says:

I believe that the world-view implied by modern physics is inconsistent with our present society, which does not reflect the harmonious interrelatedness we observe in nature. To achieve such a state of dynamic balance, a radically different social and economic structure will be needed: a cultural revolution in the true sense of the word. The survival of our whole civilization may depend on whether we can bring about such a change (1982:17).

Harding corroborates this view, saying that “we urgently need to make peace with nature by rediscovering and embodying a world-view that reconnects us with a deep sense of participating in a cosmos suffused with intelligence, beauty, intrinsic value and profound meaning” (2006:19).

⁹ Emphasis in the original.

2.3. A planet in crisis

If today is a typical day on planet earth, we will lose 116 square miles of rain forest, or about an acre a second. We will lose another 72 square miles to encroaching deserts, the results of human mismanagement and overpopulation. We will lose 40 to 250 species, and no one knows whether the number is 40 or 250. Today the human population will increase by 250,000. And today we will add 2,700 tons of chlorofluorocarbons and 15 million tons of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere. Tonight the earth will be a little hotter, its waters more acidic, and the fabric of life more threadbare (Orr, 2004:7).

The planet that we call home is in crisis. Together with ecosystem destruction; loss of biodiversity; diminishing availability of resources, e.g. water and oil, coupled with increasing difficulties in accessing these resources; and escalations in the intensity, frequency and severity of weather events, we are also confronted with rising consumption, poverty and inequality within and between nations, and economic instability across the globalised capitalist market. These challenges encompass environmental and social issues, which are now commonly referred to as 'socioecological issues' as "the distinction between social and environmental issues becomes less clear" (Bradshaw & Bekoff, 2001:460) and as an attempt to demonstrate their interconnectivity and the need to apply a transdisciplinary approach to understanding the points of intersection (Bradshaw & Bekoff, 2001; Kinzig, 2001).

At the crux of the planetary polycrisis is the fact we are disconnected from and alienated from Nature. At no time in the history of humanity have we faced such significant challenges on a global scale. According to Swilling, these challenges are highlighted in seven critical reports which draw attention to the "... 'polycrisis' that consists of a multiple set of nested crises that tend to reinforce one another..." (2009). Van Breda cited in Swartz argues that what "distinguishes the times we are living in from any other in human history is the fact that we face polycrises [that] are human-made" (2010:61).

Swilling and Annecke (forthcoming) cite the following as key reports in understanding the current polycrisis: the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) *Fourth Assessment Report (2007)*; the 2005 United Nations Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA), which reveals the severity of eco-system degradation; the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 1998 *Human Development Report*, which exposes the inequalities of consumption; the United Nations Human Settlements Programme's

report, *The Challenge of Slums* (2003), and the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) Synthesis Report (2009), which highlights the issues of soil degradation and food insecurity. They also refer to the significance of the reports on peak oil on <http://www.peakoil.net>. According to Swilling, these documents “will in one way or another shape the way our generation sees the world that we need to change” (2007:2).

2.3.1. Climate change

Climate change, exacerbated by our industrial activities in pursuit of economic growth and materialistic lifestyles, poses the single greatest threat to our survival. Communities, particularly those in so-called developing countries, which are already more vulnerable as a result of poverty and inequality, are being hit the hardest by the impacts of climate change as they have neither the opportunities nor the resources to escape these impacts. According to the IPCC: “Climate change adds to the list of stressors that challenge our ability to achieve the ecologic, economic and social objectives that define sustainable development” (2007). Stern argues:

The evidence shows that ignoring climate change will eventually damage economic growth. Our actions over the coming few decades could create risks of major disruption to economic and social activity, later in this century and in the next, on a scale similar to those associated with the great wars and the economic depression of the first half of the 20th century (2006:ii).

To date the various climate change conferences have failed to produce any legally binding agreements in terms of emission reduction targets. As nations deliberate as to which measure of emissions (total emissions per country or emissions per capita) on which to base their reduction targets, we remain on a trajectory towards a higher than 2°C increase in global temperature. This has serious ramifications particularly for the African continent. Swilling and Anneck highlight the main findings from the IPCC’s *Fourth Assessment Report* (2007):

...between 75 and 250 million people will suffer the consequences of increased water stress by 2020; by the same date productive outputs from rain-fed agriculture could drop by 50% with obvious negative consequences for food security; by the end of the c. 21st sea-level rise will have negatively affected most of the low-lying coastal cities around the coast of

Africa; and by 2080 arid and semi-arid land areas will have increased by between 5% and 8% (Swilling & Annecke, forthcoming).

2.3.2. Ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss

Climate change is impacting on already severely depleted natural resources resulting in further losses in biodiversity, and radically altering ecosystems. According to the MEA:

- “Water withdrawals from rivers and lakes for irrigation, household, and industrial use doubled in the last 40 years...
- More land was converted to cropland in the 30 years after 1950 than in the 150 years between 1700 and 1850, and now approximately one quarter (24%) of Earth’s terrestrial surface has been transformed to cultivated systems...
- Since about 1980, approximately 35% of mangroves have been lost, while 20% of the world’s coral reefs have been destroyed and a further 20% badly degraded or destroyed...
- At least one quarter of marine fish stocks are overharvested...” (United Nations, 2005:10).

The MEA highlights the fact that “some 12% of birds, 25% of mammals, and at least 32% of amphibians are threatened with extinction over the next century...it is estimated that people may have increased the rate of global extinctions by as much as 1,000 times the ‘natural’ rate typical of Earth’s long-term history”(United Nations, 2005:15). Despite the significance of its content with regards to our survival, the MEA does not appear to have drawn much attention due to a lack of awareness of its existence!

The loss of biodiversity and ecosystem degradation has significant social ramifications. The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) *Living Planet Report*

highlights an alarming rate of biodiversity loss in low-income countries. This has serious implications for people in these countries: although all people depend on ecosystem services for their well-being, the impact of environmental degradation is felt most directly by the world’s poorest and most vulnerable people. Without access to clean water, land and adequate food, fuel and materials, vulnerable people cannot break out of the poverty trap and prosper (WWF, 2010:9).

2.3.3. *Inequality and rising consumption*

The standard of living of millions of people around the world has improved. The UNDP 2010 *Human Development Report* notes:

Most people today are healthier, live longer, are more educated and have more access to goods and services. Even in countries facing adverse economic conditions, people's health and education have greatly improved. And there has been progress not only in improving health and education and raising income, but also in expanding people's power to select leaders, influence public decisions and share knowledge (UNDP, 2010:1).

But despite these achievements there are still disparities: "In 2006, the 65 high-income countries where consumerism is most dominant accounted for 78 percent of consumption expenditures but just 16 percent of world population" (Assadourian, 2010:6). The 1998 *Human Development Report* states that "20% of the world's people in the highest income countries account for 86% of total private consumption expenditure – the poorest 20% a miniscule 1.3%" (UNDP, 1998:2). In conjunction with disproportionate consumption, "...the world's richest 500 million people (roughly 7 percent of the world's population) are currently responsible for 50 percent of the world's carbon dioxide emissions, while the poorest 3 billion are responsible for just 6 percent" (Assadourian, 2010:6). Inequality is further illustrated in terms of ecological footprint¹⁰ – some nations, e.g. the UK, are consuming more than their fair Earth share,¹¹ while others, such as Madagascar, are consuming considerably less. The ecological footprint of the UK is around five global hectares per capita whereas that of Madagascar is less than half that, at around two (Global Footprint Network, 2010).

¹⁰ Ecological footprint is defined "as the area of ecologically productive land (and water)...that would be required on a continuous basis to provide all the energy/material resources consumed and to absorb all the wastes discharged" (Wackernagel & Rees, 1996:51).

¹¹ Fair Earth share: "the amount of land each person would get if all the ecologically productive land on Earth were divided evenly among the present world population" (Wackernagel & Rees, 1996:53)

2.3.4. *An urban majority living in slums*

Rising consumption is linked to the fact that the majority of the world's six-billion-strong human population is now urbanised. During 2007 the rural–urban threshold was crossed with the majority of the human population now living in cities as opposed to in rural areas. In just one hundred years we have moved from being a rural species to an urbanised one (Swilling, 2008a). By 2100 the world's human population is expected to reach 10 billion (United Nations, 2011). The additional 3 billion people will for the most part be added to cities in the developing countries of Asia and Africa. Flavin estimates that “as early as 2030, four out of five of the world's urban residents will be in what we now call the ‘developing’ world” (2007:xxiii). This has important ramifications for these regions in which the majority of people living in urban areas are already living in slums and informal (and often illegal) settlements.

According to the United Nations Human Settlements Programme:

In 2001, 924 million people, or 31.6 per cent of the world's urban population, lived in slums. The majority of them were in the developing regions, accounting for 43 per cent of the urban population, in contrast to 6 per cent in more developed regions. Within the developing regions, sub-Saharan Africa had the largest proportion of the urban population resident in slums in 2001 (71.9 per cent) and Oceania had the lowest (24.1 per cent) (2003:xxv).

According to Swilling, “220 million urban dwellers in the world's urban centres lack access to clean drinking water; just over 400 million lack access to basic sanitation and between a third and two thirds of solid waste is uncollected, especially in poorer cities” (2008a). The bulk of urbanites (approximately one billion) live in slums where there is “overcrowding, poor or informal housing, inadequate access to water and safe sanitation, and insecurity of tenure” (Davis, 2004:11). In South Africa alone, twenty-five percent of the population (6.4. million) live in slum conditions in informal (and often illegal) settlements on the peripheries of our cities (Swilling, 2008a).

2.3.5. *Peak oil*

Coupled with the impacts of climate change, which has been aggravated by our insatiable demand for fossil fuels, particularly oil, to power a modern, industrial lifestyle, we face the looming challenge of peak oil. “‘Oil peaking’—or ‘peak oil’—refers to the point at which total global oil production cannot

grow any further and begins to decline, an event that an increasing number of petroleum analysts predict happening by 2010. Ultimately, knowing the exact date is not critical. What matters is that oil prices will become volatile and progressively higher when demand increases and supply can't keep up" (Lerch, 2007:2). However, Vidal cites Wikileaks cables that "urge Washington to take seriously a warning from a senior Saudi government oil executive that the kingdom's crude oil reserves may have been overstated by as much as 300bn barrels – nearly 40%" (2011a).

Fossil fuels, and oil in particular, are becoming increasingly difficult to access and more expensive to extract, not only in monetary terms, but also at extreme costs in both social and environmental terms as we witnessed in 2010 with the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. As I write there is political instability in North Africa and in the Middle East where citizens are protesting against dictatorships and non-democratic political institutions. Libya, one of Africa's largest oil producers, is the latest country to experience an uprising and violent forces are being used to quell the unrest. These upheavals are triggering market volatility around the world as the price of oil once again climbs beyond the US\$100 mark.

2.3.6. Food insecurity

The price of oil is related to food prices given that our entire food production and transportation industries are heavily dependent on oil. "In the United States, the equivalent of 400 gallons [approximately 1600 litres] of oil is expended annually to feed each US citizen (as of 1994)" (Pfeiffer, 2006:8). As Pfeiffer points out, "we are eating fossil fuels" (2006:7).

In 2008 we saw the oil price surge to US\$147 a barrel and in the same period the prices of wheat and rice climbed substantially. Wheat soared from a range of \$400 per bushel in 2007 to over \$1200 in 2008 while the rice price rose from \$250 to about \$750 over the same period. Food riots ensued in various parts of the world, in both poor and supposedly middle-income countries, during 2008 and 2009.

According to the Food & Agriculture Organisation (FAO):

World food prices surged to a new historic peak in January [2011], for the seventh consecutive month, according to the updated FAO Food Price Index, a commodity basket that regularly tracks monthly changes in global food prices. The Index averaged 231 points

in January and was up 3.4 percent from December 2010. This is the highest level (both in real and nominal terms) since FAO started measuring food prices in 1990 (2011).

Besides increasing input costs (e.g. fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides), there is also talk of 'peak soil'. The practice of large-scale monoculture agriculture together with the intensive use of chemicals to promote maximum yields has irrevocably degraded soils in some parts of the world. Swilling cites the World Resources Institute Report as making the point that 52 percent of global agricultural lands are showing moderate to severe soil degradation. Swilling argues that "this has already started to undermine the \$1.3 trillion global agricultural industry that is supposed to feed a population that will grow from 6 billion in 2005 to 8 billion by 2030" (2007:9). According to the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) Synthesis Report, "The food security challenge is likely to worsen if markets and market-driven agricultural production systems continue to grow in a 'business as usual' mode" (2009:22).¹² In addition, efforts to increase yields are likely to be thwarted by the impacts of climate change. "Research findings from the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) indicate that climate change will cause yield declines for the most important crops and that South Asia (and especially irrigated crops) will be particularly badly hit" (WWF, 2010:82).

As Swilling points out, "...the above trends combine to conjure up a picture of a highly unequal, rapidly urbanising world connected to ecosystem services that are degrading at alarming rates, with looming threats triggered by climate change, high oil prices and food insecurities" (2007:9).

The environmental and social crises outlined above are intertwined and cannot be seen as distinct from one another. The planetary polycrisis is "a complex, multi-dimensional crisis whose facets touch every aspect of our lives – our health and livelihood, the quality of our environment and our social relationships, our economy, technology and politics. It is a crisis of intellectual, moral and spiritual dimensions; a crisis of a scale and urgency unprecedented in record human history" (Capra, 1982:21).

Thus, as Capra points out, "the more we study the major problems of our time, the more we realise that they cannot be understood in isolation. They are systemic problems, which means that they are

¹² "Food security is a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (IAASTD, 2009:27).

interconnected and interdependent” (1996:3). For this reason it is no longer possible to separate ourselves from Nature and the issues at stake. We cannot continue to simplify things into neat little boxes which can be addressed and solved by applying universal rules. The interconnectedness of our world means that boundaries are fluid and the global impacts on the local and vice versa. Unfortunately, however, as Morin argues, “The more things reach crisis proportions, the less chance there is to grasp the crisis. The more problems become planetary, the more unthinkable they become. Incapable of seeing the planetary context in all its complexity, blind intelligence fosters unconsciousness and irresponsibility” (1999:128).

I have deliberately introduced the planetary crisis using facts and statistics drawn from lengthy, albeit informative documents. While this information is critical, revealing a grave state of affairs and a frightening future for humanity and all other living beings, I feel that it is portrayed in a sterile manner, using scientific and academic language which separates us from the heart of the subject matter. As a reader, I am required to respond with my head rather than with my heart. However, as Swartz points out: “Not all the facts, academic argumentation and theories about sustainable development will be enough to startle mankind out of its drunken stupor on the highway to the total destruction that the recent tsunamis and rising climate changes are pointing to” (2010:442).

In this thesis I argue that perhaps we need to move beyond scientific language and look for other ways to describe the crisis – ways that evoke a heartfelt response. “When we no longer shudder at the ecological warning calls of science, it would seem that the only voice left that can awaken us belongs to the poets” (McCallum, 2005:30). Rosen substantiates this saying, “...in times of cataclysmic change, poetry is only language that will do. It’s the only language that speaks of the horror and the wonder, the reality and the mystery” (cited in Luterman, 2010:11).

A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall

*Oh, where have you been, my blue-eyed son?
And where have you been my darling young one?
I've stumbled on the side of twelve misty mountains
I've walked and I've crawled on six crooked highways
I've stepped in the middle of seven sad forests*

*I've been out in front of a dozen dead oceans
I've been ten thousand miles in the mouth of a graveyard
And it's a hard, it's a hard, it's a hard, and it's a hard
It's a hard rain's a-gonna fall.*

*Oh, what did you see, my blue eyed son?
And what did you see, my darling young one?
I saw a newborn baby with wild wolves all around it
I saw a highway of diamonds with nobody on it
I saw a black branch with blood that kept drippin'
I saw a room full of men with their hammers a-bleedin'
I saw a white ladder all covered with water
I saw ten thousand talkers whose tongues were all broken
I saw guns and sharp swords in the hands of young children
And it's a hard, it's a hard, it's a hard, and it's a hard
It's a hard rain's a-gonna fall.*

*And what did you hear, my blue-eyed son?
And what did you hear, my darling young one?
I heard the sound of a thunder, it roared out a warnin'
I heard the roar of a wave that could drown the whole world
I heard one hundred drummers whose hands were a-blazin'
I heard ten thousand whisperin' and nobody listenin'
I heard one person starve, I heard many people laughin'
Heard the song of a poet who died in the gutter
Heard the sound of a clown who cried in the alley
And it's a hard, it's a hard, it's a hard, it's a hard
And it's a hard rain's a-gonna fall.*

*Oh, who did you meet my blue-eyed son?
Who did you meet, my darling young one?
I met a young child beside a dead pony*

*I met a white man who walked a black dog
I met a young woman whose body was burning
I met a young girl, she gave me a rainbow
I met one man who was wounded in love
I met another man who was wounded in hatred
And it's a hard, it's a hard, it's a hard, it's a hard
And it's a hard rain's a-gonna fall.*

*And what'll you do now, my blue-eyed son?
And what'll you do now my darling young one?
I'm a-goin' back out 'fore the rain starts a-fallin'
I'll walk to the depths of the deepest black forest
Where the people are a many and their hands are all empty
Where the pellets of poison are flooding their waters
Where the home in the valley meets the damp dirty prison
Where the executioner's face is always well hidden
Where hunger is ugly, where souls are forgotten
Where black is the color, where none is the number
And I'll tell and think it and speak it and breathe it
And reflect it from the mountain so all souls can see it
Then I'll stand on the ocean until I start sinkin'
But I'll know my songs well before I start singin'
And it's a hard, it's a hard, it's a hard, and it's a hard
It's a hard rain's a-gonna fall
(Dylan, cited in Edwards, 2006:17ff).*

2.4. Sustainable development: A response to the planetary polycrisis

2.4.1. Historical overview: Key highlights

Although some believe that the environmental movement only really got underway in the early 1970s, concern for the state of the environment as a result of the impact of our activities dates back a century

at least. The names of number of individuals such as Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862), John Muir (1838–1914), Aldo Leopold (1887–1948) and Rachel Carson (1907–1964) are synonymous with the environmental movement. It was Carson’s seminal work *Silent Spring* (1962) that alerted the world to the mounting crisis being wrought by destructive human practices.

Having said this, I need to acknowledge upfront that this is a western perspective on the origins of the environmental movement and considers the rise of sustainable development associated with “a realization in the 1970s amongst Western nations that industrialization and the patterns of production and consumption associated with it seriously jeopardize the continued existence of a safe, healthy, clean and diverse environment “(Hattingh, 2001:4). However, this ‘movement’ was preceded by indigenous cultures and traditions around the world which embraced “*living in harmony with nature and in society*,¹³ [which] is one of the fundamental tenets of the concept of sustainability” (Mebratu, 1998:498). I will return to this point further on (See 2.5.1.5. on page 123).

In the early 1970s, environmentalists as well as certain industrialists, scientists and economists recognised that environmental resources were being depleted and degraded at an alarming rate, with little or no consideration of their finite character or the carrying capacity of the earth.¹⁴ In a report, *The Limits to Growth*, produced by a group now known as the Club of Rome, the fact that there are ecological limits to growth was highlighted. This report states that “if the present growth trends in world population, pollution, food production, and resource depletion continue unchanged, the limits to growth on this planet will be reached within the next one hundred years” (cited in Pezzoli, 1997:551).

The first major conference to focus on the environment and the management thereof was the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment in 1972, at which the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was established.

In 1992 the Rio Declaration of Environment and Development was signed at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), more commonly referred to as the Earth Summit. The Rio Declaration called for the eradication of poverty across the globe and “advances the principle that those who pollute – rich developed countries, mostly – should pay for the clean-up, then

¹³ Emphasis in the original.

¹⁴ Carrying capacity: “the maximal population size of a given species that an area can support without reducing its ability to support the same species in the future” (Daily & Erlich, cited in Goodland & Daly, 1996:1003).

help poor countries improve their standard of living in environmentally sound ways” (Pezzoli, 1997:552). Thus the idea that the wealth generated by the economies in developed countries would ‘trickle down’ to developing countries to uplift the poor out of poverty. At Rio, another major document, Agenda 21, was signed and included a list of actions to be put into motion by 2000.

Five years later the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) published *Our Common Future*, in which it recognised that there are indeed ecological limits and that “...ecological stress – degradation of soils, water regimes, atmosphere, and forests...[is impacting]...upon our economic prospects” (cited in Pezzoli, 1997:552). The WCED proposed the following definition of sustainable development: that which “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (cited in Pezzoli, 1997:549). At the time this definition appeared to be an acceptable compromise as it “attempted to reconcile the ecological limits to growth articulated by the Northern green movement since the early 1970s and the need for growth to eliminate poverty as articulated by Southern developing country governments” (Swilling, 2007:8). I will elaborate on this definition and its implications shortly (See 2.4.2).

In 2000, after ten years of cross-cultural collaboration, the Earth Charter was drafted and launched. This declaration, which has been accepted across the globe by governments and organisations, “recognizes that the goals of ecological protection, the eradication of poverty, equitable economic development, respect for human rights, democracy, and peace are interdependent and indivisible” (The Earth Charter Initiative, 2011).

In 2002 the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) took place in Johannesburg. This was a ‘sequel’ to the Earth Summit in Rio, but whereas the focus during the latter was on environmental concerns and how these should be incorporated into social and economic strategies, the WSSD focused on development in developing countries and, in particular, on working towards the achievement of the MDGs, specifically the eradication of poverty.

Over the years a plethora of international conferences have continued to taken place and a number of key reports have been published in response to the planetary crisis. According to Swilling and Annecke, “These global events put in place the fragile multi-lateral global governance system that is all we have today to face our collective global ‘polycrisis’” (forthcoming).

In 2012 the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) (also known as the Rio + 20) will be held in Rio de Janeiro. The UNCSD will concentrate on the objectives of “securing political commitment to sustainable development, assessing progress towards internationally agreed commitments and new and emerging challenges” (Earth Summit 2012, 2011). The overarching themes of the Conference are: “the green economy in the context of poverty eradication and sustainable development and the institutional framework for sustainable development” (Earth Summit 2012, 2011). Only time will tell whether or not the UNCSD will result in any major shifts from the current sustainable development trajectory.

2.4.2. Sustainable development: What are we trying to sustain and what kind of human development are we referring to?

In judging our progress as individuals we tend to concentrate on external factors, such as one’s social position, influence and popularity, wealth and standard of education...It is perfectly understandable if many people exert themselves mainly to achieve all these. But internal factors may be even more crucial...Honesty, sincerity, simplicity, humility, pure generosity, absence of vanity, readiness to serve others – qualities which are within easy reach of every soul (Mandela, cited in Gordhan, 2011).

While human consumption has reached disproportionate levels, consumption in itself is not problematic as we need to consume in order to survive. It is the patterns of unequal consumption and their impacts that are wreaking havoc on the environment and on the fabric of human life as described above. Flavin argues: “As consumerism has taken root in culture upon culture over the past half-century, it has become a powerful driver of the inexorable increase in demand for resources and production of waste that marks our age” (2010:xvii).

Concerns about the unsustainability of consumption patterns and their negative impact on the environment; the growing disparities within and between nations not only in terms of wealth, but also with regards to resource use, and the need to eradicate poverty gave rise to sustainable development.

2.4.2.1. Definitions of sustainable development

The definition of sustainable development most readily cited by governments, business, grassroots NGOs (non-governmental organisations) and the media is that which was put forward by the WCED: “sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (cited in Pezzoli, 1997:549). It was a term which rapidly gained traction among both environmentalists and development practitioners and in developed and developing countries as it spoke of the environment and human development. “It suggested that it was not a choice *between* environmental protection and social advance,¹⁵ but rather a problem of selecting patterns of economic and social development compatible with sound environmental stewardship” (Meadowcraft, 2005:268).

A plethora of interpretations and definitions has arisen since the formulation of the WCED definition, all of which share its fundamental concepts: “poverty alleviation, environmental improvement, and social equitability through sustainable economic growth” (Mebratu, 1998:501). But, despite the broad use of the term and the wide acceptance of the WCED definition, the meaning of sustainable development remains vague and open to contradicting interpretations. Almost without exception every piece of literature I have read on sustainable development alludes to this vagueness and ambiguity (for example, see: Bartelmus, 1994:8; Dresner, 2002:64; Mebratu, 1998:494; Peet & Watts, 1996:1; Wackernagel & Rees, 1996:33; Gallopin, 2003:7 and Sachs, 1999:29). Mebratu (1998) cites a number of references that claim the concept is ‘elusive’, ‘an oxymoron’ and, worse still, that it has become ‘a cliché’. It is also readily alluded to by companies as ‘green-wash’: they claim to be environmentally and socially conscious while continuing to do business as usual, exploiting natural resources and accumulating profit. Although “the term has served to catalyse debate over the relationship between economic growth and the natural-resource base upon which it depends” (Pezzoli, 1997:551), it does not suggest how to resolve the conflict of interests between economic growth and ecological limits.

Sachs argues that “dozens of definitions are being passed around among experts and politicians, because many and diverse interests and visions hide behind the common key-idea. As so often happens, deep political and ethical controversies make the definition of the concept a contested area” (1999:29). Dresner cites Jacobs, who says “Many political objectives...liberty, social justice and democracy...have

¹⁵ Emphasis in the original.

basic meanings and almost everyone is in favour of them, but deep conflicts remain about how they should be understood and what they imply for policy" (2002:66).

At the heart of the uncertainty is the fact that clarity on the meaning of the individual terms 'sustainable' and 'development' is lacking. What exactly are we trying to sustain and what kind of human development are we referring to? "Exactly what is being sustained (economic growth or the global ecosystem, or both) is currently at the root of several debates..." (Banerjee, 2003:144). The problem is compounded by the fact that "'sustainable development', 'sustainable growth' and 'sustainable use' have been used interchangeably, as if their meanings were the same. They are not" (IUCN, UNEP & WWF, 1991:4). In addition, sustainability "...is fraught with confusion, in large part because we are trying to define it before we have decided whether we want an intimate relationship with nature or total mastery" (Orr, 2004:141).

Wackernagel and Rees postulate that "many people identify more with the 'sustainable' part and hear a call for ecological and social transformation, a world of environmental stability and social justice. Others identify more with 'development' and interpret it to mean more sensitive growth, a reformed version of the status quo" (1996:33). Pezzoli (1997) claims that it is the ambiguity of 'sustainable' which is problematic, while Goodland and Daly state that "the moment the term 'development' is introduced, the discussion becomes quite different, and murkier" (1996:1002). Sneddon, Howarth and Norgaard agree, saying "while many have long complained that SD [sustainable development] is difficult to define, our knowledge of what sustainability means has increased considerably, while it is development that has in many ways become more difficult to define" (2006:263). Dresner (2002) questions whether 'development' necessarily implies economic growth and industrialisation or whether it refers to the 'non-material' aspects of life such as individual happiness. Pezzoli considers the latter by referring to the definition of development used in the Charter of the United Nations – "the promotion of social progress and better standards of living in larger freedom" (1997:550), which echoes Sen (1999).

According to Ashwell, citing Hattingh, there are "four interpretations of sustainable development, each one appealing to a different interest group and ideological agenda:

- a green agenda of nature conservation;
- a social and economic agenda of needs satisfaction;
- an integrated agenda of caring for the community of life on earth; and

- a radical political and ethical agenda of transformation” (2010:46).

There is also a multiplicity of ways in which ‘development’ is construed in the mainstream sustainable development literature:

- development as economic growth i.e. gross domestic product (GDP) per capita;
- development to meet basic needs (Maslow; Max-Neef);
- ‘development as freedom’ and capabilities (Sen, 1999) as reflected in the Human Development Index (HDI).

2.4.2.2. Mainstream sustainable development

Mainstream sustainable development is largely focused on the social and economic agenda and on development as economic growth: we need to sustain the natural resource base for our survival and in particular to alleviate poverty which we will achieve through economic growth measured in GDP. Boutros Gali, cited in Goodland and Daly, states that “economic growth is the engine of development....sustained economic growth” (1996:1003). The underlying assumption here is that economic growth will benefit the poor through the ‘trickle down’ effect. The WCED definition promotes economic growth as a means to eradicate poverty – “far from requiring the cessation of economic growth, it recognises that problems of poverty and underdevelopment cannot be solved unless we have a new era of growth in which developing countries play a large role and reap large benefits” (cited in Holliday, Schmidheiny & Watts, 2002:13). Wackernagel and Rees advance this argument by saying that the WCED calls for “broader participation in decision-making; new forms of multi-lateral co-operation; the extension and sharing of new technologies; increased international investment; an expanded role for transnational corporations; the removal of ‘artificial barriers’ to commerce and expanded global trade” (1996:39).

However, Daly, cited in Carruthers, cuts to the chase:

Growth in GNP in poor countries means more food, clothing, shelter, basic education, and security, whereas for the rich country it means more electric toothbrushes, yet another brand of cigarettes, more tension and insecurity, and more force-feeding through

advertising...¹⁶ [The] upshot of these differences is that for the poor, growth in GNP is still a good thing, but for the rich it is probably a bad thing (2005:287).

But, as Jackson points out, one must also address the underlying economic assumptions of these complex problems: "The myth of growth has failed us. It has failed the two billion people who still live on less than \$2 a day. It has failed the fragile ecological systems on which we depend for survival. It has failed, spectacularly, in its own terms, to provide economic stability and secure people's livelihoods" (2009:5).

According to Ayres et al., "[there is a]...growing realization that economic growth does not necessarily go hand-in-hand with growth in the well-being of people" (1996:2). Research has shown that increasing material wealth is not equated with increasing levels of happiness nor with well-being (Jackson, 2008). Conversely, "There is an increasing trend in life satisfaction at lower levels in income" (Jackson, 2008:50) (see Figure 2.2.).

Added to the debate about what the individual terms of 'sustainable' and 'development' entail is the question regarding the concept of 'needs' and what this implies. As Dresner points out, there are "basic material needs in terms of food, education, health, housing and sanitation" (2002:69) and there are also "non-material needs such as fundamental human rights, participation and self-reliance" (2002:69).

Most seem to accept that the notion of 'needs' in the WCED definition refers particularly to the "essential needs of the poor" (Hattingh, 2001:5). However, Dresner makes the point that it is extremely difficult to determine a measure of 'needs' since we first need to distinguish between 'wants' and 'needs'. He asks several questions which illustrate this dilemma: "Is air conditioning a need in very hot and humid climates? Are fresh vegetables in winter a need?" (Dresner, 2002:68). He goes on to argue that "they are things that many people have managed without for a very long time and which are environmentally costly, but which people find beneficial" (2002:68).

¹⁶ GNP: Gross national product: "GNP refers to the GDP added to the total amount of capital gain from all investments made abroad with the amount of income that has been earned by foreign nationals in that country subtracted from the total" (<http://www.differencebetween.net/business/difference-between-gnp-and-gdp/#ixzz1FZ1wXcAi>, accessed 21 August 2011).

Sachs elaborates on this discussion:

For two crucial questions remain open. 'What needs?' and 'Whose needs?' To leave these questions pending in the face of a divided world means to sidestep the crisis of justice. Is sustainable development supposed to meet the needs for water, land, and economic security or the needs for air travel and bank deposits? Is it concerned with survival needs or with luxury needs? Are the needs in question those of the global consumer class or those of the enormous numbers of have-nots? (1999:29).

The question of wants versus needs is at the crux of consumption since we are no longer consuming just to meet basic needs, but also to satisfy a wide range of material and psychological desires, which are created by mass media, advertising and marketing. According to the *Human Development Report*, "the definition of what constitutes a 'necessity' is changing, and the distinctions between luxuries and necessities are blurring" (UNDP, 1998:6). In this context, development is "about joining a rat race of meaningless additional consumption" (Dresner, 2002:74). Those in developed countries are addicted to materialistic lifestyles, are spoiled for choice in the wide range of goods and services available to them, and base their identity and social status on the accumulation of 'stuff'.

Consumerism is culturally embedded in these societies and "...asking people who live in consumer cultures to curb consumption is akin to asking them to stop breathing—they can do it for a moment, but then, gasping, they will inhale again" (Assadourian, 2010:3). Globalisation has facilitated the proliferation of the consumer culture throughout our increasingly homogenous world and people around the globe now aspire to the dream of the 'western, modern' lifestyle. But, as Diamond makes clear:

No one in First World governments is willing to acknowledge the dream's impossibility: the unsustainability of a world in which the Third World's large population were to reach and maintain current First World living standards...[this] is the cruelest trade-off that we shall have to resolve: encouraging and helping all people to achieve a higher standard of living, without thereby undermining that standard through over-stressing global resources (2005:496).

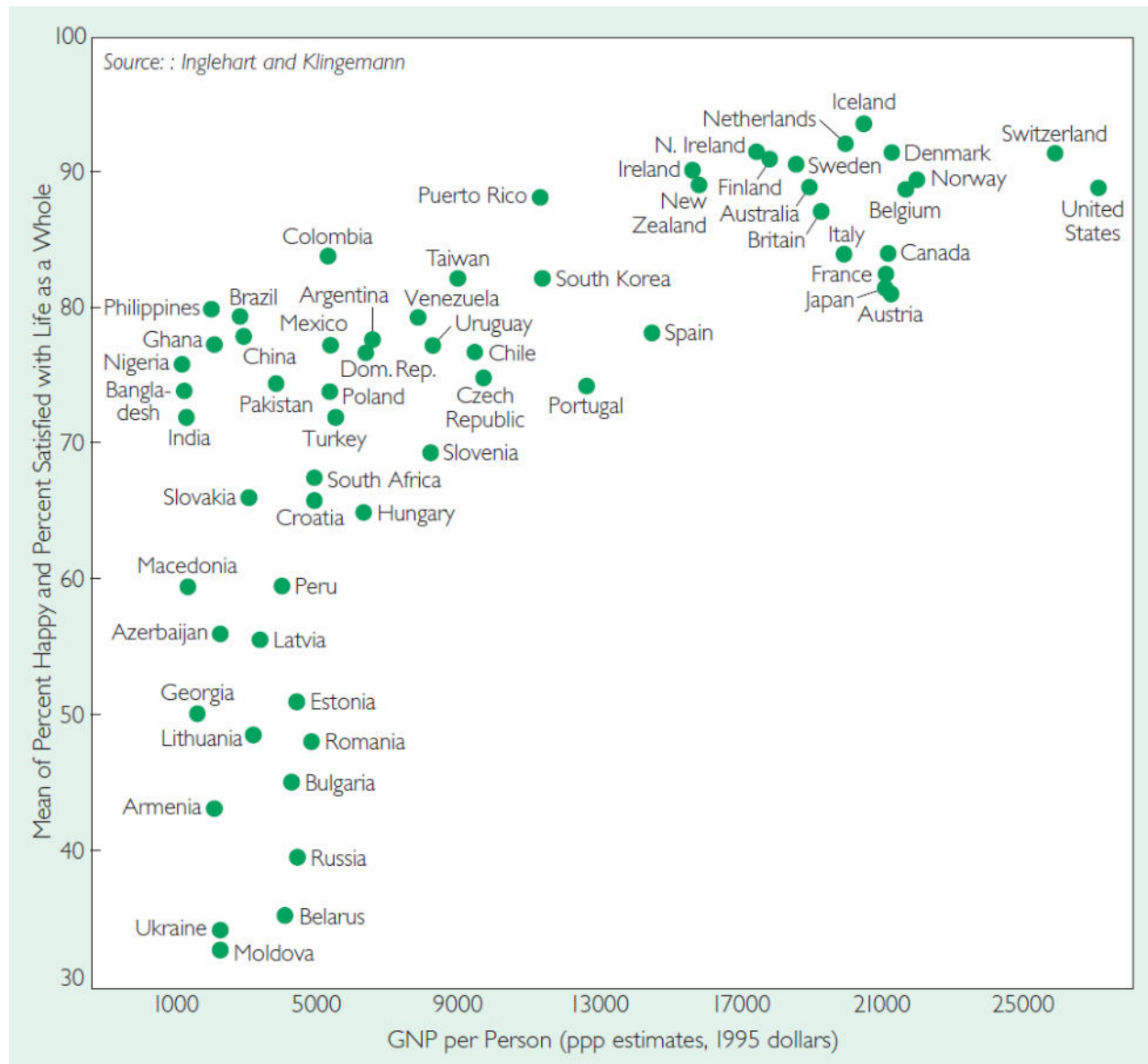


Figure 2.2. Subjective well-being and per-capita income, 2000 (Source: Jackson, 2008:51)

Regardless of whether it is needs or wants, the fact remains that “human needs have expanded while the ecosystems we depend on have remained formally finite and are in the process of being substantively eroded” (Swilling, 2007:10).

2.4.2.3. *Alternative (anthropocentric) approaches to sustainable development*

In 1999 economist Amartya Sen published his seminal work *Development as Freedom*. This introduced an alternative interpretation into the development debate as “Sen argued for a shift in emphasis from incomes to outcomes and from per capita income growth to improved quality-of-life outcomes” (Wise, 2001:48). According to Sen, development is “a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy. Focusing on human freedoms contrasts with narrower views of development such as identifying development with the growth of gross national product, or with the rise in personal incomes, or with industrialization, or with technological advance, or with social modernization” (1999:3). Sen also introduced the notion of ‘capabilities’: “a set of choices available to different individuals and groups within society” (Wise, 2001:48) by which they can achieve various freedoms, including “political freedoms, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees and protective security” (Sen, 1999:38).

The *Human Development Report* defines development as “the expansion of people’s freedoms to live long, healthy and creative lives; to advance other goals they have reason to value; and to engage actively in shaping development equitably and sustainably on a shared planet” (UNDP, 2010:18). The Human Development Index (HDI) was conceptualised based on the work of Sen and others and instead of focusing on GNP and GDP as measures of wealth and progress, the HDI considers life expectancy or longevity, literacy (education) and minimal income. In 2010 three further indices were added: “an Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index, the Gender Inequality Index and the Multidimensional Poverty Index” (UNDP, 2010:1).

What is clear from the above is that development is not so much about meeting needs and wants, but about ensuring quality of life. Quality of life is achieved by meeting various human needs – including subsistence, reproduction, security, affection, understanding, participation, leisure, spirituality, creative/emotional expression, identity and freedom (Costanza et al., 2006) – the fulfillment of which ensures subjective well-being. It is noteworthy that Costanza et al. have included spirituality which is “meant to encompass the ways humans feel a sense of transcendence or connection to a larger system or power” (2006:271). Incorporated in their description of spirituality they have included the “ability to engage in transcendent experiences [and having] access to nature” (2006:270). The concept of quality of life enables us to surmount the wants/needs debate and also provides a more holistic approach to

development. The emphasis on quality of life rather than just on meeting basic human needs allows for a more integrative approach to sustainable development as it also inherently recognises that quality of human life is dependent on the quality of our natural environment.

2.4.3. Sustainable development: From a human-centred to an eco-centred approach

We must protect the forests for our children, grandchildren and children yet to be born. We must protect the forests for those who can't speak for themselves such as the birds, animals, fish and trees (Qwatsinas, n.d.).

While an in-depth critical analysis of sustainable development is beyond the scope of this thesis, I will highlight some of the pertinent points which are relevant to my argument.

Mainstream sustainable development is concerned with maintaining the natural resource base to ensure human survival and quality of life in this generation and future generations. Expert knowledge in science, economics and politics focuses on the maintenance of capital (financial, social and natural). Sustainable development is promoted by nation states, leadership forums and business think tanks in both the developed and developing world (Swilling, 2008b).

According to ul Haq: "Sustainability involves ensuring that human opportunities endure over generations. This means not just sustaining natural capital but physical, human, and financial as well. This should not require preserving every natural resource in its current form. That would be environmental puritanism. We must preserve the capacity to produce human well-being" (2001:58). The assumption implicit in this argument epitomises the ideology underlying mainstream development: that we as human beings are at the centre of sustainability discourse, that Nature plays a supporting role and that we can determine which elements of that role are more or less important to our overall survival. This anthropocentric approach focuses on the perpetuation of consumption and our current economic system. According to this human-centred approach, Nature has a right to exist only in so far as it is useful for human beings, i.e. as a material resource or as an ecosystem service. It views people as superior to and separate from Nature. This thinking has allowed us to exploit Nature with little consideration of its value beyond feeding and satisfying our consumptive society. As Wackernagel and

Rees question: “Do we have the right to so much of nature’s productivity at the expense of the several million other species living on the planet?” (1996:57).

Birkeland acknowledges that “while the Brundtland Report was an impressive milestone, it marginalized ecology from the mainstream sustainable development debate. It treated nature as only a resource, and framed the sustainability issue as one of resource efficiency and equitable distribution” (2008:xvi).

Hattingh argues that “in some of its interpretations the notion of sustainable development rests on highly dubious assumptions that do not help us to curb our exploitation of nature, but rather stimulate and accelerate it” (2001:2). According to Swartz,

Sustainability studies currently continue to couch the concept of aesthetic value within the notion of ‘benefits’ and ‘services’ that mankind enjoys from nature. This conceptualization hardly helps to free sustainable development from being associated with Western control and domination; in its global stride nature and the human family are nothing more than objects for subjugation, use, gain and self-gratification. It has been suggested that sustainable development as a vehicle for the export of a harmful ideology of nature (2010:46).

Sachs sums up the argument neatly: “sustainable development calls for the conservation of development, not for the conservation of nature” (1995:434). Sustainable development has also ensured that the current economic system remains intact and that development, for the most part, continues to be measured in terms of economic growth and GDP. Hattingh argues that “we have up till now to a very large extent only paid lip service in our responses to the challenges...we have...adopt[ed] a conservative or minimalist model of sustainability that pretty much leaves the world as it is” (2001:26). We have not eradicated poverty; we have continued to deplete and destroy that which we depend on for our survival and yet we have continued on an economic growth trajectory that does not include the real costs, i.e. the environmental and social costs. Atkisson makes the point that

it may in fact be highly problematic that sustainable development has become so mainstream...[and] has generally proceeded within the framework of the dominant economic paradigm which, to say the least, deserves to be inspected more closely for design flaws. There may in fact be ways in which the most common forms of sustainable development practice itself – incrementalist, conservative, market-privileging – are contributing now to the kinds of progress/regress illusion-making described above. In many

contexts, it might be masking the fact that the things that matter are getting worse; or, it may in fact be making them worse (2009).

Shiva argues that economic growth and development are in fact 'maldevelopment'. She asserts that "development was thus a continuation of the process of colonisation; it became an extension of the project of wealth creation in modern western patriarchy's economic vision, which was based on the exploitation or exclusion of women (of the west and the non-west), on the exploitation and degradation of nature and on the exploitation and erosion of other cultures" (1998:271). Such "development...is equivalent to maldevelopment, a development bereft of the feminine, the conservation, the ecological principle" (1998:272).

While Sen's 'development as freedom' approach advances the 'development as economic growth' perspective, it is important to take note of the bigger picture:

In a world of limits, certain kinds of freedoms are either impossible or immoral. The freedom endlessly to accumulate material goods is one of them. Freedoms to achieve social recognition at the expense of child labour in the supply chain, to find meaningful work at the expense of a collapse in biodiversity, or to participate in the life of the community at the expense of future generations may be others (Jackson, 2009:34).

We have to acknowledge that there are limits: "Capabilities are bounded on the one hand by the scale of the global population and on the other by the finite ecology of the planet" (Jackson, 2009:35).

Sneddon, Howarth and Norgaard agree: "If there is one noticeable gap in Sen's analysis, it is a lack of concern with the environment and ecological changes" (2006:262).

It is the acknowledgement of ecological limits which appears to be largely lacking from the sustainable development discourse. The only limits which the WCED explicitly recognised were technological and social: "the concept of sustainable development does imply limits – not absolute limits but limitations imposed by the present state of technology and social organisation on environmental resources and by the ability of the biosphere to absorb the effects of human activities" (cited in Carruthers, 2005:289). Sustainability is fixated with technological fixes and gadgetry and many believe that we will be able to re-engineer our way out of the planetary crisis.

The language used in sustainable development discourse is that of 'natural resources', 'environment', 'ecosystem', 'ecosystem services', 'natural capital', 'resource base', 'stocks' and 'environmental management' and 'ecological economics'. This language has framed Nature in scientific, economic and political terms. It speaks of Nature as something to be managed and controlled to serve human beings. We need a new language which connects, rather than separates us from Nature. In my view, Banerjee presents this argument most eloquently:

Sustainable development is not just about managerial efficiency (although that has a part to play); it is about rethinking human–nature relationships, re-examining current doctrines of progress and modernity, and privileging alternate visions of the world. It requires a retracing of steps to the juncture where 'nature' became transformed into 'environment', distancing the natural world and positioning it as a resource to be mastered, in the way that human feelings and expression become mastered through 'culture'. Contemporary notions of sustainable development are embedded in the development discourse that requires the death of nature and the rise of environment. Alternate visions can be imagined only by rescuing sustainable development from this dichotomy (2003:169).

Ver Beek contends that development largely ignores the spiritual dimension of people's lives. He substantiates this, saying that "the subject is conspicuously under-represented in development literature and in the policies and programmes of development organisations" (2000:36). Furthermore, "the failure to recognise the centrality of their spirituality ultimately robs the poor of opportunities to tap into whatever strength, power, and hope that this dimension gives them and deprives them of opportunities to reflect on and control how their development and spirituality shape each other" (2000:32). Biko, cited in Swartz, states this very clearly: "Material want is bad enough, but coupled with spiritual poverty it kills" (2010: 429). Ignoring spirituality is therefore 'anti-developmental'.

To ensure a more sustainable world current consumer patterns must shift from 'greed to need' and from "conspicuous display to meeting basic needs" (UNDP, 1998:1). Hattingh argues that "the fundamental pattern of production and consumption and the values informing and perpetuating it should be radically changed. A cut-down in consumption...and a drastic change in lifestyles [is] required" (2001:7).

Hattingh further argues for a radical change in “the structure of the industrialised society, the fundamental pattern of consumption and the values informing and perpetuating it” (2001:7). As Capra points out, the crisis we face is as a result of the fact that “most of us, and especially our large social institutions subscribe to the concepts of an outdated worldview, a perception of reality inadequate for dealing with our overpopulated, globally interconnected world” (1996:4). He argues that “a radical shift [is required] in our perceptions, our thinking, our values” (1996:4). Assadourian states that “preventing the collapse of human civilization requires nothing less than a wholesale transformation of dominant cultural patterns” (2010:3).

In support of these arguments it is my contention that we need a radical political and ethical transformation which takes into consideration the entire community of life on earth. We need to adopt an ecological approach to sustainable development which aims at sustaining the creative fabric of natural and cultural evolution, not just for human beings, but for all life forms, both in the present and in the future. An ecological approach acknowledges the role to be played by indigenous and local knowledge and that a more sustainable world will be created through global networks, local solutions, policy changes and social movements (Swilling, 2008b). The recent Dhaka Declaration *Positions on an Emerging Green Economy* by the South Asia Women’s Network (SWAN) illustrates the above perspective. According to this Declaration, “A Green Economy should be an economic system that ensures social justice and equity, protects the ecological balance and creates economic sufficiency...The core idea of a Green Economy must be poverty alleviation, environmental sustainability through maintaining biodiversity, and the well-being of all the people” (SWAN, 2011). The SWAN statement acknowledges the role of women; local economies; peace; local traditions, wisdom and knowledge sharing; and decentralisation.

Given the foregoing discussion, I propose the following definition of sustainable development: Acknowledging that all living beings, including humans, animals and plants, are part of a complex system in which the ability to thrive individually is intrinsically linked to the ability of others to thrive, sustainable development recognises the rights of all present living beings, including humans, animals and plants, to live a quality life of sufficiency without compromising the ability of future generations of all living beings to also live quality lives of sufficiency while remaining within the carrying capacity of the earth.

However, it seems as though something is missing in the litany of environmental and social dilemmas and the response of sustainable development and that is an acknowledgement of that which is the fundamental root of these dilemmas: that we are disconnected and alienated from Nature and from one another, and that the planetary polycrisis is a crisis of spirituality, particularly with respect to our relationship with Nature. Perhaps we need to shift our focus from the external issues in the sustainable development discourse and debates and start looking inward. Instead of just the three traditional pillars of sustainable development – ecological, social and economic – we could perhaps add a fourth: spirituality (Taylor, 2010). Hawken says “...we cannot save our planet unless humankind undergoes a widespread spiritual and religious awakening...fixes won’t fix unless we fix our souls as well” (2007:31). And Macy speaks directly to individual experience that feeds into this collective: “Unless you have some roots in a spiritual practice that holds life sacred and encourages joyful communion with all your fellow beings, facing the enormous challenges ahead becomes nearly impossible” (1991:185).

2.5. Spirituality: Building a bridge between humans and Nature

As we human beings lost our spiritual connection with the Earth, as we lost the inner ground of our being, of our place in the world, we lost sight of the reciprocal interrelatedness of all life. We now walk the Earth with impoverished souls (Maser, cited in Ashley, 2007:53).

Like Nature and sustainable development, the concept of spirituality is complex, contested and understood in diverse ways. Spirituality is often equated with religion, and while there are similarities between them, including a sense of the sacred and a life-time search for meaning, they are not necessarily one and the same. Religious people can be spiritual, but spiritual people are not necessarily religious. Religion is generally associated with the presence and worship of a higher being, which is carried out in organised and ‘traditional ways’ such as regular attendance at church, mosque or synagogue. Spirituality does not necessarily recognise the power of higher being and is associated with “individual experience...and such things as personal transcendence, supraconscious sensitivity and meaningfulness (Spilka & McIntosh, cited in Hill et al., 2000:60). Further, “spirituality is often thought to be about personal growth and gaining a proper understanding of one’s place in the cosmos and to be intertwined with environmentalist concern and action. This contrasts markedly with the world’s predominant religions, which are generally concerned with transcending this world or obtaining divine rescue from it” (Taylor, 2010:3).

According to Kumar:

The word religion comes from the Latin root *religio* which means to bind together with the string of certain beliefs. A group of people come together, share a belief system, stick together and support each other. Thus religion binds you, whereas the root meaning of spirit is associated with breath, with air. We can all be free spirits and breathe freely. Spirituality transcends beliefs (2004).

The etymology of 'spirit' comes from the Latin '*spirare*', meaning to breathe.

Berry argues that "the Earth as spiritual reality has generally been ignored by the religious-spiritual traditions of the modern West" (2009:70). Mebratu points out that religions tend to be anthropocentric: "Religions have taught us to perceive and act on non-human nature in terms of particular human interests, beliefs and social structures...we have socialized nature, framing it in human terms...to satisfy human needs, abilities and power relations" (1998:497). This is supported by research conducted by Schultz, Zelezny and Dalrymple: "Our results provide strong evidence that a literal belief in the Bible is negatively related to ecocentric environmental concerns and positively related to anthropocentric concerns—regardless of country" (2000:590). However, as Snyder reminds us: "Inspiration, exaltation, and insight do not end when one steps outside the doors of a church" (cited in Turner, 1995:43).

Gardner maintains that, in three of the world's largest religions (Christianity, Islam and Judaism), "morality has been traditionally human-focused, with nature being of secondary importance" (2003:155). According to Bateson:

If you put God outside and set him vis-a-vis his creation and if you have the idea that you are created in his image, you will logically and naturally see yourself as outside and against the things around you. And as you arrogate all mind to yourself, you will see the world around you as mindless and therefore as not entitled to moral or ethical consideration. The environment will be yours to exploit (cited in Reason, 1993:4).

I acknowledge that "both spirituality and religion are complex phenomena, multidimensional in nature, and any single definition is likely to reflect a limited perspective of interest" (Hill et al., 2000:52). As I stated at the beginning of this thesis, I am presenting a limited number of views of spirituality in respect to Nature and therefore my discussion reflects this, but I acknowledge, with respect, that there are

other views. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to debate the differences and similarities between religion and spirituality, I recognise that religion has a role to play (See 2.5.2. on page 126). However, I have chosen to focus on spirituality as it seems to me that a spiritual rather than a religious response is needed, particularly with respect to our relationship with Nature, in the transformation to a more sustainable world.

The spirituality to which I am alluding does not imply faith-based or religious institutional spirituality. As McCallum suggests: “It must be remembered that there are many people who do not associate themselves with any officially recognised religion, but who nevertheless have a deep and genuine sense of the sacred in certain forests, in wilderness areas” (2005:170). Costigan, Rose and Tinney provide a definition of such a spirituality: “A spirituality which envisions the Sacred as intimately embodied in the earth and the cosmos brings into force powerful emotions of reverence for all life and commitment to justice for the earth. A deep bonding with nature, and recognition that humankind is only one element in the whole interdependent web of life, underpins this type of spirituality” (2007:41).

Edwards et al. present something similar, in their understanding from a particularly African perspective: “Spirituality takes on many expressions. It includes the ability to see the sacred in the ordinary and to know the passion of existence. It involves looking at the world with fresh wonder, seeing the sacred in our lives and opening the door to a life of passion and depth” (2006:142).

Mies and Shiva further refine this understanding by making the distinction between a belief in God and spirituality, which they suggest is about “the rediscovery of the sacredness of life, according to which life on earth can be preserved only if people again begin to perceive all life forms as sacred and respect them as such. This quality is not located in an other-worldly deity, in a transcendence, but in everyday life, in our work, the things that surround us, in our immanence” (1993:18).

Spirituality in the context of this thesis therefore implies a heightened awareness or consciousness, the capacity for deep reflection and compassion, and a profound sense of what it means to part of the web of life – to be another living, breathing, sentient being in Nature without the hierarchies which are often dictated by religious forms of spirituality. It is a spirituality which is “not based upon the continuation of the patriarchal, monotheistic religions of Christianity, Judaism or Islam” (Mies & Shiva, 1993:17). I am

not referring to an esoteric spirituality, but rather to a spirituality which is integral to daily life, which informs the decisions about the way we live, and which is expressed through action, i.e. spirit-in-action. Inherent in the concept of spirituality I am proposing is sentience, which Lincoln says “refers to a sense of knowing...It is with the essence of sentience that we are able to perceive and aesthetically sense this wonder [of and in Nature] and to describe it” (2000:238). She later describes sentience as one of the “essence[s] of an ecospiritual consciousness” with the following characteristics: “Finding beauty and enchantment in life. Gives wonder a voice when words cannot. Perceives wordless moments imbued with radical liveliness. An embodied sense of knowing” (Lincoln, 2000:239).

While it is possible to experience a shallow connection with Nature (see Pyle, 2003), it is my contention that we need a deeper and therefore a spiritual relationship with Nature to restore the human-Nature connection and instil a sense of oneness with Nature. It is thus highly possible that a spiritual relationship with Nature could promote greater awareness of the interconnectedness of life, assist people to see the connections and patterns in the planetary crises and hopefully encourage more sustainable lifestyles and behaviours. According to Hastings, “a sense of the sacred in nature would promote reverent regard for natural things, including non-human life, leading to compassionate, sustainable use of the earth” (2009:63). By embracing a profound respect and compassion for Nature, I believe that we will be able to recreate a world which is just and sustainable and which offers sanctuary to all living beings on our planet including one another.

A number of terms are used to describe a spiritual relationship with Nature. These include eco-spirituality, nature spirituality, spiritual ecology, deep ecology and bioregionalism, which is a more spiritual way of living in connection with Nature. I will now briefly outline and define these terms.

Caine suggests that eco-spirituality “celebrates our connection with nature, not apart from nature. It asks us to embrace a deeper spiritual kinship with other species by viewing them as fellow earthlings...It is grounded in our feelings of love and appreciation, connection, compassion and reverence for all natural things/entities on Earth” (2003:49).

Nature spirituality includes the following: “Introspection and reflection on deep personal values; the elements of human devotion, reverence, respect, wonder, awe, mystery or lack of total understanding; inspiration; interaction with and relationship to something other and greater than oneself; sense of

humility; and sense of timelessness, integration, continuity, connectedness, and community” (Driver et al.,¹⁷ cited in Ashley, 2007:57).

Spiritual ecology “focuses on the transformation of consciousness, especially religious and spiritual consciousness...[and on] new ways of relating to the planet that entail not an ethic of domination, but one of partnership with nature” (Merchant, 1992:111).

The common thread in each of these concepts is connection – this is at the heart of the spirituality I believe is needed in our relationship with Nature.

The philosophy of deep ecology (see Box 2.1. below) provides insight into the kind of spirituality to which I am referring. Capra argues that “deep ecological awareness is spiritual or religious awareness. When the concept of the human spirit is understood as the mode of consciousness in which the individual feels a sense of belonging, of connectedness, to the cosmos as a whole, it becomes clear that ecological awareness is spiritual in its deepest sense” (1996:7).

Box 2.1. The deep ecology platform

1. All life has value in itself, independent of its usefulness to humans.
2. Richness and diversity contribute to life’s well-being and have value in themselves.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs in a responsible way.
4. The impact of humans in the world is excessive and rapidly getting worse.
5. Human lifestyles and population are key elements of this impact.
6. The diversity of life, including cultures, can flourish only with reduced human impact.
7. Basic ideological, political, economic and technological structures must therefore change.
8. Those who accept the foregoing points have an obligation to participate in implementing the necessary changes and to do so peacefully and democratically (Harding, 2006:241).

¹⁷ Driver, Dustin, Baltic, Elsner & Peterson, 1996.

Macy and Young Brown suggest that “deep ecology questions fundamental premises of the Industrial Growth Society. It challenges the assumptions, embedded in much Judeo-Christian and Marxist thought, that humans are the crown of creation and the ultimate measure of value” (1998:45).

Deep ecologists argue that human life and survival are no more valuable than that of Nature: Nature has intrinsic value beyond simply being a resource for human consumption. Every living organism therefore has a right to exist, to meet its needs and to have a good quality of life, regardless of whether it is deemed valuable to humans or not.

According to deep ecologists, “richness and diversity of life [are] values in themselves and [they] assume that human beings have no right to reduce these, except to satisfy their basic needs” (Mebratu, 1998:511). Humans are thus part of a larger living system that self-organises, self-regulates and self-stabilises to maintain its balance. Using feedback, the system monitors changes in its various parts – if there is change in one part, the system adapts accordingly by making a change in another part in order to maintain equilibrium. As Macy and Young Brown suggest, “as systems we participate in the evolving web of life, giving and receiving the feedback necessary for its sustenance, and maintaining integrity and balance by virtue of constant flow-through” (1998:42).

Deep ecology may be a remedy to mass consumerism and the increasingly materialistic world in which we live. Encouraging people to think deeply about that which they are consuming and to be conscious of the fact that they are a part of the web of life could lead to reduced and more equitable consumption.

Harding proposes that “each person must work out their own ecosophy (from *oikos*: household and *sophia*: wisdom) based on their own deep experience, deep questioning and deep commitment” (2006:240).

Harding uses the metaphor of a tree (see Figure 2.3. below) to illustrate “how individual ecosophies relate to each other” (2006:240). The roots are submerged in the earth of deep experience, from which they absorb the nutrients of “profound inspiration”. Each root tip represents individual deep experiences which, although drawn from various sources, acknowledge “the importance of compassion in our relationships with the whole of life” (2006:241). The concept of radical pluralism is applied here in that “we need to be tolerant of other people’s deep experiences, no matter how different they might be

from our own" (2006:241). The trunk of the tree comprises the deep ecology platform while the branches show "the options that each person has for making changes in their lives that are consistent with their deep experience..." (2006:241). Finally, concrete actions are the fruit of deep experience and once they ripen and fall to the ground, they in turn nourish the earth of deep experience. As Harding sums up: "Each person's particular journey from roots to trunk, and then to branches and fruit represents their own ecosophical path into right action in the world" (2006:244).

Deep ecology calls for a 'new morality' and set of ethics for sustainable living. Hattingh cites nine principles proposed in a report by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) and the World Wildlife Fund, entitled *Caring for the Earth: A Strategy for Sustainable Living*, which echo the platform of deep ecology. These include: "respect and care for the community of life; conserving the vitality and diversity of the earth; minimising the exhaustion of non-renewable resources; keeping within the carrying capacity of the earth and changing personal attitudes and practices in accordance with an ethic for sustainable living" (Hattingh, 2001:6).

The concept of bioregionalism is about living in place. It is about being sensitive to the regions in which we live, learning to relocate ourselves in the land and understanding the importance of ecological relationships. Bioregionalism calls us to live poetically and spiritually in tune with the land around us: "When you are informed by your place, you become the voice of its spirit" (Turner, 1995:45). It is also about learning to become native to a place, to belonging to the land, learning to remember and learning from others including the ecosystem. Bioregionalism is more than local living: it requires us to 'dig' into a place in order to know it. The place becomes "a home territory...mapped by song and story, myth and lore, filled with critical information about distance, water, animals, plants, weather, shelter – a string of ecological and economical connections between human being and place..." (Turner, 1995:43).

Hattingh suggests that "we have to relocate ourselves by adapting our technologies and lifestyles to the land and learning to appreciate its particular gifts" (1999:78). This requires a slow approach – spending time observing, being, reflecting and listening to Nature – so that we integrate our lives with those in Nature. Time allows us to "observe and experience the natural cycles of our world and to recognise emergent patterns and trends in a changing context. As a result we can make decisions which will improve the resilience of social and ecological systems to ensure long-term sustainability" (Currie,

2008). In this way, we will not only be connected with Nature, but also able to live more sustainable lives.

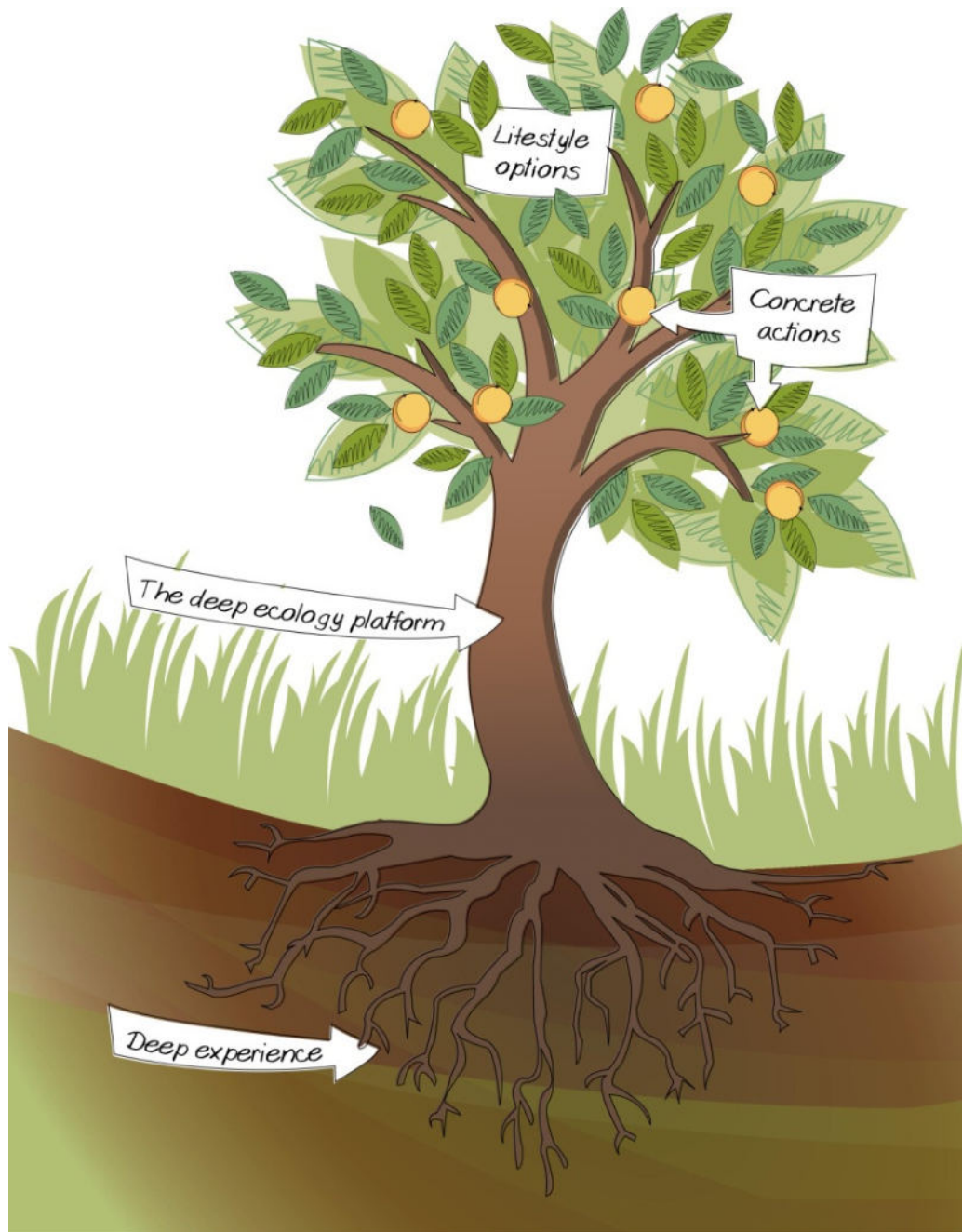


Figure 2.3. The ecosophical tree (Source: adapted from Harding, 2006:240)

2.5.1. What kind of practices will help us to reconnect with Nature?

We belong to the universe, we are at home in it, and this experience of belonging can make our lives profoundly meaningful (Capra, 2002:60).

There are a number of practices which could help us reconnect with Nature and restore our sense of oneness with Nature. From a spiritual point of view people need to be encouraged to turn to practices that encourage heightened awareness and reflection, so that “with a little more exploration and discussion of the being dimension, we might be able to do more appropriate things and, in turn, have a much better experience of the turbulent times ahead” (Willis, 2009). According to Macy,

we need, in this time of great challenge and change, the internal support of personal practice. I mean practice in the venerable spiritual sense of fortifying the mind and schooling its attitudes. Because for generations we have been conditioned by the mechanistic, anthropocentric assumptions of our mainstream culture, intellectual assent to an ecological vision of life is not enough to change our perceptions and behaviours. To help us disidentify from narrow notions of the self and experience our interexistence with all beings in the web of life, we turn to regular personal practices that range from meditation to the recycling of our trash (1991:37–38).

However, we need to be wary of a ‘false’ or shallow spirituality, the kind that is commonly being adopted as a trend in the middle to wealthier classes. Narayanan warns that “there is danger of spirituality itself becoming a consumerist commodity” (2010:255). Unfortunately, evidence of this reality already abounds: from yoga classes being offered in multinational gyms and spas and retreats offering meditation to the commercialisation and marketing of spiritual artifacts such as prayer flags, Buddha statues and meditation cushions. Gould alludes to ‘spiritual materialism’ (a term coined by Trungpa [1973]) and explains it as follows: “Such materialism comes about when people consume spirituality in much the same way that they would consume goods. It may take such forms as collecting teachings, teachers, spiritual experiences, related material objects, and so on” (Gould, 2006:65).

The spirituality which I believe is needed is based on simplicity and a genuine commitment to disengage from consumer culture. It requires deep self-reflection, confronting our hypocrisies and questioning our lifestyles and levels of consumption.

2.5.1.1. *Mindfulness*

Mindfulness (paying attention or being fully present) is regarded as both a spiritual and a personal practice. “Mindfulness is described as experiencing what mind and body are doing as they are doing it, being present with one's mind, body, and energy in their ordinary states of occurrence” (Rosch, 1997).

According to Plotkin, mindfulness is “a calm presence with what is, whether joy or pain, ease or difficulty, boredom or ecstasy, life or death. It is both a specific skill and an all-embracing approach to life, and it most commonly developed through a discipline of meditation, prayer or contemplation” (2008: 284). The Institute for Mindfulness refers to mindfulness as “the capacity of paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, without judgment” (2010). Further, it is “a profound way to be proactive in how we engage with, understand and respond to the challenges, uncertainties and confusion in us and around us” (Institute of Mindfulness, 2010). Brown and Kasser define mindfulness as “a quality of consciousness that denotes a receptive attention to and awareness of ongoing internal states and behavior” (2005:351)

Although mindfulness as a technique is being applied in a number of arenas (e.g. stress reduction), according to Amel, Manning and Scott, “up to this point, few studies have directly addressed mindfulness and environmental behavior” (2009:17). Jacob, Jovic and Brinkerhoff substantiate this, stating that “the relationship between MM [mindfulness meditation] and ESB [ecologically sustainable behaviour] is at this stage hypothetical, waiting for empirical support” (2008:278).

According to Brown and Kasser:

Although we know of no research examining associations between mindfulness, as defined here, and ERB [ecologically responsible behaviour], both Burch (2000) and Rosenberg (2004) have suggested that mindfulness may provide an antidote to consumerism, as this quality of consciousness encourages reflection on the ecological impact of one's behavior and facilitates choicefulness in the face of consumerist messages designed to encourage materialistic pursuits (2005:351).

Crawford argues that “ultimately the solution to the environmental crisis can only be found by seeking soul” (cited in Costigan, Rose & Tinney, 2007:42) and that “this soul is especially captured through attention, mindfulness/awareness/wonder”.

Mindfulness could assist in reconnecting us with Nature as it can be applied in everyday situations: from eating, to shopping and driving, to our interactions with others. It is a means of slowing down and paying deep attention to what is going on around us and within us, what we are thinking, what we are doing.

Being mindful while eating not only means experiencing food in terms of its colour, shape, texture and taste, but also considering its journey to one’s plate: how it was grown; where it was grown; what was needed to grow it; who grew it; how was it processed and packaged, and how was it transported? Applying mindfulness when shopping requires us to ask deeper questions such as: do I really need this item; where was it made, what is it made of and who made it; am I purchasing this to satisfy some other need or to make me feel better?

When driving, how many people pay attention to their surroundings and see things other than the cars, the road and the traffic lights? How many people see the full moon rising as they drive home from work? Does anyone see the grey heron standing statuesque next to the road? Who notices last night’s road kill and says a silent prayer for the dead? How many of us greet the beggar on the street corner and engage in conversation, one human being to another?

Wagoner’s poem “Lost” below reminds us to stand still, to experience the power of the present and to be mindful of what is around us:

*Stand still. The trees ahead and the bushes beside you
Are not lost. Wherever you are is called Here,
And you must treat it as a powerful stranger,
Must ask it permission to know it and be known.
The forest breathes. Listen. It answers,
I have made this place around you.
If you leave it, you may come back again, saying Here.*

*No two trees are the same to Raven.
No two branches are the same to Wren.
If what a tree or bush does is lost on you,
You are surely lost. Stand still. The forest knows
Where you are. You must let it find you
(Wagoner, cited in Plotkin, 2008:29).*

The practice of mindfulness allows us to transcend our small/shallow selves and to connect with our nature as human beings and the world around us in a more meaningful way. Tolle sums it up: “The moment you enter the Now with your attention, you realize that life is sacred. There is a sacredness to everything you perceive when you are present. The more you live in the Now, the more you sense the simple yet profound joy of Being and the sacredness of all life” (2003:44).

2.5.1.2. Meditation

As explained earlier, the etymology of ‘spirit’ is the Latin ‘*spirare*’ which means ‘to breathe’. Through our breath and by breathing we are connected to every living being on this planet. “You reconnect with nature in the most intimate and powerful way by becoming aware of your breathing and learning to hold your attention there” (Tolle, 2003:83).

Suzuki puts it this way: “Every breath is a sacrament, an affirmation of our connection with all other living things, a renewal of our link with our ancestors and a contribution to generations yet to come” (2007:63). By focusing on the breath in meditation, we are reminded of our aliveness and “our spiritual moments are those moments when we feel most intensely alive” (Capra, 2002:59).

*As the forests exhale
so we inhale.
And as we exhale
so the forests inhale.
In giving we receive
and in receiving we give.
A sacred bond, a delicate balance (Saayman Krige, 2010).*

Meditation is a means of calming the mind and body and enhances the capacity to be more mindful and present in our everyday activities. Through meditation and watching the breath, it is possible to find a place of “...centred stillness from which you can engage attentively, caringly with the world” (Batchelor, 1997:25). According to De Boer: “Stillness, an inner peace, is the first step in what I call the practice of spiritual ecology...To adopt this practice is to apply ecology in a conscious way to our lives, not only through the ecological knowledge that science provides, but through respectful presence, through the breath, by being watchful whenever and wherever we are able” (2009:273). Shapiro says, “Each time we settle into our breathing, feeling our biological presence, sensing the changes in the weather and the wildflowers, we experience in our bones the immense creativity of the web of life” (1995:238).

According to Rosch, “Western scientific psychology explicitly seeks to study mind from the outside as though it were an object of the natural sciences. The meditative traditions provide an alternative route, methodologies for learning about the mind/consciousness/living being from the inside, paths for gaining knowledge about the living being as that being itself” (1997). She points out that meditation is not “introspection” or “dissociation of mind and body” or “a means of separating oneself from one's experience”. It is rather “*integration* in which body, energy, mind, intention, awareness, and action come to form one nonfragmented, integrated whole”.¹⁸ Meditation is, therefore, a means to integrate the subjective and the objective, the inner and outer worlds of human existence and to experience “glimpses [of] non-separateness, open-heartedness, or compassion” (Rosch, 1997).

While sitting meditation is one form of practice, there are other ways to meditate such as guided meditations, which often invoke scenes and sensory experiences of Nature and walking meditations, which take practitioners into Nature. “Walking is a deceptively simple yet apparently effective means of promoting deep contemplation” (De Young, 2010:19). While writing the thesis I started walking meditations in the early morning – I simply walked barefoot around my garden with an awareness of the dew-damp grass beneath my feet, the sounds of life awakening to the new day and the various scents in the air. On the days when I walked I was aware of an inner calmness as well as an openness to engage with others in a more genuine and compassionate way.

Meditation, as a restorative process, may also be a means of coping with the mental and emotional fatigue, which is experienced by those people who are responding to the planetary crisis and working in

¹⁸ Emphasis in the original.

ways to create a more just and sustainable world. If we accept “that we can suffer on behalf of society itself, and on behalf of our planet, and that such suffering is real and valid and healthy” (Macy & Young Brown, 1998:31), then the Tibetan Buddhist practice of tonglen is a way to connect with the suffering in the world and to respond in a compassionate way. In tonglen we breathe in the suffering and pain of ourselves and other living beings and breathe out compassion, gentleness and healing. Through this act we keep our hearts soft and open so that we feel connected to Nature and “... strengthen our sense of belonging in the larger web of being” (Macy & Young Brown, 1998:191).

2.5.1.3. Rituals

Rituals are symbolic acts which are performed regularly by individuals or groups of people and help “to internalize and communicate deep-seated values” (Gardner, 2010b:30).

Rituals are practised in “the cycles of daily life in our communities” (Ndebele, 2007:156) and earth-centred rituals deepen our awareness of the patterns in nature. Rituals provide important holding spaces, in which people can tell their stories, express their deepest fears, share their aspirations and find meaning. In so doing, people connect with one another on a deeper level, feel that their voices have been heard and experience a sense of belonging. It is through rituals and lived experience that we are able to develop practical wisdom.

Although the concept of ritual is most often associated with First People and cultural traditions, rituals are part of everyday life although we may be unaware of them. Everyone has daily rituals which they practice either consciously or unconsciously. We do not necessarily need formal organised rituals in order to reconnect with Nature. The simple act of brushing one’s teeth could be a means of restoring connection: thinking about the water we use and where it comes from and giving thanks for it could form part of a daily ritual.

Consumerism has become a ritual throughout the world and it is necessary to develop rituals to counter this trend which not only has negative impacts on Nature, but also on our relationships with others. Fasting, and participating in initiatives such as ‘Buy Nothing Day’, ‘Meat-free Mondays’ and ‘Car-free Fridays’ are rituals that encourage people to be more mindful of their consumption patterns.

Earth Hour is becoming an annual ritual for people around the world. Not only does this event encourage people to switch off lights and other electrical appliances and help to raise awareness of climate change, it is also a means for families to interact with one another by playing games and telling stories. Festivals and celebrations are also ways of introducing ritual into our lives and to celebrate and give thanks for that which Nature provides.

Rituals performed to mark the beginning or ending of the day or to acknowledge the change of seasons deepen our awareness of the patterns and cycles in Nature. Through ritual we are able to make time to reflect on our lives and our habitual patterns. "Ritual is essential because it is truly the pattern that connects...during rituals we have the experience, unique in our culture, of neither *opposing* nature or *trying* to be in communion with nature; but of *finding* ourselves within nature, and that is the key to a sustainable culture"¹⁹ (LaChapelle, 1995:62).

American Joanna Macy and Australian John Seed have developed a ritual known as the Council of All Beings. In this ritual people are invited to represent a non-human life form and to speak on behalf of that being. According to Taylor, "the 'sacred intention' of such rituals has been to reawaken understandings of spiritual realities that people today rarely perceive but that they believe animate nature in its many expressions" (2010:21). Giving voice or expression to non-human beings enables people to identify with Nature in a profound way.

2.5.1.4. Poetry

In his poem 'What you should know to be a poet', Snyder says you need to know:

*all you can about animals as persons
the names of trees and flowers and weeds.
names of stars, and the movements of the planets
and the moon.*

Your own six senses, with a watchful and elegant mind... (Snyder, 1992:184).

¹⁹ Emphases in the original.

Writing and reading poetry is an ancient means of reflecting on the world and appreciating the beauty of Nature. Poetry re-enchants the world. It is the voice of Nature. "Poetry is the language of hope. It inspires. It heals. It belongs" (McCallum, 2005:168).

All the arts – music, art, dance, etc. have the potential power to connect us to ourselves, each other and the larger universe. But poetry "reaches people in a different place than the one that takes in analysis and statistics...and motivates in a way that science alone cannot" (Gardner, 2003:175). Poetry enables us to see the relationships between things in a different light and "challenges the limits of objective reality. It goes straight for the heart. It speaks to a forgotten side of ourselves" (McCallum, 2005:167).

Poetry reconnects us with our hearts because it is about feeling rather than thinking and understanding. "In order to enter poetry's language, your grip on habitual, left-brained ways of processing information needs to soften" (Rosen, 2009:xvi). "It rearranges our thinking, our perception, our dialogue. It takes us out of the literal so that we can see what is real" (Ensler, 2009:xiv). Rosen cites Bachelard, saying poetry "comes before thought...[Rather] than being a phenomenology of the mind, [poetry] is a phenomenology of the soul" (2009:xvi).

Brady suggests that

perhaps...a planet of poets...would be much less likely to trammel the very source of its own existence; to cut off the milk, the honey, the aesthetic and ecological sustenance of its forests and waterholes, its peaks and valleys; to shatter the web of life that ties coral reef to caribou, owl and finch to prairie grass, buffalo to ground squirrel, and the winds of the Sahara and stratosphere to the quality of life in Chicago, Honolulu and Madrid (2005:997).

Poetry is currently being used in various public spaces as a means to reconnect people with Nature. Three examples include the Two Oceans Aquarium,²⁰ the *Untamed Exhibition*,²¹ in the Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens,²² and at the Audubon Zoo,²³ among others. The latter is one of five zoos participating in the Language of Conservation Programme, which is "designed to deepen public awareness and

²⁰ Two Oceans Aquarium, V&A Waterfront, Cape Town, South Africa. <http://www.aquarium.co.za/>

²¹ *Untamed Exhibition*: A collaborative project between a sculptor, an architect and a poet. http://www.sanbi.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=980:untamed&catid=48:kirstenbosch-nbg&Itemid=138

²² Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens, Cape Town, South Africa. http://www.sanbi.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&Itemid=57&id=139

²³ Audubon Zoo, New Orleans, United States of America. <http://www.auduboninstitute.org/>

appreciation of environmental issues through poetry” (Poets House, 2011). In a similar initiative at the Central Park Zoo in New York City, “researchers discovered that the use of poetry installations made zoo visitors dramatically more aware of the impact humans have on ecosystems” (Poets House, 2011). An evaluation study found that there was a significant increase “in awareness that humans share habitats with and co-exist with animals” (Condon, 2005:3).

2.5.1.5. Re-learning from indigenous knowledge and wisdom

According to Graaff et al., “Indigenous knowledge can be defined broadly as the knowledge that an indigenous (local) community accumulates over generations of living in a particular environment. This definition encompasses all forms of knowledge – technologies, know-how skills, practices and beliefs – that enable the community to achieve stable livelihoods in their environment” (n.d.:1). Maila suggests that indigenous knowledge is “technical insight or wisdom gained and developed by people in a particular locality, through years of careful observation and experimentation with the natural phenomena around them” (2007:77). Hawken says that “indigenous science is an observational science, recorded in myths, stories, teachings and, in particular, language” (2007:101).

Cullinan proposes that many indigenous cultures are based on a set of recurring themes. These cultures:

- “have a real sense of belonging, and of being part of a larger context or community that embraces the living, the dead and the unborn, as well as non-human beings;
- respect laws or principles that they believe are immutable and do not have a human source;
- are very conscious of the need to adapt their social practices to accord with the natural world rather than focusing on changing the natural world to suit them;
- place great emphasis on respecting other aspects of the environment (particularly animals that they hunt for food) and avoiding waste or excess” (2002:99).

There is resurging interest in and growing acknowledgement that we need to learn from and appreciate indigenous knowledge and practices in order to restore our connection with Nature. Learning from indigenous knowledge requires sensitivity, respect, humility and openness: as Campbell and Robins point out, it “is less about comprehension, and more about an opening” (2009:2). It is not just about misappropriating the practices of others, but also about perhaps accessing residual indigenous knowledge buried deep within our western subconscious. Macy suggests that indigenous “voices find a

hearing because they tell us – as the natives we are of the late Industrial Growth Society²⁴ – what we want to know once again: that as kin to the animals and plants, rocks and air of this sacred world, we can tap its powers, take part in its healing” (1998:50). Cullinan proposes that “remembering where we have come from and who we are is a necessary part of recovering our lost role in the Earth Community and of creating a vision of who we may become. The remaining tribal communities that still maintain strong bonds with the natural world can show us much about our human past and what we have left” (2002:101).

Perhaps “the most important lesson to be drawn from indigenous traditions and beliefs is the ‘holistic vision’ that is inherent in all of the beliefs and the importance attached to being in constant communication with nature” (Mebratu, 1998:498).

If we are to learn from indigenous knowledge and wisdom, we need to create opportunities for dialogue, find ways to deeply integrate the inherent philosophies of this knowledge and wisdom into western practices, and consult with indigenous people with an appreciation that their enduring observations of and connection to Nature can offer a unique perspective, which is inaccessible through a western scientific approach. Further, according to Campbell and Robins, “African ways of learning require mentorship, and the commitment to return to our mentors again and again, weighing their words against our growing knowledge of experience. Mentors will typically wait until they hear whatever they’re waiting for and then say ‘Yes, it’s like that’. At that point, you have accessed rather than intellectually understood something” (2009:2).

2.5.1.6. Restoration

The living world is not ‘out there’ somewhere, but in your heart (Hawken, 2009).

The act of restoration is not only about healing elements in Nature which have been damaged by our exploitative activities, but also offers an opportunity for us to reconnect with Nature and heal ourselves. “Through environmental restoration, people are coming back to the Earth with their bodies...They are learning through their hands and their hearts, to identify with the pain and the healing of ecosystems that sustain them” (Shapiro, 1995:225).

²⁴ Emphasis in the original.

Van Wieren suggests that “restoration provides an interesting and distinctive example of the way in which science and spirituality, the secular and sacred interact in contemporary life to promote a more cooperative and meaningful relation between humans and nature” (2008:239).

A local restoration act took place in Bottom Road, Zeekoevlei,²⁵ where twelve residents together with officials from the City of Cape Town and Zeekoevlei Nature Reserve restored an area which had become a dumpsite for building rubble, tyres and other waste back to the original fynbos, the natural vegetation that occurs in the area. The restoration project took several years, but the Bottom Road Sanctuary is now well established and has inspired other restoration projects on the Cape Flats. Resident Kelvin Cochrane says: “I saw a community spirit being built up. It’s something we haven’t got anymore but I’ve seen the benefits of this project and I’ve seen what it’s done for this community. This project has opened a lot of people’s eyes. We can change people’s attitudes” (Zeekoevlei Community News, Info & Blogs, 2010).

The Tarboo Watershed Restoration Project in Jefferson County, in the state of Washington, USA, involves the Northwest Watershed Institute, schools and hundreds of volunteers who participate in the planting of indigenous trees along the Tarboo Creek which is an important salmon restoration site. Over 110 000 trees have been planted since 2004. During the recent Plant-a-Thon, one of the school co-ordinators, Betsy Carlson, commented: ““I never feel more alive than I do after a day of tree planting, head to toe in mud, with so many children, families and friends” (PTLeader, 2011). Funding for the trees is raised via the schools which sell tree cards and certificates so that trees can be planted in honour of friends and family. This act is not only one of acknowledgement of a loved one, but also connects the beneficiary of the card with the restoration initiative. Thanks to my sister, a tree was planted in my honour in 2010 “to shade the stream and benefit fish and wildlife on a protected sanctuary”.

There are many other examples of restoration. One at city scale is the removal of a six-lane highway, which had been constructed over a river in Seoul, South Korea. Guided by the vision of the mayor, the city tore down the highway and created a park alongside the river where people could walk and spend time in Nature. “The project has been very symbolic for Seoul, as the river was a spiritual source of life

²⁵ Zeekoevlei is a permanent wetland system situated on the low-lying Cape Flats near Cape Town in the Western Cape. This freshwater coastal lake, which is the largest in South Africa, forms part of the Zeekoevlei Nature Reserve, which in turn is part of the greater False Bay Ecology Park. It is situated within an urban context with urban sprawl surrounding it.

for the city” (Newman & Kenworthy, 2007:76). According to Yu, “People feel the water and the wind. Life becomes slower. The price of nearby land has risen. But it reminds people of their own hearts. It gives a new heart to the city” (cited in Vidal, 2007).

2.5.2. The role of religion

As mentioned earlier, it seems to me that spirituality, more than religion, is needed if we are to create a more sustainable world. Unfortunately some religions are associated with dogma, fundamentalism and power dynamics, which have impacted negatively on their efficacy and credibility. Given that religions are often unaccepting of other religions and attempt to convert believers from other belief systems to their own, perhaps there is the danger of falling into the trap of ‘which religion would be the most appropriate to respond to the socioecological crises?’ In light of this, it seems that spirituality and some of the practices I described above are perhaps better suited as a response to the crises as they open the heart to perspective, kindness and compassion, and enable us to reconnect with breath, the life-force that connects us all as equals without prejudice or discrimination.

However, I acknowledge that religion does have a role to play, particularly as millions of people around the world are engaged in a formal religion, be it Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism etc. Perhaps the challenge is to invoke spirituality back into our religions?

While religions are increasingly speaking out about environmental issues and encouraging ‘greening’ behaviour in congregations, they do not seem to have much influence in persuading people to change their consumer behaviour, even though the theme of living simply is at the heart of many religious teachings. “It is difficult to find religious initiatives that promote simpler living or that help congregants challenge the consumerist orientation of most modern economies” (Gardner, 2010a:26). It is perhaps unfair to expect religions to play this role, given that they are just one aspect of our culture and, as I have pointed out, it is not possible to consider things in isolation given the complex world in which we live. However, religious institutions are in a powerful position given their moral authority, the vast number of followers which adhere to their teachings, the financial resources which they have at their disposal and their capacity to build communities and to influence change. Religious leaders are in a position to “use their elevated social standing to call for an end to systematic abuse of the environment and for the creation of a just and environmentally healthy world in a way that would capture the

attention of many people...Such leadership would lift discussion of these issues to an entirely new level, and might well increase pressure for action” (Gardner, 2003:172–173).

The Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI) is an example of the kind of religious leadership required. SAFCEI is an inter-faith initiative which focuses on the following objectives:

- “Raise environmental awareness.
- Engage in formulating policy & ethical guidelines within our faith communities.
- Facilitate environmental responsibility & action.
- Confront environmental & socio-economic injustices.
- Support environmental training and learning” (SAFCEI, 2009).

SAFCEI is actively involved in climate change issues, the greening of congregations, food security – including issues related to GMOs (genetically modified organisms), biodiversity conservation and energy in South Africa. It engages with government, partners with various NGOs and enlists congregations in environmental awareness projects.

At a recent conference initiated by SAFCEI in Nairobi, Kenya, African faith leaders met with Kenyan Vice President Kalonzo Musyoga and UNEP executive director Achim Steiner to discuss climate change issues ahead of COP17,²⁶ which will take place in Durban in December 2011. In a declaration “compiled jointly by 130 faith leaders representing Muslim, Christian, Hindu, African traditional, Bahá’í and Buddhist communities from 30 countries across Africa”²⁷ (SAFCEI, 2011a), the African faith leaders committed to the following responsibilities:

- “Set a good example for our faith communities by examining our personal needs and reducing unsustainable consumption.
- Lead local communities to understand the threat of climate change and the need to build economies and societies based on a revitalised moral vision.
- Draw on our spiritual resources to foster crucial ecological virtues such as wisdom, justice, courage and temperance, and to confront vices such as greed in our own midst.
- Acknowledge that climate change has greatly affected already vulnerable people (such as women, children, the elderly, the poor and the disabled), that it worsens existing inequalities

²⁶ COP17: 17th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

²⁷ The declaration’s title is *Climate Justice for Sustainable Peace in Africa*, 8 June 2011.

and that this places an obligation on faith groups to stand in solidarity with the victims of climate change disasters, showing care, compassion and love.

- Plant indigenous trees and promote ecological restoration” (SAFCEI, 2011a).

Steiner informed delegates: “In the climate negotiations, the world’s people are being silenced by arguments, facts and figures that are disempowering...You have immense power to bring back a sense of responsibility to these negotiations” (cited in SAFCEI, 2011b).

In my view, the declaration by the African faith leaders is an example of the positive role religions can play in the transformation to a more sustainable world. No one religion dominates or prescribes to others, indigenous religions are recognised as equal, and all beliefs find expression. Perhaps joint initiatives such as this can assist in transcending the dissension between religions and the scepticism and ‘anti-religion’ sentiment that exists in many people today.

2.6. Transformation

Nothing short of total transformation will do much good (Snyder, 1995:147).

Transformation in the context of this study refers to a radical change in “the structure of the industrialised society, the fundamental pattern of consumption and the values informing and perpetuating it” (Hattingh, 2001:7) and “a radical shift in our perceptions, our thinking, our values” (Capra, 1996:4). A radical transformation is needed in our world if we are to survive the planetary crises and to create a socially and environmentally just world. It requires a paradigm shift in our worldviews, in our economic, political and cultural systems, and in our relationship with and connection to Nature. This transformation requires a shift in consciousness and a revolution in our thinking from a linear to a systemic paradigm. As Macy suggests, transformation “require[s] a letting go of outmoded ways of being, of old assumptions and old defences” (1991:255).

In order for a radical transformation to occur, a new paradigm is needed which:

- “dethrones humankind, reincluding it within the Earth’s community of life, this being perceived as an exceptionally complex, self-steering system generating diverse vital values,

- in overcoming the separation of that which is human in the human being from that which is natural, it leaves as unfounded any contrasting of humankind and the animal world, and hence any belief in 'humanity' as against 'animalism' – it is for this reason that there is a Declaration of Animal Rights alongside the Declaration of Human Rights,
- in making use of the concept of culture understood as a phenomenon of Nature, it dispenses with the gulf long taken to separate humankind from Nature,
- it proposes replacement of the so-typically-human desire to build a human world independent of natural imperatives with a striving to recognize the relationships that actually exist, such that socioeconomic development might be adjusted to the capabilities of the environment, which is to say to the achievement of sustainable development" (Piątek, 2008:93).

2.6.1. Complexity theory and systems thinking

The burgeoning field of complexity theory offers an approach, indeed a new language, which allows us to confront the crises with which we are faced. Although it defies definition, we are discovering that we need to apply complexity theory to socioecological issues since it is impossible to reduce them to any one single problem in which the causes and effects can be determined linearly and in which we can make predictions about outcomes. Clayton and Radcliffe point out that "the sustainability of the human species can only be defined, ultimately, at the level of the interaction between the entire complex of human systems and all directly implicated environmental systems" (1996:6). Complexity theory acknowledges the uncertainty of our times and the disconnections between Nature, the sciences and what it means to be human. It provides a deeper insight into a particular system, into the relationships between the components and into the broader context in which the system is located. Swilling argues that complexity theory "holds promise because it invites us to look for patterns rather than parts, probabilities rather than predictions, processes rather than structures, and non-linear dynamics instead of deterministic causalities" (2002).

While Cilliers (1998) proposes various characteristics of a complex system, it is not easy or necessarily even possible to define a complex system. In addition, we cannot define a complex system since the terms which we use to define it will require definition themselves. According to Cilliers (2009), the definition of a complex system depends on the context in which the system exists. Taking this notion further, it could be said that the definition depends on who is making the definition. This has

implications for our understanding of what constitutes a complex system. Further, the characteristics of complex systems are self-reflective. By this I mean that it is difficult to describe one characteristic without referring to any of the other characteristics and thus sounding repetitive.

However, the following characteristics of a complex system can be identified:

- Complex systems comprise a large number of components which in themselves can be quite simple.
- The interaction between the components is dynamic and the level of interaction is rich.
- The interaction between the components is non-linear.
- Feedback loops (both direct and indirect) exist in the interconnections between components.
- There are short-range interactions between the components.
- Complex systems are open systems and therefore far from equilibrium.
- Complex systems have histories.
- The individual components within a complex system are ignorant of the overall system in which they are embedded.
- Complex systems are adaptive and capable of self-organisation (Cilliers, 1998).

With reference to Figure 2.4, individuals are embedded in social groups, e.g. families, which in turn form part of society, which in turn is embedded in Nature. The boundaries between them are open and infinite. As Mebratu points out, “the human universe, in general, and the economic and social cosmos in particular, never have been, and never will be, a separate system independent from the natural universe” (1998:514).

However, Robins argues that “it is important to remember that complex systems (like people and their organisations) are self-organising, non-linear feedback mechanisms and are inherently unpredictable” (2007).

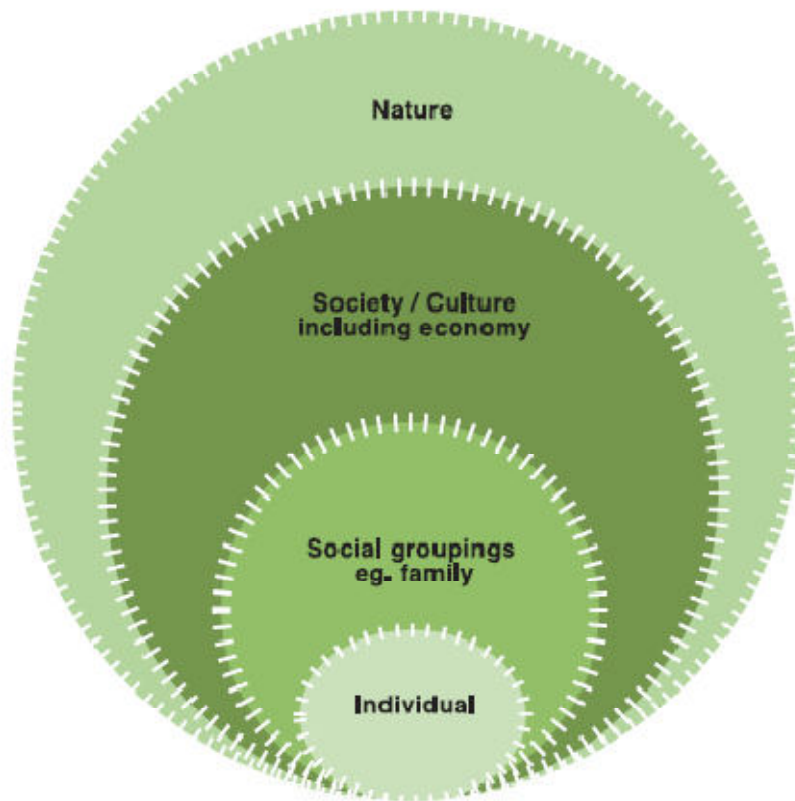


Figure 2.4. The complex system of life (Source: adapted from Mebratu, 1998 and Swilling, 2008b)

She proposes the following tools used by *sangomas* (traditional healers) to envision our future as part of a complex system:

- “Lesson 1: *Amadlozi* / Honour the Ancestors. Listen to the wisdom of the system. Learn its history. Discover where the roots of imbalance lie for therein lies guidance for the future. Before you fiddle with anything, be sure to locate those forces and structures that help the system run itself.
- Lesson 2: *Gita* / Dance. Find the rhythm or resonance of the system. Get the beat. Watch how it behaves and learn the facts by getting involved, not just by reading theory, annual reports and published statistics.
- Lesson 3: *Patla* / Communicate. Clear the lines of communication and keep talking. Most of what goes wrong in systems is a result of miscommunication or missing information.

- Lesson 4: *Laola* / Divination. Listen to what is important, not just to what is quantifiable. Learn to integrate different kinds of information: sensory, rational, psychic, intuitive, counter-intuitive and to bring it together in a coherent story.
- Lesson 5: *Vumisa* / Truth-telling. Have the courage to expose your thoughts and mental models. Allow things to be shot down and laughed at, then let go of things that are not useful.
- Lesson 6: *Muthi* / Medicine. Learn to find energy in the system and direct it to where it is needed.
- Lesson 7: *Moya* / Trance. Expand time and thought horizons. See the system from outside, from another perspective. Don't get caught in the little picture. Don't get attached to the bigger one" (Robins, 2007).

Complexity shows that, by trying to find a single truth or focusing on a single strategy to deal with a complex system, we fail to acknowledge the complexity entirely. We cannot afford to do this, given the nature of the global crises facing us. Complexity theory provides a bridge which is desperately needed between human systems and ecological systems in order for us to create a more sustainable world. It could also provide us with "a consciousness and an intelligence that can redefine our sense of history, our sense of Nature and our sense of co-existence" (McCallum, 2005:158).

2.6.2. Earth jurisprudence

What would a radically different law-driven consciousness look like?...One in which Nature had rights...Yes, rivers, lakes...trees...animals (Stone, cited in Cullinan, 2002:104).

In 1971 Stone wrote the article 'Should trees have standing? – Towards legal rights for natural objects'. The title of the introduction of this article is 'The Unthinkable' and Stone notes: "I am quite seriously proposing that we give legal rights to forests, oceans, rivers and other so-called 'natural objects' in the environment – indeed to the natural environment as a whole. As strange as such a notion may sound, it is neither fanciful nor devoid of operational content" (1971:9).

Today earth jurisprudence recognises that Nature has rights, including the intrinsic right to exist independent of human needs. Further it "recognises the Earth as the primary source of law which sets human law in a context which is wider than humanity. This is to say that human law is secondary to

Earth law” (Earth Jurisprudence Resource Centre, n.d.). Earth jurisprudence suggests that “the way we govern ourselves needs to embody an ethical code of practice which requires us to live according to Nature’s laws for the well-being of the whole Earth Community and future generations of all species” (Earth Jurisprudence Resource Centre, n.d.). According to Berry, cited in Cullinan, “Every component of the Earth Community has three rights: the right to be, the right to habitat, and the right to fulfil its role in the ever-renewing processes of the Earth Community” (2002:114).

The principles of earth jurisprudence are increasingly being applied in transformative ways across the globe by environmental lawyers, governments and, in particular, by indigenous people who are leading the way to establishing the rights of Nature. In 2010 the World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth was held in Cochabamba, Bolivia. Over 35,000 people committed to the Universal Declaration of Rights of Mother Earth, which is “a People’s Agreement which affirms the thought and practices of ‘Living Well,’ recognizing Mother Earth as a living being with which we have an indivisible, interdependent, complementary and spiritual relationship” (Global Exchange, 2010).

This is in line with Ecuador’s Constitution, which now includes the rights of Nature. Voted into the Constitution in 2008, this is the first time that the rights of Nature will be legally recognised. “Nature or *Pachamama*, where life is reproduced and exists, has the right to exist, persist, maintain and regenerate its vital cycles, structure, functions and its processes in evolution” (cited in Greenchange, 2008). According to Golding, “The Ecuadorian case is groundbreaking in sophistication because human beings are correctly seen as being part of nature. This is a key principle of sustainable development. The result is a fusion of holistic human values into the sustainable development agenda, which in return is integrated with governance systems – a philosophy known as ‘Earth jurisprudence’” (2010).

In 2011 Bolivia followed Ecuador’s example and established the Law of Mother Earth. According to Vidal, the Law of Mother Earth includes, “the right to life and to exist; the right to continue vital cycles and processes free from human alteration; the right to pure water and clean air; the right to balance; the right not to be polluted; and the right to not have cellular structure modified or genetically altered” (2011a). The Law is based on the “indigenous Andean spiritual world view which places the environment and the earth deity known as the *Pachamama* at the centre of all life. Humans are considered equal to all other entities” (Vidal, 2011b).

2.7. Conclusion

This chapter has provided a broad overview of the literature with regards to the key concepts in this thesis: Nature, sustainable development, and spirituality.

I opened the chapter by introducing the notion of the human-Nature dis(connection). I then explored the concept of Nature, looking at what Nature is, given that the literature suggests that it is a contested concept and understood in a multiplicity of ways. Underlying the contestation is the question of whether humans are part of or separate from Nature or whether they are Nature. In this discussion I argued that language matters and offered a rationale for my decision to use 'Nature' as opposed to other terms, e.g. Earth, environment or Gaia. I then presented brief sketches of three broad cultural interpretations of Nature (eastern, Western and African); Nature through the lens of different environmental ethical positions (ruthless developer, conservationism, preservationism, ecocentrism, deep ecology, ecofeminism and bioregionalism) and Nature in ancient times. I then discussed some of the key arguments as to why humans are disconnected from Nature (science, loss of indigenous knowledge, colonialism, capitalism, globalisation, religion and technology) and considered some of the presenting symptoms of the disconnection at an individual, societal and global scale. With regards to both 'causes' and 'symptoms', I reiterated that neither should be seen in isolation, but that there is a complex, non-linear interplay between them.

In order to contextualise my argument and expand on the section regarding the symptoms of the human-Nature disconnection, I presented a discussion regarding the planetary polycrisis. I referred to a number of key documents that highlight the socioecological challenges underpinning the polycrisis: the IPCC's 2007 report on global warming; the United Nations 2005 MEA; the UNDP's 1998 *Human Development Report*; the United Nations Population Statistics report; the United Nations Human Settlements Programme's report, *The Challenge of Slums*, the IAASTD's Synthesis Report, and the online reports on peak oil. I pointed out that these challenges cannot be seen in isolation, but that they are multi-dimensional, interconnected and interdependent. In response to the factual, sterile language used in these documents, I argued that perhaps a more heartfelt approach is required in order to wake us to the reality of the situation and presented a poem to evoke an emotional response.

Sustainable development arose as an attempt to respond to the planetary polycrisis. After briefly outlining the historical evolution of sustainable development, I discussed the questions of what are we trying to sustain and what kind of development are we referring to. The literature points to the fact that the notion of sustainable development is plagued with ambiguity, contestation and a multiplicity of attempts to arrive at a concise and generally accepted definition. I presented issues of whether the sustainable aspect refers to sustaining economic growth or sustaining the environment; whether development refers to material or non-material aspects, and the debate regarding wants and needs. I also discussed 'development as freedom', the Human Development Index (HDI) and development as quality of life as alternative approaches to the 'development as economic growth' rationale. In the following section I provided a critical overview of sustainable development in which I argued that mainstream sustainable development is anthropocentric and perpetuates consumption by means of the current economic system and Nature is only seen as valuable if it serves human needs.

In light of the above, I argued that the basis of the socioecological polycrisis is the fact that humans are disconnected and alienated from Nature, and that we face a crisis of spirituality with regards to our relationship with Nature. I proposed that perhaps we should consider adding a fourth pillar to sustainable development: spirituality (the current pillars being ecological, social and economic).

In the subsequent section I proposed that spirituality could serve as a bridge between humans and Nature. I clearly pointed out that spirituality in the context of this thesis does not mean religion and provided a rationale for this. The understanding of spirituality that informed my approach implies a heightened awareness or consciousness, the capacity for deep reflection and compassion, and a profound sense of what it means to part of the web of life – to be another living, breathing, sentient being in Nature without the hierarchies often dictated by religious forms of spirituality. It refers to a spirituality integral to daily life, which informs the decisions about the way we live, and which is expressed through action, i.e. spirit-in-action. I found various ways in which this understanding is embraced in the literature, including ecospirituality, spiritual ecology, nature spirituality, deep ecology and bioregionalism, and offered a number of practices that could perhaps assist in moving towards a deeper connection with Nature, including mindfulness, meditation, rituals, poetry, re-learning from indigenous knowledge and wisdom, and restoration. I acknowledged that religion does have a role to play in the transformation to a more sustainable world, particularly when it is free from domination and

prescription by one religion over another, when indigenous beliefs are acknowledged and all views find expression.

In the final section of this chapter I reflected on what is required for transformation: radical shifts in society, (including political, economic and cultural systems), consumption patterns, values, worldviews and our relationship with Nature. I referred to complexity theory and systems thinking and earth jurisprudence as two examples of transformative paradigms.

In the following chapter I present the research design and methodology which I followed to conduct my research.

Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology

3.1. Introduction

I seek a writing form that enacts a methodology of the heart, a form that listens to the heart, knowing that 'stories are the truths that won't stand still' (Pelias, 2004, 171). In writing from the heart, we learn how to love, to forgive, to heal, and to move forward (Denzin, 2006:423).

In this chapter I present the research design and methodology I followed to gain insight into my research question: Could a spiritual relationship with Nature assist in the transformation to a more sustainable world? This thesis is about relationship and connection – me being connected to the work and connected to those who have shared this journey and participated with me. As such I have tried to represent these connections as authentically as possible through my chosen research design and methodology.

My research can be seen as a “complex tapestry woven of many threads: of passionate intellectual interests, of wounds that linger in complex ways that draw one into a work, of archetypal blessings, of daily work in one’s profession, and of other daily practices and rituals that might seem disconnected to a work but which actually carry something of its depth that is not to be forgotten” (Romanyshyn, 2007:129).

I drew on heuristic inquiry, reflexivity, narrative and poetics in the methodology and design of the research. I also tried to honour the sacred in research. Romanyshyn suggests that perhaps “all our acts of knowing are attempts at remembering what we once knew but have forgotten. Perhaps all our attempts at re-search are sacred acts whose deep motive is salvation and redemption” (2007:268). Or as Reason puts it:

...we need to look at the idea and the experience of inquiry as sacred too...It is a process through which we may honour our human lives and the planet which nurtures us. It is a process through which we live fully in our experience, participating in creating our lives with others and with the many worlds of our experience; and to which we also bring a

loving, imaginative, exploratory, critical, sensemaking reflection which informs our future action and experience (1993:3).

3.2. Research design

3.2.1. Research question and sub-questions

As set out in the opening chapter, my intention in this thesis is to elucidate the question as to whether a spiritual relationship with Nature could assist in the transformation to a more sustainable world.

Sub-questions arising from this question include:

- What is spirituality?
- What characterises a 'spiritual' person?
- What is Nature?
- What is sustainable development?
- What is/constitutes/characterises a spiritual relationship with Nature?
- How and why are people generally considered to be 'disconnected from Nature'?
- How does this disconnection manifest in our daily lives and what implications does it have for sustainable development?
- Among the change agents identified, is there an association between spirituality and a connection with Nature?
- Can one have a relationship with Nature and not be spiritual?
- Can one be spiritual and not have a relationship with Nature?
- Do spiritual people necessarily behave in sustainable ways?
- What kinds of practices could assist in enabling a spiritual relationship with Nature?
- How do these practices inform one's work?
- What role could organised religion play in the transformation to a more sustainable world?
- How do sustainability change agents work for change and what motivates them to do so?

3.2.2. Definitions of key concepts

Based on a comprehensive literature review, I have defined the key concepts of spirituality, Nature, sustainable development, change agent and transformation as follows:

3.2.2.1. Spirituality

Spirituality in the context of this thesis implies a heightened awareness or consciousness, the capacity for deep reflection and compassion, and a profound sense of what it means to part of the web of life – to be another living, breathing, sentient being in Nature without the hierarchies which are often dictated by religious forms of spirituality. I am not referring to an esoteric spirituality, but rather to a spirituality which is integral to daily life, which informs the decisions about the way we live, and which is expressed through action, i.e. spirit-in-action.

3.2.2.2. Nature

Nature is not something ‘out there’ or something separate from human life. It is inescapably part of who I am and I am part of it. For the purposes of this thesis I have defined Nature as: all of life both animate and inanimate, both ‘human-made’ and ‘natural’, for that which is human-made is derived from natural resources. Humans are Nature – there is no separation or distinction.

3.2.2.3. Sustainable development/sustainability

Acknowledging that all living beings, including humans, animals and plants, are part of a complex system in which the ability to thrive individually is intrinsically linked to the ability of others to thrive, sustainable development recognises the rights of all present living beings, including humans, animals and plants, to live a quality life of sufficiency without compromising the ability of future generations of all living beings to live a quality life of sufficiency while remaining within the carrying capacity of the earth.

3.2.2.4. Change agent

A change agent is an individual who acts as a catalyst for change and transformation by questioning the status quo, working innovatively towards a vision of a better future and inspiring others through action. A change agent is conscious of the interconnectedness of the world we live in and insists on systemic change. These individuals could also be referred to as activists or social entrepreneurs. According to the Ashoka Foundation, "Social entrepreneurs often seem to be possessed by their ideas, committing their lives to changing the direction of their field. They are both visionaries and ultimate realists, concerned with the practical implementation of their vision above all else" (2011). The same could be said of change agents.

3.2.2.5. Transformation

Transformation in the context of this study refers to a radical change in "the structure of the industrialised society, the fundamental pattern of consumption and the values informing and perpetuating it" (Hattingh, 2001:7) and "a radical shift in our perceptions, our thinking, our values" (Capra, 1996:4).

3.2.3. *Heuristic inquiry*

I was aware from the outset that this thesis was going to be a personal exploration within an academic context and I have largely followed a heuristic approach in my research. This has enabled me to do justice to the subject that I have explored, to respond with my heart as well as my head, and to honour the contributions of the six change agents who acted as co-researchers in this endeavour.

According to Moustakas, heuristic inquiry is "a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis. The self of the researcher is present throughout the process and, while understanding the phenomenon with increasing depth, the researcher also experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge" (1990:9). Etherington says: "By allowing ourselves to be known and seen by others, we open up the possibility of learning more about our topic and ourselves, and in greater depth" (2004:25).

There are seven stages in heuristic research design: initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication creative synthesis and validation of the heuristic inquiry (Moustakas, 1990). As Etherington points out, these stages do not imply “a linear process, but rather stages to enable the researcher to locate themselves and guide the research” (2004:111). Various processes are at play during these stages: identifying with the focus of inquiry, self-dialogue, tacit knowing, intuition, indwelling, focusing and internal frame of reference (Moustakas, 1990). Summaries of these stages and processes can be seen below in Box 3.1. and Box 3.2.

Box 3.1. Summary of Moustakas's phases of heuristic inquiry

Initial engagement

The task of the first phase is to discover an intense interest, a passionate concern that calls out to the researcher, one that holds important social meanings and personal, compelling implications. The research question that emerges lingers with the researcher, awaiting the disciplined commitment that will reveal its underlying meanings.

Immersion

The research question is lived in waking, sleeping and even dream states. This requires alertness, concentration and self-searching. Virtually anything connected with the question becomes raw material for immersion.

Incubation

This involves a retreat from the intense, concentrated focus, allowing the expansion of knowledge to take place at a more subtle level, enabling the inner tacit dimension and intuition to clarify and extend understanding.

Illumination

This involves a breakthrough, a process of awakening that occurs naturally when the researcher is open and receptive to tacit knowledge and intuition. It involves opening a door to new awareness, a modification of an old understanding, a synthesis of fragmented knowledge, or new discovery.

Explication

This involves a full examination of what has been awakened in consciousness. What is required is organization and a comprehensive depiction of the core themes.

Creative synthesis

Thoroughly familiar with the data, and following a preparatory phase of solitude and meditation, the researcher puts the components and core themes usually into the form of creative synthesis expressed as a narrative account, a report, a thesis, a poem, story, drawing, painting, etc.

Validation of the heuristic inquiry

The question of validity is one of meaning. Does the synthesis present comprehensively, vividly, and accurately the meanings and essences of the experience? Returning again and again to the data to check whether they embrace the necessary and sufficient meanings. Finally, feedback is obtained through participant validation, and receiving responses from others.

Source: Hiles, 2001

Box 3.2. Summary of Moustakas's core processes of heuristic inquiry

Identify with the focus of the inquiry

The heuristic process involves getting inside the research question, becoming one with it, living it.

Self-dialogue

Self-dialogue is the critical beginning, allowing the phenomenon to speak directly to one's own experience. Knowledge grows out of direct human experience and discovery involves self-inquiry, an openness to one's own experience.

Tacit knowing

In addition to knowledge that we can make explicit, there is knowledge that is implicit to our actions and experiences. This tacit dimension is ineffable and unspecifiable, it underlies and precedes intuition and can guide the researcher into untapped directions and sources of meaning.

Intuition

Intuition provides the bridge between explicit and tacit knowledge. Intuition makes possible the seeing of things as wholes. Every act of achieving integration, unity or wholeness requires intuition.

Indwelling

This refers to the conscious and deliberate process of turning inward to seek a deeper, more extended comprehension of a quality or theme of human experience. Indwelling involves a willingness to gaze with unwavering attention and concentration into some aspect of human experience.

Focusing

Focusing is inner attention, a staying with, a sustained process of systematically contacting the central meanings of an experience. It enables one to see something as it is and to make whatever shifts are necessary to make contact with necessary awareness and insight.

Internal frame of reference

The outcome of the heuristic process in terms of knowledge and experience must be placed in the context of the experienter's own internal frame of reference, and not some external frame.

Source: Hiles, 2001

3.2.3.1. *Initial engagement*

According to Moustakas:

Heuristic inquiry is a process that begins with a question or problem which the researcher seeks to illuminate or answer. The question is one that has been a personal challenge and puzzlement in the search to understand one's self and the world in which one lives. The heuristic process is autobiographic, yet with virtually every question that matters personally there is also a social – and perhaps universal – significance (1990:15).

Hiles suggests that in “heuristic inquiry, the research question chooses you, and invariably the research question is deeply personal in origin” (2001). Similarly, Romanyshyn refers to ‘alchemical hermeneutics’ as “that spirit of research which acknowledges that one is called by soul to follow a certain path of inquiry, which, when it is honored, holds together the tension between personal interests, aims, intentions, and complexes of the researcher and the ‘others’ in the work, the ancestors who carry the unfinished business of the soul in the work” (2007:261). He points out that “there is no separation between the work and the person doing the work, the person who, in working on the topic, is also being worked on, and even at times worked over, by the topic” (2007:269).

However, having said this, it is important to point out that I am aware that this is a very fine line to walk as an academic research because, as Romanyshyn argues, “Research is not about the researcher. It is not just a memoir or confession. Rather, it is about a topic that is other to the researcher but which nevertheless finds itself and speaks itself through him or her” (2007:107). Furthermore, “the work that we are called to do is in service of the ancestors, and it is through our archetypal blessings or wounds and our personal complexes that we make the work, which comes through us but is not about us” (Romanyshyn, 2007:121).

While I started to mull over my research topic towards the end of 2009 and finally formulated my research question in early 2010, I had been thinking about the question of spirituality and Nature in relation to sustainable development throughout my Bachelor of Philosophy (BPhil) degree. Several of the modules I completed during this degree stimulated my thinking around this question and, as I pointed out in Chapter One, I began to feel that perhaps this element was missing from the mainstream sustainable development discourse. However, I think the seed of this idea had been dormant in me for a

much longer time. The fertile ground of the degree and my explorations during this time as well as where I was in my own personal growth and spiritual journey provided the life-giving conditions for the idea to germinate and to start growing steadily (see Figure 3.1. below).

During this initial engagement phase, self-dialogue is vital as it is “one’s own self-discoveries, awarenesses, and understandings [which] are the initial steps of the process” (Moustakas, 1990:16). Self-dialogue is not only an internal process, but requires that “one be open, receptive, and attuned to all facets of one’s experience of a phenomenon, allowing comprehension and compassion to mingle and recognizing the place and unity of intellect, emotion and spirit” (Moustakas, 1990:16). The journals which I submitted as part of my degree contained self-dialogue in which I grappled with issues, commented on texts and generally reflected on my experiences both during the course work and in my daily life.

Not only is my research question of deep personal concern, it also embodies the characteristics of a research question identified by Moustakas. According to these characteristics my research question:

- “...seeks to reveal more fully the essence or meaning of a phenomenon of human experience;
- ...seeks to illuminate the qualitative aspects, rather than the quantitative dimensions of the phenomenon;
- ...engages one’s total self and evokes a personal and passionate involvement and active participation in the process;
- ...does not seek to predict or to determine causal relationships;
- it is illuminated through careful descriptions, illustrations, metaphors, poetry, dialogue, and other creative renderings rather than measurements, ratings or scores” (Moustakas, 1990:42).

3.2.3.2. *Immersion*

“The immersion process enables the researcher to come to be on intimate terms with the question – to live it and grow in knowledge and understanding of it” (Moustakas, 1990:28). Indwelling is a process related to the immersion stage. It is “a conscious and deliberate process that allows the researcher to follow clues, hunches and intuitive ideas, to examine the details contained within them and expand their meanings” (Etherington, 2004:124).

Given that I could find very little academic writing about sustainable development which included discussions on spirituality and Nature, I conducted a thorough literature review and drew from a wide range of sources including material on spirituality, ecopsychology, deep ecology, environmental ethics, complexity theory, poetry, and indigenous knowledge. I immersed myself in sourcing and reading as much as I could for almost a year before I began to write my thesis. During my search I tried to gain a deeper understanding of what is meant by spirituality and Nature and revisited the literature on sustainable development which I had encountered during my BPhil degree.

However, this process did not end with the completion of the literature review chapter (Chapter Two). I read and listened to poetry, I explored ideas raised and authors mentioned by the change agents during the interviews, I watched films and attended talks and exhibitions, and had conversations with work colleagues, family members and friends, and with my partner. I also spent time in Nature, gardened, kept a journal of sorts, took photographs, wrote poetry and tried to meditate. Throughout this thesis I have grappled with concepts and ideologies as well as continually questioned my own beliefs. I have experienced a wide range of emotions: from confusion, frustration, anger, despair and sadness to hope, inspiration, gratitude and peace.

The transcription of the interviews was an immersive experience and in some instances the experience of re-listening to the voices of the change agents felt almost as real as the initial interview. It felt as though the change agents were in my home with me while I typed up their words.

I feel strongly that my interest in the research question will not end with the submission of this thesis, but that I will continue to be immersed in it as a life-long quest. As Romanyshyn says, "...research as vocation [is] a journey of homecoming, a journey that is never completed" (2007:123).

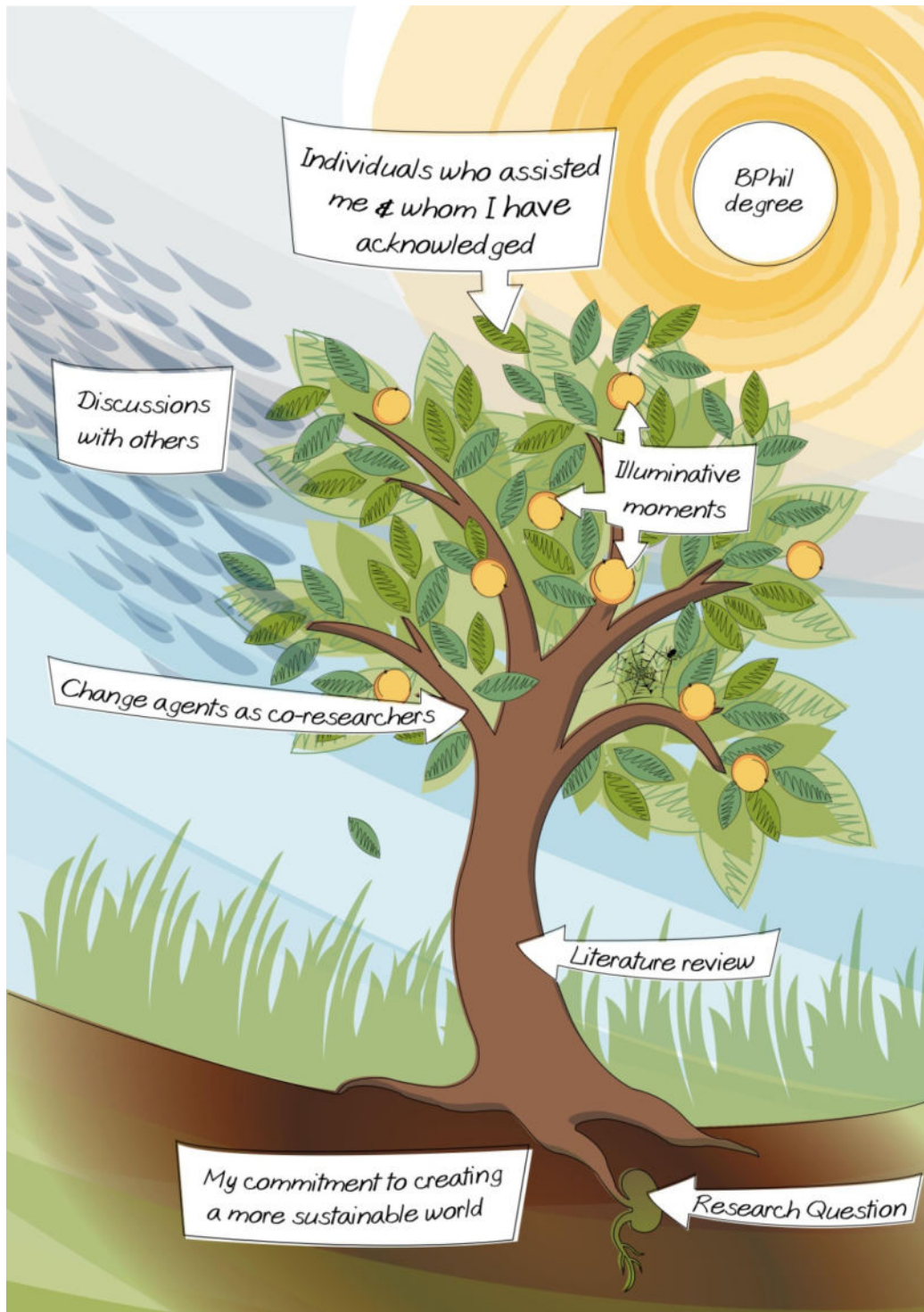


Figure 3.1. Thesis tree: My research experience (Source: adapted from Harding, 2006:240)

3.2.3.3. *Incubation*

While the incubation phase is “the process in which the researcher retreats from the intense, concentrated focus on the question” (Moustakas, 1990:28), I have also alluded to an incubation phase during my BPhil degree during which the idea was present, but I was not consciously focusing on a specific question as yet.

I also experienced an incubation phase during my research. During this time I was not actively working on my thesis, but quietly pondering and mulling over my question. However, at times it felt almost as though I was experiencing ‘writer’s block’ – I wrote in my journal: “I need to try and break the inertia, the paralysis which I feel every time I sit down to confront my thesis” (27 November 2010). However, as Romanyshyn points out, it is in these “moments of ‘time out’ ...[that] a researcher makes a place for the unconscious sense of the work to speak” (2007:141).

3.2.3.4. *Illumination*

According to Etherington, it is during illumination that “new insights and understandings develop, perhaps through recognizing structures or patterns or themes” (2004:111). The stage of illumination in heuristic research is intricately linked with intuition and tacit knowing. As Moustakas puts it, “intuition guides the researcher in discovery of patterns and meanings that will lead to enhanced meanings, and deepened and extended knowledge” (1990:24).

Illumination often came at inopportune times when I was away from my desk and without paper and pen, e.g. in dreams which were forgotten by morning or in the shower or while running! However, the clarity of my thought at these times was often almost epiphany-like. I often felt excited by these epiphanies which re-energised my thinking and my commitment to my topic.

Two experiences stand out as illuminative moments during my research. The first was when the trees surrounding my house were cut down. It was only while trying to come to terms with this act that I realised how it connected me in a very tangible way to my thesis topic. It illustrated on a micro scale the power of wealth and patriarchy, revealed the disconnect between humans and Nature and ignorance of

the interconnectedness of all life, and showed a lack of respect and compassion for trees, and the life they supported, as living beings with an intrinsic right to exist.

The second experience was a rather interesting one when a spider climbed into my ear while I was paddling on the vlei close to where I live. It spent the night in my ear and was only discovered and removed – alive – when I visited the hospital casualty the next morning! I released it into the hospital gardens. I realised that it was no coincidence that it was a *spider* than climbed into my *ear*: Was Nature asking me to *listen* and reminding me about connection and my part in the web of life?

Illumination also occurred during the interviews with the six change agents during which the concepts of spirituality, Nature and sustainable development were clarified and deeper connections were made between these concepts.

Various synchronous events played a role during the illumination stage, e.g. discovering the connection between Nicola Robins and Mphatheleni Makaulule, which I was unaware of when I selected the change agents, the discovery of the magical Platbos Forest in the early part of 2011,²⁸ and the fact that my father chose to accompany me to Venda for my interview with Mphatheleni whose own father had played such a significant role in her life.

In a sense the unearthing of the heuristic approach to research was an illuminative moment in that it helped me to understand and make sense of the research process I had been following intuitively without really being sure of what I was doing!

3.2.3.5. *Explication*

Explication involves “articulating and making sense of the material” (Etherington, 2004:111). Moustakas explains that during this stage “the heuristic researcher utilizes focusing, indwelling, self-searching, and self-disclosure, and recognizes that meanings are unique and distinctive to an experience and depend upon internal frames of reference. The entire process of explication requires that researchers attend to

²⁸ Platbos Forest, near Gansbaai in the Western Cape, is a relic indigenous forest in which some of the trees are more than 1,000 years old (<http://www.platbos.co.za>).

their own awarenesses, feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and judgments as a prelude to the understanding that is derived from conversations and dialogues with others” (1990:31).

As indicated above, heuristic research is not a linear process so the phase of explication was present throughout my research as I read and wrote, trying to make sense of the literature and finding ways to integrate my own thoughts in the structure of this thesis.

3.2.3.6. Creative synthesis

A creative synthesis is “an original integration of the material that reflects the researcher’s intuition, imagination, and personal knowledge of meanings and essences” (Moustakas, 1990:50). The creative synthesis is represented by the complete and final version of thesis which you now have in front of you. However, as Lincoln and Denzin so eloquently point out, “the end of a work such as this should signal neither a conclusion nor a final word, but rather a punctuation in time that marks a stop merely to take a breath” (2005:1115).

3.2.3.7. Validation of the heuristic inquiry

Validity is generally associated with quantitative research, but in heuristic research it is related to meaning. The question of meaning can only be answered by the primary researcher who “has collected and analyzed all of the material – reflecting, sifting, exploring, judging its relevance or meaning, and ultimately elucidating the themes and essences that comprehensively, distinctly, and accurately depict the experience” (Moustakas, 1990:33). With regards to my research, some of the comments I received from the change agents at the end of the interviews validated the meaning of the work:

It’s a fascinating study. I’d love to read what comes out of this in the end...It’s worthwhile work (Lakhani interview).

It’s quite a gift to spend the time thinking about it and talking about it (Friedman interview).

...they are nice questions. It makes [me] think a lot (Makaulule interview).

I received this comment from Nirmala Nair when I requested an interview with her: “I admire your courage to go this route. So I am keen to support you all the way, as your work will be adding value to my work and passion as well”.²⁹

3.2.4. Reflexivity

Reflexivity is present throughout the stages of heuristic inquiry and inherent in the various processes. According to Etherington, reflexivity is

the capacity of the researcher to acknowledge how their own experiences and contexts (which might be fluid and changing) inform the process and outcomes of inquiry. If we can be aware of how our own thoughts, feelings, culture, environment and social and personal history inform us as we dialogue with participants, transcribe their conversations with us and write our representations of the work, then perhaps we can come close to the rigour that is required of good qualitative research (2004:32).

By incorporating reflexivity into research we are able to “cocreate multifaceted and many layered stories that honour the messiness and complexity of human life and enable us to create meaning out of experience” (Etherington, 2004:28).

3.2.5. Qualitative research

Heuristic research is inherently qualitative: “in heuristic methodology one seeks to obtain qualitative depictions that are at the heart and depths of a person’s experience – depictions of situations, events, conversations, relationships, feelings, thoughts, values and beliefs” (Moustakas, 1990:38). In qualitative research, the researcher “is not an objective, politically neutral observer who stands outside and above the study of the social world” (Denzin, 2001:3). As Romanyshyn points out, “any mode of inquiry that attempts to exclude the researcher’s presence stands today on shaky philosophical grounds (2007:209).

²⁹ Nair, N. (nirmala@nirmalanair.com). 3 March 2011. Re: participation in thesis. Email to H. Lockhart (helen.lockhart@aquarium.co.za).

According to Denzin and Lincoln, qualitative research is

a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretative, material practices that make the world visible. The practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretative, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers studying things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (2005:3).

In light of the issue I raised in Chapter Two with regards to the impact of western science on indigenous cultures, it is perhaps worth noting here the point which Denzin and Lincoln make: “qualitative research, in many if not in all of its forms (observation, participation, interviewing, ethnography) serves as a metaphor for colonial knowledge, for power, and for truth” (2005:1). They argue that, historically, research was a means to investigate ‘foreign’ peoples and that “in the colonial context, research becomes an objective way of representing the dark-skinned Other to the white world” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005:1). However, research, both quantitative and qualitative, has evolved substantially and now includes a moral and ethical dimension, embraces issues of social justice and allows for the voices of indigenous researchers to be heard (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). It also includes “the quality of *‘being with and for the other, not looking at’* the other”³⁰ (De Laine, cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005:1118). For example, while interviewing Mphatheleni I was aware of my historical and cultural complicity in many of the issues she raised, but I was there to learn *from* her as a co-researcher rather than just *about* her.

3.2.6. Selection of change agents (co-researchers)

Upon the suggestion of two professors and guidance from my supervisor, I chose to interview six South African change agents who are working for change in the social and environmental arenas. By focusing on only six individuals I was able to source rich, in-depth and personal material. In terms of heuristic inquiry, the change agents are considered co-researchers.

³⁰ Emphasis in the original.

I did not randomly select my co-researchers, but consciously ‘hand-picked’ them based on an awareness or rather an intuitive sense that they work and act differently in the world. With reference to heuristic research, the processes of tacit knowing and intuition were possibly at play here, “guiding...[me]... to untapped aspects of awareness in nonlinear ways that elude analysis and explanation” (Douglass & Moustakas, cited in Hiles, 2002).

Based on their work and on some of the material I had read either written by them or about them, I was interested to find out more from them, specifically with regards to their views on Nature and spirituality and whether they believe that a spiritual relationship with Nature could assist in the transformation to a more sustainable world. I did not have any strict criteria against which to choose the change agents except that I wanted equal gender representation, mixed ethnicity and a variety of age groups. I consciously chose not to interview people who work closely with Nature, e.g. conservationists, environmental educators, etc. as I thought that this would perhaps introduce bias.

3.2.6.1. Brief introduction to the change agents

I was acquainted with Nirmala Nair, Justin Friedman and Simon MAX Bannister before starting this thesis, having collaborated with them on various projects through my own work. I ‘discovered’ and met Muna Lakhani, Nicola Robins and Mphatheleni Makaulule along the journey. In each case I was drawn to the nature of their work and in particular *how* they do this work.

Nirmala is the co-ordinator of the southern African branch of the Zero Emissions Research Initiative (ZERI). I first met her in 2006 when she approached me with the idea of hosting Dr Masaru Emoto and holding a sacred water ceremony in the Two Oceans Aquarium.³¹

Justin is the director of Greenhouse Thinks (an organisation which focuses on sustainability strategy) and the originator of the FLOW (For Love of Water) movement.³² He contacted me in 2009 to organise a

³¹ Dr Emoto is renowned for his work in which he captures water's 'expressions'. Using a powerful microscope in a very cold room along with high-speed photography, he photographs newly formed crystals of frozen water samples. Through this process Dr Emoto has discovered that crystals formed in frozen water reveal changes when specific, concentrated thoughts are directed toward them. He found that water from clear springs and water that has been exposed to loving words shows brilliant, complex, and colourful snowflake patterns. In contrast, polluted water, or water exposed to negative thoughts, forms incomplete, asymmetrical patterns with dull colours.

³² FLOW (For Love of Water): <http://forloveofwater.co.za/>

festival in the Aquarium to launch FLOW and to raise awareness of water and some of the issues associated with it.

Simon MAX Bannister is a young South African artist who draws his inspiration and materials from Nature. We met in 2010 as he was keen to explore the possibility of holding an exhibition in the Aquarium dedicated to bringing the public's attention to the issue of plastic pollution in the oceans.

I heard Muna speak at the launch of a television series in 2010 and was struck by his passion and his bold activist approach with regards to the future of nuclear energy in South Africa. He is currently the national co-ordinator for the Institute for Zero Waste in Africa (IZWA) and a volunteer with Earthlife Africa, a non-profit organisation.

Nicola's name was mentioned to me on several occasions by different people and I was intrigued to find out more, given that she is a trained and initiated *sangoma* working in the sustainability field. She is the co-director of Incite Sustainability which does consulting and strategy in the corporate arena and a co-founder of Raindance Network, which applies southern African teachings to "bridge communities and cultures to facilitate exploration, learning and empowerment for social change" (Raindance Network, 2011).

I first read about Mphatheleni on the Schumacher College website,³³ and was drawn to her because of the work which she is doing to protect the natural sacred sites of the Venda people. According to the Schumacher College website, Mphatheleni is

a dynamic community leader from South Africa, where she is engaged in a process of rediscovering ecological knowledge and practices with the elders and youth of her community. She is currently involved in supporting a legal challenge with other custodians of sacred natural sites of the Venda people. As with other traditions, these sites are understood as vital in maintaining the ecological and energetic equilibrium of ecosystems. Mphathe's father was a chief and a traditional healer. Mpathe grew up mostly in a traditional way, with a great love of nature, culture and her traditions. Her inspiration is to revive Africa's wisdom traditions (Schumacher College, 2009).

³³ The Schumacher College is situated in the United Kingdom and focuses on social and environmental sustainability. <http://www.schumachercollege.org.uk/>

I had some difficulty tracking Mphatheleni down as the Mupo Foundation did not have a website (it was only published on 1 June 2011). A fellow student finally put me in contact with Elfrieda Pschorn-Strauss,³⁴ who works with Mphatheleni and she gave me Mphatheleni's contact details.

All the change agents are based in Cape Town, except Mphatheleni who is lives and works in the Limpopo Province of South Africa in an area which was Venda under the apartheid government.

While this research was an opportunity to explore how other change agents experience the world and how they view the relationship between spirituality and Nature, it was also an opportunity for me to learn from them and to discover ways in which I can enhance my own work and become more effective in this work.

3.3. Strategy of inquiry (Research methodology)

The reflexive interview is not an information gathering tool per se. It is not a commodity that you hire someone to collect for you, or that you pay someone to give you. It belongs to a moral community. On this point I borrow from Leopold (1949: viii) who says of the land: 'We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.' We do not own the land, the land is a community to which we belong. Substitute the words 'interview' and 'research' for the word 'land'. As researchers we belong to a moral community. Doing interviews is a privilege granted us, not a right that we have. Interviews are things that belong to us. Interviews are part of the dialogic conversation that connects all of us to this larger moral community. Interviews arise out of performance events. They transform information into shared experience (Denzin, 2001:24).

In terms of strategy of inquiry or research methodology, I conducted interviews with my co-researchers. According to Fraser, interviews "have the potential to validate the knowledge of 'ordinary' people" (2004:184). Denzin says, "the interview functions as a narrative device which allows persons who are so inclined to tell stories about themselves. In the moment of story-telling, teller and listener, performer

³⁴ Elfrieda Pschorn-Strauss works with GRAIN, <http://www.grain.org> and is the director of the Mupo Foundation.

and audience, share the goal of participating in a experience which reveals their shared same-ness” (2001:25). Interviews seemed the most appropriate strategy of inquiry because through them I could capture the local stories and lived experience of the change agents.

3.3.1. Collection of material

I made initial contact with each of the change agents via email (Appendix A) and then continued to communicate with them via email to make arrangements to interview them. Although I requested artefacts in my initial email, none were forthcoming (except a document from Muna), but I was able to access material online written either by the change agents or about them.

I gathered the material using semi-structured interviews, during which I asked a number of open-ended questions (Appendix D). The interview schedule, which was guided by my sub-questions, was divided into four areas: work, Nature, spirituality and sustainable development. The questions in the work section were devised to provide a context for each change agent in terms of the work they do.

For the most part I followed the order of the interview schedule, but where appropriate or necessary I asked other questions to clarify statements or issues raised by the change agents. Although I was nervous in conducting the first two interviews, particularly as it was the first time that I had met Muna and Nicola, the atmosphere in all six interviews was casual and informal and, while the subject matter was of a deep and personal nature, each of the change agents apparently felt sufficiently safe to share the intimacy of their stories.

At the suggestion of my supervisor I followed up three of the interviews with an additional question: ‘How did you get into/find your way into your current field of work?’ which I emailed to the three change agents whom I had already interviewed and asked them to respond. I then added this question to the interview schedule for the remaining three interviews.

My initial interview schedule included many more questions than the final set of questions. On the advice of a friend I split the questions between the interview and a questionnaire which I was originally going to send out to each of the change agents first before interviewing them as I was concerned about the amount of time which the interviews might require. However, on the advice of my supervisor, I

pulled back from this idea as she felt that “the questionnaire seems to be based on a set of assumptions that, coming out of the blue, are difficult to answer in any depth”.³⁵

Although I recorded each interview, I was extremely anxious that the recording device would fail and so I also took copious notes as back-up throughout the interviews. I then transcribed the interviews myself which, although laborious at times, proved to be a valuable exercise in that I was able to re-immers myself in the interviews and really listen to what each change agent had said; it was a means to stay “intimately connected with the data” (Etherington, 2004:79). According to Braun and Clarke, “the time spent in transcription is not wasted, as it informs the early stages of analysis, and you will develop a far more thorough understanding of your data through having transcribed it” (2006:18). In addition, “the time spent with tape recordings and transcriptions is an important part of the immersion phase of heuristic research: noting our feelings and responses can enhance the depth and quality of the research process” (Etherington, 2004:80). This was my first experience of transcribing and I was astounded by the incomplete nature of our speech – how we use incomplete sentences and incorrect grammar and yet still manage to somehow understand one another!

However, it is important to point out that it is virtually “impossible to produce a transcription ...which completely captures all of the meaning that was communicated in the encounter itself” (Elliot, 2005:51). Body language and facial expressions are obviously not included unless one is able to film the interviews and these non-verbal forms of communication contribute significantly to the overall quality of communication.

3.3.2. Presentation of the change agents’ perspectives/stories

Narrative in its many guises serves as a means to go beyond our facades and reveal our Hearts, to teach us something, to effect change (Faux, 2005).

Faux’s comment resonates strongly with my sense of my research question and methodology. It is echoed in Prendergrast’s poem below, which contemplates the processes of story telling and listening, the connections between narrative, self and meaning making, using metaphors from Nature.

³⁵ Annecke, E. (eve@sustainabilityinstitute.net). 16 March 2011. Re questionnaire & interview. Email to H. Lockhart (helen.lockhart@aquarium.co.za).

thinking narrative (on the Vancouver Island ferry)

A hybrid poem

there is story

then there is

how it is told

there is description

then there is

how it is moved

embodied

enacted

endowed

narrative descends (cloud-like)

from white—

tooth mountains

floats

gathers

condenses

rains

onto

a skyward—

facing face

a narrator

who is also (only)

a character

never omniscient/objective/outside

always situated/subjective/inside
who sings in
the poet's voice
aesthetic
authentic
haunted by the other (the witness)

who channels story
streams meaning
waterfalls metaphor
self over self
over character
over self

who tumbles
bright-pebbled memories
into roaring rivers

who carries
breath- suspended
reader & storyteller
along ancient
arterial passages

toward deltas of
possible wisdom
& the sea

(Prendergast, 2007:743–744)

Prendergast's poem seems to capture the essence of narrative and highlights some of the key aspects thereof:

- narrative represents the story, it is not *the* story but only a description thereof;
- the narrative perspective is always subjective;
- narrators and readers are intertwined, each bringing themselves into the story, and in so doing changing the story and one another in the process; and
- stories are never our own, but bear witness to the stories we gather throughout our lives.

According to Hiles, “Narrative is inherently a heuristic process, and as such provides a key way in which to investigate human authenticity” (2002). He cites Polkinghorne who argues:

Our lives are ceaselessly intertwined with narrative, with stories that we tell and hear told, with stories that we dream or imagine or would like to tell. [...] We live immersed in narrative. Recounting and reassessing the meanings of our past actions, anticipating the outcomes of our future projects, situating ourselves at the intersection of several stories not yet completed.

As Mahongo points out, “No people in the world can survive without telling their stories. To tell your history makes you human, because your humanity comes from your story and your background” (2004:5).

It is for these reasons that I have chosen to present the perspectives of the change agents as narrative summaries (which include poetic transcriptions/re-presentations and images) in Chapter Four (the full transcriptions are included in the Appendices E–J). Each summary opens with a brief introduction to the setting of the interview to provide a context as to when and where the interview took place, i.e. I have set the scene for each interview. Given that my research focuses on the perspectives of the change agents and how they view and interpret the key concepts of spirituality, Nature and sustainable development, and whether they believe that a spiritual relationship with Nature could assist in the transformation to a more sustainable world, it seemed appropriate that I present the ‘data’ from the interviews in detailed narrative summaries. In this way I was able to honour their contributions and let them speak for themselves, albeit through me.

I have to admit that I had not planned to do this from the outset: it was only while typing up the transcriptions that I realised that I had a responsibility to the change agents to portray the richness and depth of their contributions in a meaningful way. In some way this process mirrors that spoken about by

Ward (2011) who speaks about the dilemmas of presenting the contributions of her participants. She says:

I wanted to foreground the stories without an intrusive researcher presence; I wanted the reader to experience the experience. To solve this dilemma, I decided to present the participants' stories in a chapter of their own, thus honoring them and creating flow and continuity. Reading pages of stories without interruption allows the reader to be immersed in the experience and sense the verisimilitude, thus making their own interpretation before they read my academic response in the subsequent chapter (2011:357).

Incorporated in the narrative summaries are poems created from the spoken words of the change agents. Poetic transcription is the "creation of poemlike compositions from the words of interviewees" (Glesne, 1997:202). Poetic transcriptions connect not only researcher to the interviewee, but "the reader is [also] invited into the research space" (Ward, 2011:356).

Poetic transcriptions or re-presentations are a form of evocative writing which "create emotional as well as cognitive responses" (Ward, 2011:358). Glesne points out that "through accessing the senses, poetry makes one pause, reflect, feel" (1997:213). According to Brady, "the ultimate aim of poetic expression is to touch the universal through the particular, to evoke and enter into discourse about the sublime, to move the discourse to what defines us all – what we share as humans" (2005:998).

It appears that there is not one particular method of poetic transcription and for the most part I used intuition and my own emotional responses as to which sections of the interviews to turn into poetry. I felt that these particular sections lent themselves to poetry because they either spoke of deep emotion or deep experience, or because they were particularly evocative, because they were heartfelt responses rather than intellectual ones, or because they restored a connection in some way, either to ourselves, to spirit or to Nature. Wherever possible I kept the actual words spoken by the change agent, but at times made adjustments to enhance the flow.

3.4. Interpretation and discussion

According to Mouton, “The aim of analysis is to understand the various constitutive elements of one’s data through an inspection of the relationships between concepts, constructs or variables, and to see whether there are any patterns or trends that can be identified or isolated, or to establish themes in the data” (2001:108). Chapter Five presents a discussion of some of the key insights as presented by the change agents. In order to present this discussion, I conducted a thorough exploration of the interview transcripts and conducted a thematic analysis, carefully sifting through the material in search of common threads, recurring words and emerging themes. Braun and Clarke suggest that “a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (2006:10). Thematic analysis “involves the searching across a data set – be that a number of interviews or focus groups, or a range of texts – to find repeated patterns of meaning” (Braun & Clarke, 2006:15). Keeping my research objective in mind, i.e. to promote and encourage deeper conversations about what a more sustainable world could look like, I looked for illuminative points in each interview which show how we might transform to such a world and ‘clustered’ these together as themes. Simple coding was done by highlighting words and phrases common across the interviews, e.g. ‘heart’, and cutting and pasting sections of the interviews into categories, e.g. ‘non-money economy’ and ‘future generations’. I then sorted these into various themes such as ‘a heart-based economy’, inter-generational learning, and values, healing and deeper reflection.

3.5. Ethical considerations

Having read the ‘Ethical clearance of proposed research projects’ form (Muller, 2009:58) and the chapter on research ethics in Mouton (2001:238–248), I am not aware of any ethical implications of this research project. All the information was treated with sensitivity.

I informed each of the change agents as to the nature and purpose of my research before they agreed to participate in the research and each of them signed a participant consent form (see Appendix B). I indicated to them that should they prefer I would respect their anonymity and use a pseudonym for them instead. They all chose to be identifiable in this thesis. The change agents were free to withdraw their participation in this research at any stage during the research process. Copies of the final thesis together with the recording of the interview and the transcription thereof will be made available to each

of my participants once the thesis has been accepted by the University (see Appendix C for the ethical clearance form).

3.6. Conclusion

In this chapter I have explained the research design and methodology I applied in an attempt to answer my research question. I have outlined the stages of heuristic inquiry that I followed during the research process, briefly introduced the change agents and how I got to know them and provided the rationale for presenting their perspectives as narrative summaries in which poetic re-presentations are embedded. I have also given a brief prelude to Chapter Five in which I discuss and analyse how my co-researchers view Nature, spirituality and sustainable development.

According to Moustakas, “heuristic research processes include moments of meaning, understanding, and discovery that the researcher will forever hold on to and savor. Feelings, thoughts, ideas and images have awakened that will return again and again. A connection has been made that will forever remain unbroken and that will serve as a reminder of a lifelong process of knowing and being” (2001:273).

In closing this chapter and in honour of the sanctity of research, I quote from Reason who says:

I wish to heal the barrenness of the isolated intellect by bringing it into relationship with emotional, practical, aesthetic and spiritual rigour, and to discover what these are. Through a process of human inquiry we may learn to walk in spirit, walk in beauty, walk in wisdom, walk in skill, and we may through this learn what we mean by spirit, beauty, truth and skill...maybe that is one way of seeing the quest (1993:8).

Chapter Four: Narrative Summaries: Perspectives of South African Change Agents

Story has the power to bring soul back to the world: old stories about the Earth and its landscape, new stories that give us fresh ideas about connecting to the Earth and each other. Stories can inflame the imagination. Stories about our families and ancestors, stories about the trees and animals and rocks around us, stories about the stars and planets and gods can help us find and remember our place and anchor us in time and space. In re-storying the world, we can restore it (Robinson, 2009:29).

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter I present the perspectives and stories of the six South African change agents whom I selected to interview and who are working for transformation towards a more sustainable world. I conducted semi-structured interviews with each of them during which I asked a set of open-ended questions (see Appendix D). I divided the questions into four focus areas: work, Nature, spirituality and sustainable development, and have included the questions here for ease of reference.

What follows is a narrative summary of each interview (the full transcripts can be viewed in Appendices E–J). In each case I have set the scene of the interview and then proceeded with the narrative.

You will discover as you read through this chapter that I have transformed some of the change agents' quotes into poetry rather than leaving them in prosaic form. I felt that these particular quotes lent themselves to poetry because either they spoke of deep emotion or deep experience, or because they were particularly evocative, because they were heartfelt responses rather than intellectual ones, or because they restored a connection in some way, either to ourselves, to spirit or to Nature.

4.2. Muna Lakhani (see Appendix E)

I meet Muna on the morning of 2 April 2011 at his home. I am nervous because I have not met him before and this is my first interview. I'm not quite sure how to handle it – whether to engage in a conversational manner or whether to adhere to my list of questions. When he meets me at the gate Muna says he thinks that he has met me before – “probably at some meeting or other”. He invites me in and offers me tea. I immediately notice drums and guitars standing to one side of the room. I also notice two bumper stickers on his table – one carries an anti-nuclear statement and the other a ‘no fracking in the Karoo’ statement.³⁶

We sit down. I set up the recording device (which also makes me nervous as I haven't used it before) and proceed with the interview.

4.2.1. Work

Tell me about the work you do.

How did you get into/find your way into your current field of work?³⁷

What global and local trends do you see currently impacting on your work?

Which of these trends give you hope for the future?

Originally from Durban but now living in Cape Town, Muna Lakhani describes himself as an advocate for environmental and social justice. He is currently the national co-ordinator for the Institute for Zero Waste in Africa (IZWA) and a volunteer with Earthlife Africa, a non-profit organisation. He is not formally employed and much of his work is voluntary. He says, “I am busy living my passion”.

At present he is involved with two significant campaigns: an anti-nuclear campaign and a campaign against the proposed hydraulic fracturing (fracking) for shale gas in the Karoo. He is also challenging the City of Cape Town's plan to extract methane gas from its landfill sites in order to convert it to electricity and is waiting to comment on the national waste management strategy. Muna confirms that he has “a

³⁶ Fracking refers to ‘hydraulic fracturing’.

³⁷ After the suggestion of my supervisor on 21 April 2011, I added this question, but since I had already interviewed Muna, I pose the question in an email to him. I have included his response in this section for the sake of continuity.

small soft spot for animal rights” and will be tackling Cape Nature Conservation and South African National Parks (SANParks) on their plan to euthanise baboons on the Cape Peninsula. However, his main focus in 2011 is to continue work on a document which outlines how South Africa can make the transition to a future economy (*Shifting South Africa to the Next Economy: Green Growth – Towards a Green Economy, Rich with Green Jobs*). He says: “Many people...have some vague idea of what this future could look like, but [they] also understand that some things are entrenched in our system so the systemic issues are what people are grappling with”.

According to Muna, he became engaged in the work that he does because

once it became clear that we had won the political struggle, i.e. the vote was on its way, the next challenge was the quality of life for our people, given that the vote cannot be ‘eaten’ – so it seemed a natural transition to look to issues that were critical to quality of life, and what could be more basic than clean air, pure water, healthy food, safe energy, decent and adequate housing, sustainable sanitation, and so on”.³⁸

*as long as a child goes hungry,
a sister is unable to walk safely wherever she goes,
or that people freeze to death, or have their homes washed away,
particularly living in shacks,
or having to live near a waste dump, or a polluting factory,
the struggle indeed continues...*³⁹

Muna cites climate change, the global economic meltdown, the rising oil price and the “so-called nuclear renaissance” as some of the global trends which are impacting on his work. With regards to climate change, he argues that “we have this massive focus on a symptom with relatively little or comparatively little being done about the root causes...and the focus on mostly one particular part of that system mainly carbon dioxide is of deep concern to many of us”. He is concerned, that while other countries are questioning, if not moving away from nuclear as a source of energy after the nuclear crisis which Japan experienced a result of the earthquake on 11 March 2011, South Africa is continuing on its path to build

³⁸ Lakhani, M. (muna@iafrica.com). 24 April 2011. RE: a question re your work. Email to H. Lockhart (helen.lockhart@aquarium.co.za).

³⁹ Lakhani, M. (muna@iafrica.com). 24 April 2011. RE: a question re your work. Email to H. Lockhart (helen.lockhart@aquarium.co.za).

new nuclear stations. He also refers to the belief, particularly in the 'North and the West', that 'greening' capitalism is the solution, albeit a "false solution" to the problems being experienced in the world today.

Locally, Muna argues that he finds it problematic that domestic users in South Africa are bearing the brunt of rising electricity costs and "subsidis[ing] the huge volume users of electricity like smelters and mines". He states that "all 50 million of us are using...18% of electricity [when] one company that uses 10% pays below cost, [and] creates .002 and .005% of our jobs in GDP, aren't asked to do anything...it's a wholly unjust and imbalanced system...we don't actually have an electricity crisis in this country, it's a complete myth".

Further, he argues that there is very little understanding of what a green economy entails and that people tend to think of green jobs as just recycling, with building wind turbines and solar power having recently been added to the list.

Another local trend Muna highlights is the fact that environmental issues were once considered to be an elitist concern and had little, if anything, to do with the poor. He recognises that there is a now a growing realisation that "every struggle of the working class and the poor are intimately related to issues of environmental justice".

When I ask him what gives him hope for the future, Muna says:

*what gives me hope is
the ability of our people,
particularly the poorest of the poor,
to be resilient despite the odds...
to feel compassion despite their circumstances,
[this] is one of the things that makes me get up every morning.*

He is, however, critical of the wealthier classes whom he claims, in spite of being well educated and having access to various forms of information, e.g. television, Internet etc., are less likely than the poor to engage with and support issues. He states that "the wealthier classes aren't prepared to get off their

butts, they think sitting on Facebook wins campaigns – you know you can’t win campaigns by sitting on your arse”.

4.2.2. Nature

What early memories/experiences do you have of Nature?

Have you experienced times in Nature which you would consider as turning points in your life? Please describe one such moment.

What do you understand by the concept of a person having a “relationship with Nature”?

Do you feel that you have a relationship with Nature?

How and why are people generally considered to be “disconnected from Nature”?

How does this disconnection manifest in our daily lives and what implications does it have for us?

How do you think we can restore connections with Nature?

Although Muna grew up in the “concrete jungle” of a city, he recalls family holidays on a farm up the north coast of KwaZulu-Natal where he would play amongst the sugar cane and groves of indigenous trees as a small boy. However, he believes his first experience of Nature was his mother saying: “respect all life”. Given that both sides of his family, going back fifteen to twenty generations, were vegetarians, he believes that this “rule” was based “partially on the culture that my ancestors come from but...predominantly driven by compassion”. He says “So I think that sort of philosophical understanding was what actually was the first connection that I can think of as a child”.

Muna doesn’t recall any turning points in Nature per se, but recounts an unusual experience in which he discovered he could “see wind” while on an outing in the Valley of a Thousand Hills in KwaZulu-Natal. For Muna this experience highlighted the fact that “we have abilities beyond ourselves that we don’t understand or [that] we are unaware of”.

While he considers himself to have a relationship with Nature, Muna argues that “we for various reasons don’t see ourselves as part of nature we see ourselves apart, but humanity’s history was different and until literally a couple of thousand years ago...we were an automatic part of nature”.

*if one is genuinely human
then you can't help but
be connected with nature...
so it's actually an unnatural state
to be in, not to be
connected to nature.*

As to why people are generally considered to be disconnected from Nature, Muna cites mainstream religion as having given people some kind of “moral justification” to “use [nature] as we wish.....nature being something outside of us and something that is there for us to use...I would venture the word is actually *ab-use*”. He also contends that greed plays a role, saying “the more greedy a person is the more successful we think they are which I think it is quite frightening. It shows a massive disconnect not just from planet, but from people as well”. Muna also argues, by way of an example of a cartoon by satirist artist Zapiro (which Muna later sent me by email⁴⁰ – see Figure 4.1. below), that people have become “unskilled...in how to think. The what is actually easy...what to think is easy but how to think, we [have] lost that skill”.

According to Muna, South Africa has moved from an “us-we” culture to an “I-me” culture in spite of all the talk about *ubuntu*.⁴¹ He contends that “the American dream is the dream of our people, understandably so, but still not unacceptable and the rampant capitalism has become an aspirational model”. He illustrates his argument by using an example from Ad Busters:

*so firstly they tell you you're not cool
so they attack your self esteem and say...
if you want be cool
you gotta have this pair of shades except this pair of shades
costs a thousand bucks so you work harder
more time less time
with your family and friends people who love you and*

⁴⁰ Lakhani, M. (muna@iafrica.com). 3 April 2011. RE: thank you. Email to H. Lockhart (helen.lockhart@aquarium.co.za).

⁴¹ *Ubuntu* is an African philosophy which implies that a person is a person because of other persons. “Ubuntu speaks particularly about the fact that you can't exist as a human being in isolation. It speaks about our interconnectedness” (Tutu, 2008).

*then you get this pair of shades
but the action of reaching that stage means that
your support structure has engaged less with you
cos you're busier working
so your self esteem hasn't had a chance to revive which sets you up
perfectly
for the next one and says
Aah but you haven't got these takkies and
you haven't got this t-shirt and
you've haven't got this car and
you haven't got this house
so it's a
constant
vicious
downward
spiral
that
we
get
sucked
into...*

Muna says "if I could give people a gift I would give everybody a high sense of self esteem I suspect we'd solve the majority of our problems".

He also points out that, while many people tend to agree that hunger, war and homelessness are undesirable, they still pursue better cell phones, bigger cars and the latest fashion so "there's a disconnect [between the fact] that those desires are the root causes of the things they don't like – like homelessness, ill health, hunger etc.". Further, he maintains that people are disconnected from themselves and says:

We've lost the ability to listen to ourselves and we do things despite what our intuition and instincts tell us...we've become embodied in the physical world... to replace the other needs

that we have as human beings the world has created opiates that are supposed to satisfy those instincts and intuitions and those opiates include religion, sport, consumerism, popular culture and so on.



Figure 4.1. © 2006–2011 Zapiro (all rights reserved). Source: used with permission from <http://www.zapiro.com>. For more Zapiro cartoons visit <http://www.zapiro.com>.

Muna's final point in response to the question about restoring connections with Nature is that context is often lacking. He questions whether behaviour would change if people had the full facts about how and with what resources a certain product is manufactured, e.g. a cell phone or a MacDonald's burger. According to Muna, the latter requires "some nine to eleven square metres of rainforest". He supports this statement by referring to a World Watch Institute report which he says claims that "one of the large causes, equally large causes of green house gases and livestock production is deforestation. So they analysed global deforestation and found that 70% of deforestation occurs because of the production of

meat". Using other statistics to further corroborate his argument, Muna makes the point that "if we change our diets and bought less shit, we'd pretty much solve climate change".

4.2.3. Spirituality

What do you understand by the term/concept of spirituality?

What is/constitutes/characterises a spiritual relationship with Nature?

Do spiritual people necessarily behave in sustainable ways?

Do religions have a role to play in the transformation to a more sustainable world? If so, what kind of role?

Do you participate in regular spiritual practices, rituals, etc.? Please explain.

Can one have a spiritual relationship with Nature and if so, what does this entail?

Muna believes that the term 'spirituality' is generally misunderstood and that it is "conflated with religion". He does not consider himself particularly spiritual and thinks that the use of 'god' is "paternalistic, sexist and objectionable" given that "women make up the majority of the people on the planet". People tend to think he is spiritual because he lives consciously and does good work, but he says, "I don't see anything of this being outside myself...everything's connected". He substantiates this, saying, "I don't see a difference between connectedness and spirituality". Muna suggests that energy is perhaps the closest thing to encapsulate this because "everything has energy and energy exists at many levels". Although quantum physics attempts to explain this, Muna argues that he does

things that Western/Northern mainstream peer reviewed research can't explain yet we do it all the time – they say it's scientifically impossible...we've just done it so what's wrong? I am doing it...isn't science supposed to be evidence based? So here's the proof your science can't explain it doesn't mean to say...my practice is wrong. I've just done it so your science must explain it. If it can't then it must mean your science is flawed or incomplete at best.

Because "spirituality...smacks of a practice", Muna suggests that "we replace the word spirit with energy...to me they're not two different things...then it just reconfirms that we're connected to everything".

When I ask him the question ‘What characterises a spiritual relationship with Nature?’ Muna first points out that “the way you’ve structured this implies Nature is separate which I don’t think is the intent of your work”. He argues that “Nature’s not a thing outside of us so either we’re connected with ourselves in which case we’re automatically connected to everything else or we’re not...I don’t see nature as something outside of us so I find it difficult to relate to the question”. Again he points out his difficulty with the word ‘spirituality’ and suggests that it is “respect which is lacking” in regards to Nature.

Although he agrees that religion could play a role to play in the transformation to a more sustainable world, he expresses concern that all the mainstream religions are based on texts which were written by men of a certain class or mindset and who had a particular agenda in mind. He believes the fact that these texts are still taken literally today is problematic. However, he acknowledges that “the glimmer in the darkness is that all the religions claim to be love and mercy-based” and this is the “foundation for transformation”.

*we need passion and...
we need compassion
and I believe that
with compassion and passion
anything’s possible.*

Muna does not participate in any regular spiritual practices or rituals. He says: “Whatever practice there is, is a part of my life, it’s what I do, so I suppose every time I eat something I feel a sense of wonder that I live on this generous planet that provides this amazing food...I think my practice is a sense of wonder”. He believes that “there’s no need for ritual because every act should be embodied with meaning or intent...not meaning...meaning is a dangerous word that so I suppose intentional living...”.

He responds to the question as to whether one can have a spiritual relationship with Nature by saying: “One should have a deep connection with our environment as opposed to nature as a subset thereof...the way the questions are structured implies a continued disconnectedness – it comes from a paradigm of disconnection so I don’t support it the word [Nature] in its isolation”. He asserts that I have used the wrong word (Nature as opposed to environment) and that this is “a reflection of the paradigm”.

4.2.4. Sustainable development

What do you think the world needs if we are to overcome the global crises facing us?

Do you think consumption and materialism are problematic? If so, why?

How do you think we can overcome consumption and materialism?

What is your view on why there is suffering in the world?

In your view what is the world 'calling' for?

How do you think we should go about 'sustainable development' in South Africa?

Do you think there is a relationship between Nature, spirituality and sustainable living? Please describe this relationship.

When I ask Muna what he thinks the world needs if we are to overcome the global crises facing us, he is unsure at which level to answer – “personal level, cosmic level, global level?” In response to me confirming that he should answer from a personal point of view, he says, “I think we just need better self esteem. You know just to know that we’re fine and loved and lovable and beautiful and amazing beings and that we are not vested outside of ourselves. That what’s vested outside of ourselves is not a reflection of how beautiful we are. Our sense of self worth does not lie in things”. He refers to a study done on happiness and comments that “certain needs and wants both are perfectly valid in the human condition beyond them there’s no more happiness to be found because happiness does not lie outside ourselves”. He argues that people tend to think they will be happy when “I have a bigger house. I’ll be happier when I have a bigger car. I’ll be happy when my kitchen’s done up. You know whenever it’s not going to happen. It’s a myth. What’s wrong with being happy now? Why must it be deferred? It’s what religion sells. Don’t worry you’ll go to heaven if you do A,B, and C”. Muna says he is happy in the here and now – “not joyously, blissfully happy every day, but I’m not discontented. Why would I be?...Is my life perfect? No, not all. I’m sure it’s got a long way to go before it hits anything close to perfection. But it doesn’t stop me from being happy”.

As to why there is suffering in the world, Muna argues that overconsumption by the North, a lack of equity, the current economic system and aspirational model, and politics are the main sources of suffering. He maintains that if the current food available on the planet was shared equally among all six billion people there would be “enough to make us fat far less survive”. Although he doesn’t remember the actual numbers, he did some research in which he “looked at housing, sanitation, potable water, pre

and post healthcare, primary healthcare you know like the basics one or two other things if we wanted to solve that we would need to take only one week of the money spent on the global arms trade to resolve that issue". With regards to politics, Muna refers to the "issue of power...I see religion as a means of gaining power over people; I see business as a means of gaining power over people". He contends that "politics is another whole world and I don't see enough of it in your paper. Everything is political. Everything. The food choices we make, the music we listen to – it's all political".

When I ask him what he thinks the world is calling for, Muna says:

*I don't have a mandate to save the planet.
She certainly didn't vote for me so
I don't have a mandate to save the planet
neither do I have a mandate to save humanity.
Six billion people on the planet did not put me where I am
...I'm not a chosen one of any kind.*

However, he believes that the world is calling for "rescue from ourselves". He says "if we stopped thinking with our pockets and egos and rather thought with our hearts my sense is that all the good wonderful things would come to the fore". While he would not have a problem "if you told me that tomorrow at noon all six billion of us would die", what does concern him "is that the poor and the innocent suffer through no fault of their own". He also concerned with the number of people he has met, particularly in Cape Town, who believe in ascension as a form of rescue. He has noted that these people

are generally comfortably off, very green, well educated, understand all sorts of things, but they're in complete denial about their lifestyles even though they're living what they think is a green lifestyle and have forsworn anything negative in their lives...I think they are of the kind that say if we go OM enough the nuclear industry will vanish and all these wind turbines will sprout from cane fields...which I find very disconnected.

*if I wasn't an optimist
I wouldn't be an activist
if I didn't think that [a] better world was possible*

*I wouldn't be doing what I am doing...
we're the day we've been waiting for
to give life to what we are calling for
lies in our hands and then the decision
to act or not is
in our hands
and if we don't act then
we have nobody
but ourselves to blame.*

As to how he thinks we should go about sustainable development in South Africa, Muna responds: "Sustainable development is as intelligent as military intelligence". He argues that sustainable development is an abused term and states that the generally accepted definition of sustainable development associated with the Brundtland Commission, i.e. satisfying the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to satisfy their needs is actually not what was said at the time. According to Muna, "if you read the Brundtland Commission she [Gro Harlem Brundtland] said sustainable development is the notion of discipline within which we are able satisfy the needs etc....[however] the discipline part is avoided because it doesn't suit the vested interests". He points out that "the notion of development requires unpacking" because there is a lack of understanding of what this means. He contends "that the accepted understanding of the word development...[is] that if we do everything in the green way we can all live like Americans like...wealthy people". However, he goes further to say that "the problem of the world is overdevelopment" given that there are enough resources for everyone to live well and by 'well' he means "where the basic needs and wants are taken care of and we can have a really good quality of life which is after a certain point as I've explained disconnected from money and things and all the rest of it". He concludes his answer by saying "the notion of sustainable development needs rewording".

In response to the final question about the relationship between Nature, spirituality and sustainable living, Muna says "I think they're the one and the same". He again points out that he has difficulty with the words 'spirituality' and 'Nature', but confirms that

I don't think how one could live sustainably without being connected to everything...if you're attempting to live sustainably in the accepted sense of the word then it's got to be

done with intent which is for me the version that passes for spirituality and if my intent is not to harm people and planet...If living sustainably means not harming people and planet or any life on the planet or as little as possible if one does it with intent then it's all linked.

In closing he says:

*I wouldn't say nature
I would say planet
I wouldn't say spirituality
I would say intent
Sustainable living...
living within the carrying capacity of the planet
then I think it's highly achievable
it's easy to do actually.*

I thank Muna for his time and contribution and he responds, "It's a fascinating study. I'd love to read what comes out of this in the end". I tell him that he will indeed get to read it as I will be giving all my participants a copy of the complete thesis as well as copies of the interview recording and the transcript. He says "Thank you for making the time. It's worthwhile work".

He then has to leave in a hurry as he has to meet someone at the station, after which he is due in Khayelitsha to run a workshop on nuclear energy.

4.3. Nicola Robins (see Appendix F)

Nicola and I had planned to meet at the Southern Right Hotel in Glencairn on the afternoon of 7 April 2011. I arrive early to discover that the hotel has closed down. I have a moment of uncertainty as to whether I am in fact in the right place and have a moment of panic when I realise that I do not have any contact numbers for Nicola (although I had given her my cell number via email). Fortunately Nicola arrives, somewhat late, and we then try to find somewhere to sit down and talk. We eventually head off to Simonstown to a small coffee shop. En route Nicola asks me about my thesis and how I linked up with her. I tell her that her name was mentioned to me by a couple of people and that I had read articles and information about her on the Internet. She asks who else I am interviewing and so I tell her – she knows

of all my participants, but knows Mphatheleni Makaulule from Venda well as they have worked together! I was not aware of this. She tells me that the people in Venda are still very close to Nature in spirit – I wish I could remember her exact words as they were profound. She tells me that Mphatheleni will know her as ‘Tim’ – which is the name of her paternal grandfather. This is in line with tradition of ancestral lineage which Nicola later explains during the interview.

I ask Nicola if she is happy for me to record the interview to which she agrees so long as I don’t release it as a podcast or on to the Internet and that I don’t use the interview if I were to write a book. I agree to this and we start the interview.

4.3.1. Work

Tell me about the work you do.

How did you get into/find your way into your current field of work?⁴²

What global and local trends do you see currently impacting on your work?

Which of these trends give you hope for the future?

Nicola Robins has three jobs. She is the co-director of a company, Incite Sustainability, which focuses on strategy, communications and advocacy in the arena of corporate sustainability. She has a private practice in which she “coaches” clients on an individual basis, using a framework of traditional southern African teachings. She is also the co-director (with Niall Campbell) of Raindance Network which focuses primarily on “communities that are interested in bringing together traditional African thinking, and using it to inform an approach to challenges raised today in relation to climate change, sustainability, sustainable living, conflict anything really – that we as people working within a predominantly western framework are struggling to get right”.

Nicola is also a trained and initiated *sangoma* in the southern African healing tradition. This came about as a result of an experience in Australia,

when it seemed the mountain spoke to me regarding a particular diamond mining venture in the Kimberley mountains. It was not possible to make sense of what I experienced in my

⁴² After the suggestion of my supervisor on 21 April 2011, I added this question, but since I had already interviewed Nicola, I posed the question in an email to her. I have included her response in this section for the sake of continuity.

western frame of mind; what followed was a period of intense upheaval – emotionally and spiritually. This persisted for three years, despite every attempt to find a cure within the various disciplines of western medicine, to the point that I was literally unable to work. The African cure for this kind of sickness required me to become a *sangoma*. In my experience, this ‘cure’ is profound and has been transformative.⁴³

In terms of the global and local trends which Nicola sees currently impacting on her work, she cites three main trends: “the decline in resources, increasing consumption and a growing gap or disparity in people’s access to resources”. These fundamental drivers are “giving rise to a whole lot of trends, one of which is an interest in sustainability and those sort of things, another is the interest in traditional knowledge because it seems that our western knowledge is lacking in certain respects in providing us with adequate tools to address the level and nature of the complexity of the challenges facing us”. She highlights social networking as another major trend through which people are able to get messages out and engage with one another.

With respect to local trends, Nicola says, “I don’t know if they really affect me because I think I would be doing what I do anyway”, but she does acknowledge that, post the South African democratic elections, there is an “interest in things African and in looking at ways to inform our policies and our programmes with the kind of traditions that have been here a long time so inform them with thinking and consciousness that developed out of this soil”. According to Nicola, “South Africa is a fascinating country where there is a huge amount of knowledge, huge amount of energy, huge amount of inspiration, enthusiasm, a lot of challenges for...people who are prepared to work together in sometimes unexpected ways to address them”.

While Nicola believes that “there’s always cause for hope”, she recognises that we are “going into a period of significant disruption and a necessary period of transition and accelerated change”. She continues, “One can say it’s hopeful because we know that change is inevitable, but it is also a future that I think is going to be a difficult one”. In South Africa she sees both open and closed-mindedness: some people are prepared “to learn and...look...at new ways to approach difficult challenges...

⁴³ Robins, N. (nicola@incite.co.za). 15 May 2011. RE: a question re your work. Email to H. Lockhart (helen.lockhart@aquarium.co.za).

[but]...some people are only prepared to look in a very shallow way at the fundamental messages that are coming up from different approaches...they are really not prepared to deeply interrogate”.

4.3.2. Nature

What early memories/experiences do you have of Nature?

Have you experienced times in Nature which you would consider as turning points in your life? Please describe one such moment.

What do you understand by the concept of a person having a “relationship with Nature”?

Do you feel that you have a relationship with Nature?

How and why are people generally considered to be “disconnected from Nature”?

How does this disconnection manifest in our daily lives and what implications does it have for us?

How do you think we can restore connections with Nature?

Nicola is not sure how to respond to my question regarding her early memories or experiences of Nature. She asks: “Do you mean the outside world or do you include my sense of myself and do you include memories that I’ve accessed through process of trance or do you mean just ordinary memories?” She admits that she will find it difficult to answer, but says that two things stand out for her: “a sense of awe and at the same time...disconnectedness”. Her earliest memory “which is not a conscious memory, but was brought through

unconscious

being born

my grandfather...in spirit form

...coaxing me into the world

by showing me

how exquisite trees and leaves and flowers were.

while I was being born he took me out in spirit form

and walked me through the garden and...

coaxed me into embodiment...

I accepted that from him

but asked that in return

*if should I need him at any time
that he would come back and
walk with me in my life.*

She sums up her answer, saying “the earliest experience that I have of nature was being introduced personally to its depth and beauty by my grandfather who was dead”.

When I ask her to clarify what she means by ‘disconnectedness’, she states that it was something she just knew:

I knew that as a young child when I used to sit in the garden I would spend a lot of time in the river that ran or the stream that ran beside our house that there was a connection that was meant to be, but that I was not experiencing it. There was something missing from my earliest experience of self-reflective consciousness...I only knew it in its absence.

Although she has no conscious recollection of the connection, she says she may have experienced in dreams.

Although Nicola says she finds it difficult to answer the question, she says she has had many turning points in her life, but these were not dependent on her being in Nature: “I don’t have this kind of strong differentiation between whether I am in nature or not”. She says:

Quite a lot of my experiences have been in a homestead in Botswana and, while that is to some extent in a more natural setting than the urban Cape average household, it’s still a place of humans. My most profound experiences have been in that kind of setting which is in effect on the edge between a classic western urban context and wild nature.

She is hesitant at this point and says “My experiences in wild nature...this is quite hard to say, but anyway let me say it, are quite difficult to reflect on as transformative, because it’s as if when they happen, I’m completely part of nature. So I can’t say I was in nature because I was part of it at the time”. Nicola believes that she does not need to go on vision quests or to engage in spiritual processes in order to undergo transformative experiences in nature:

If I wanted to induce an experience nature’s a useful context to do it...Literally I can go for a walk and experience the kind of connectedness I need to align my life with what

transformation wants to happen. But I would also say though that if I spend more than five days in wild nature in a continuous period something would inevitably happen.

With regards to her understanding of the concept of a person having a 'relationship with Nature', Nicola is quite clear about the fact that humans are distinct from Nature although it may have some level of consciousness, but not human consciousness. "I think there's an element of wild nature inside us, but I think that humans are quite distinct from nature in many ways and that we've made that choice relatively consciously as a species". While she does not believe that this distinction or "split" as she refers to it, is necessarily bad or that humans are bad for Nature, Nicola believes that we need to live in accordance with Nature and practice mutual respect as we would in any relationship. She also states that, although humans are apart from Nature, "I don't believe the work is to end the split. I think the work is to engage with it creatively because I think the split has value and the fundamental requirement of working with it skilfully is to recognise that we must live in accordance with Nature and not the other way around". She says that, as a society, we need to "develop tools and processes to enable us to make that relationship more possible and more celebrated".

Nicola's relationship with Nature is often one of physical discomfort – "it's a multi-faceted relationship, it's certainly not a romantic one". Because of the discomfort, she argues that the relationship is such that "it needs to be mediated by things from the human world because wild nature is in many respects challenging and uncomfortable". She will therefore "wear clothes to protect me from the sun; I will take hats; I will take sunscreen; I will take shoes with thick soles; I will take a car with an air-conditioner sometimes; I will take water". However, this is not bad, "it's how it is".

*I breathe the air
...an obvious centre of relating
every breath I take in
every breath I take out
...there's an exchange and
...it's not conscious all the time
but there's...an awareness
that can come to you
very*

*fast
if
you
stop
breathing.
I feel that very strongly if I am in nature
and again I can feel that in my home
as much as when I'm walking in the mountains or
in the sea but its more
visceral and tangible
if I am swimming in the sea –
I can feel held, I can feel cold, I can feel repelled,
I can feel every single human emotion in relation to nature.*

With regards to how and why people are generally considered to be disconnected from Nature, Nicola believes that the disconnection is not something new – that people have experienced it since the earliest of times, but it has increased over the last 10,000 years:

I think that humans have always been aware of the disconnect and if you read interviews...with hunter-gatherer people they will always talk about the time before when humans and animals shared the same language, they would talk about the time before when we were animals and I think to an extent that an awareness, a conscious awareness of disconnect, is part of what...it is to be human.

However, people are disconnected today because they generally spend very little time in Nature: “We live in houses, we go from houses to air-conditioned cars, we go from air-conditioned cars into shopping malls and into movie cinemas where we can watch nature on a screen but not experience it so we have a entirely mediated existence”. Nicola clarifies that she is “talking generally about western urban people, I’m not talking about people who live in close proximity to nature”. She reiterates that she does not believe the disconnection to be a bad thing, but that it is something to work skilfully with. She acknowledges that “some cultures have and continue to work more skilfully than western industrial culture with this split...which is part of the reason why Raindance Network explores methodologies from indigenous southern African cultures in this

regard". Her final comment in answering the question is "I believe that we, as western industrial people, have convinced ourselves that we don't need nature and that's delusional".

According to Nicola, the disconnection from Nature can manifest itself in a range of psychological conditions ranging from low-level depression and sadness to a light disassociation of "not quite being in your body, not quite being who you are" and even extreme psychosis. These psychological conditions can also be have somatic symptoms which include paralysis, lesions, stiffness, an increase or decrease in weight, fluctuations in energy levels and imbalanced immune functioning. The "split" or the lack of a feeling of wholeness is what makes people sick and Nicola believes that "this condition is pervasive in our society and quite often working on the split is fundamental to the person feeling more whole". However, she is clear that the split is rarely manifested as a split from Nature, but rather from one's family. For this reason "in most southern African traditions you don't heal your split from nature, or from God, or from the universe, you heal your split from your parents". She acknowledges that this view is difficult for western people, but is adamant that "there's no fast track to connectedness with nature and God, you go through your parents and your grandparents and your great grandparents. You go through your lineage. It's unequivocal and it's non-negotiable".

4.3.3. Spirituality

What do you understand by the term/concept of spirituality?

What is/constitutes/characterises a spiritual relationship with Nature?

Do spiritual people necessarily behave in sustainable ways?

Do religions have a role to play in the transformation to a more sustainable world? If so, what kind of role?

Do you participate in regular spiritual practices, rituals, etc.? Please explain.

Can one have a spiritual relationship with Nature and if so, what does this entail?

When I say that we are moving on to the next section of the interview, that being spirituality, Nicola's response is: "Oh my goodness, I thought we were talking about spirituality!" She is quite clear about what spirituality means to her and says,

Spirituality for me is...a wholeness that comes from being who I am in the world. There's no specific form other than I recognise it when I'm experiencing it. It exists purely in the

experience of who I am in my relationship to that experience at any given moment of time. So it's a state of being, it's not a particular act, not a cultural icon. And it's not religion by the way.

In terms of what characterises a spiritual relationship with Nature, Nicola says, "A spiritual response to nature lies in being absolutely aware and accepting the experience I have in nature and with nature at any given point".

*So if I'm in nature and I'm getting
burnt by the sun and
cut by stones and
blown by the wind
sort of stinging sand,
the level to which I am
aware and accepting and allowing
myself to be part of that experience
defines in some respects
how spiritual my relationship with nature is.*

However, she points out that she does not find the word 'spiritual' useful for her, particularly "because I find [it] to be rather loaded in our culture and I'm talking about western, urban north Atlantic culture". According to Nicola, the term 'spiritual' refers to something "ethereal, transcendent or set apart from and – not set apart not from nature, but set apart...from ordinary human experience". In her mind a relationship that is "experienced in fullness and awareness" is a spiritual experience. She says "when I am very deeply into my humanness, very deeply inside myself, I find nature". She also suggests that "sexuality, in a moment of orgasm, when one feels incredibly connected and in love with another person...[is] as spiritual as any experience that I might have in nature. As spiritual and as connected to nature, but it obviously profoundly human at the same time".

Although she does not accept the term 'spiritual people' and says "I think we might have a long conversation about what that actually means", Nicola contends that, the fact that we live in an unsustainable society makes it difficult, if not challenging, for people regardless of whether they are

conscious or not (her definition of spiritual) to disengage and live in more sustainable ways. However, she agrees that “spiritual people quote unquote...who attempt to become more conscious of their connection to the world perhaps do more to reduce their negative impact and enhance their positive impact on society or on nature”.

With respect to the role that religions could possibly play in the transformation to a more sustainable world, Nicola agrees that they could play a role given that they are a means of gathering people together and inspiring action through a set of “common beliefs [which]...create a shared story”. While she does not view religion in Marxist terms, i.e. as an opiate or believe that religions are particularly spiritual, she acknowledges that they “can provide a very useful conduit for human energy to come together”. However, she points out that dogma can undermine “a movement to that personal consciousness and personal awareness”. Nicola acknowledges the work done by religions, churches and mosques in the struggle against apartheid and suggests that they could play the same role in creating more sustainable societies. “Anything that can inspire humans to act courageously could be useful. And by courageously I mean from the heart”.

As a trained and initiated *sangoma* in the law of *nyanga* (which means ‘traditional doctor’) or the law of lineage, Nicola is required to practice certain rituals. These rituals include speaking to the ancestors and she tells me that “we give offerings, we tell them what we do, explain what’s going on in our lives, we ask them...to stand with us and help us, to clear the way when we have problems, [we] simply make that relationship with people in the past conscious”. Nicola says:

*we may speak to people
in the future
who are not yet born and
we also speak to other
nations of ancestors which...
include the spirits of nature,
the spirits of lakes, caves, of hills.*

This ritual of ‘speaking exchange’ or *patla* or *passa* is practised by all traditions of southern African people including Mozambicans, Zimbabweans, and Zambians. Nicola points out that “they’re not the

same, but similar. They have an understanding that in order to make relationship flow you've got to exchange, you've got to tell, you've got to talk, you've got to engage".

Another ritual which she participates in regularly is dance, and, in this instance, it is a form of possession trance. "If there is a particular ceremony that is taking place for people associated with our lodge, the people that we trained with, we'll go up and we'll dance with them, we will celebrate with them, we will contribute to that ritual, contribute to that process". Nicola draws on some of the many rituals, which can be done either in Nature or in the homestead, to further her own personal development. These rituals "enable that transition to take place in a skilful and positive way, a constructive way". According to Nicola, "These are all rituals that have been around for a number of years so they've been tried and tested by communities and found to be useful in mediating that relationship between ourselves as individuals and the community, ourselves, our family, the community, nature and God. And all the spirits which is how those things manifest, can manifest". Other rituals are performed to mark transitions in life, i.e. "coming into birth, giving birth as a woman, coming to puberty, going into elder hood, becoming a doctor". She continues:

That's why rituals are useful – they give us the ability to integrate and come to call us through otherwise what tends to happen is the spirit will attempt to do that process on its own and the result can often be that our sickness, our imbalance, our split is actually heightened, while that maybe not a bad thing and a lot of people experience it, it's certainly not necessarily a pleasant way to go through transition in life. It's what many spiritual traditions would refer to as spiritual emergency rather than emergence and we will always pick emergence because it's a lot more comfortable.

Although it is not one of my questions, I ask Nicola to clarify what she means or understands by 'God' as she has made reference to God several times during the interview. She says she does not have a traditional Christian understanding of God as "an old man with a white beard" nor does she believe that God is a "a personified being with whom I have a personal relationship". She says that, in African traditional belief, God is "the great one, quite far away from who we are" and she interprets this as being "the primal one-ness in all of the universe". She elaborates, saying it is

something I'm a part of, something that's a part of me. That just is. When we *patla*, when we do these rituals, they are not in relation to God directly, they're in relation to those

things that are part of our community whether they are no longer living, not yet living, but they're the things that are close and around us.

Nicola also asserts that "God is not particularly interested in what we do, but as everything that we do goes back to God it's useful to have a sense of alignment with God anyway. It's also not very new-age, i.e. the universe actually doesn't really care".

4.3.4. Sustainable development

What do you think the world needs if we are to overcome the global crises facing us?

Do you think consumption and materialism are problematic? If so, why?

How do you think we can overcome consumption and materialism?

What is your view on why there is suffering in the world?

In your view what is the world 'calling' for?

How do you think we should go about 'sustainable development' in South Africa?

Do you think there is a relationship between Nature, spirituality and sustainable living? Please describe this relationship.

Nicola says the world needs "radical co-operation...radical innovation and a profound understanding of what it means to live within ecological limits" if we are to overcome the global crises facing us.

She does not think consumption and materialism in and of themselves are problematic, but become so if we operate beyond ecological limits without an understanding of the limits in a given society.

Consumption is necessary for human survival and materialism "can be a beautiful expression of who we are". Nicola believes that the reason why they are problematic is that "there are too many of us. There isn't space for us all to practise consumption and materialism in an unconscious way". However, there is no way to overcome them other than by dying. She believes that people will have desire, which is not necessarily a bad thing, but "desire without an appreciation of context can lead to the death of a species". She elaborates: "In as much as we have a problem with that, we should look to ways to become conscious of consumption and materialism and to really understand the limits within which [they] can operate safely and that will require skills and innovations that, at the moment we have in its infancy, but I think that that needs to [still] grow up".

With respect to her view on why there is suffering in the world, Nicola distinguishes between pain and suffering. She says,

I believe that to some extent suffering is about the relationship that we have to pain. I think suffering is something we can work with, but I think pain is part of the human condition and will be part of what we experience if we are fully human. I don't believe any human being will ever live a life free of pain.

She feels that it is a difficult question to answer, but adds: "From what I can see in human society there has always been a degree of suffering and perhaps if I think about the question that you asked earlier, the extent to which we are disconnected from who we are, from our power and also from nature, we are more likely to experience pain in a way that includes suffering".

Nicola does not know what the world is 'calling' for, but says:

*if I listen to the people
that I engage with
and speak to
and dance with
and pray with,
I would say that the world is calling
for an opportunity to be happy.
The world is calling for happiness.*

Nicola suggests that two things are required for sustainable development in South Africa. The first is "dialogue, to converse, to have conversations, to really speak to each other, meaningful exchange on the nature of our challenge and the radical shifts required to address it. I think we're talking about
a revolution in consciousness.

The second thing is an "opportunity to move to greater wholeness in some form of healing". She acknowledges that there is a lot of pain, suffering and bitterness in South Africa as a result of "the experience of apartheid, the experience of racism, the experience of disparity, the experience of cruelty, and the experience of violence". She says, that in order to "move to the level of dialogue that we need

in the country we need to have an exchange and experiences that enable us to get to the depth of pain that people have felt in this country and I think to do that we would be wise to draw on many methodologies available in our traditions". Nicola suggests that if we were to use art, story writing, dance and traditional rituals such as *femba* ("bring out the spirits of the past that are possessing them with negative consequence"), and create "space for simple shared experience – conversation, meals and activities", we would see

some quite magical openings and quite astounding dialogues emerging in our society. There is no limit to the way that process of healing can take place and there is certainly no one right way for the opportunities to be set up. It can happen in a world cup and it can happen to an individual walking on the beach. Or it can happen when you lift up a sick child...there are a lot of people in this country who have the desire to connect and at some point you asked me what gives me hope. So I'd say that gives me hope because there are so many people in this country that are prepared to express a desire to connect despite the level of pain and suffering that has been part of their life and experience over the last few generations. And it's that which I think is at the heart of sustainable development [which] will be built on in this country. To be honest I don't think it will be built on anything else.

In answer to the final question about whether there is a relationship between Nature, spirituality and sustainable living, Nicola says, "I guess there is....and

*the thread that would wind
between all of them is
a greater consciousness or awareness of
what it means to be me,
what it means to be human,
what it means to be part of society and
what it means to be part of the world,
of nature and spirits.*

4.4. Justin Friedman (see Appendix G)

When I arrive at Justin's home on the afternoon of 14 April 2011, he is not there yet so I chat with his partner, their year-old baby girl and the neighbour's cat. Upon arriving, Justin quickly searches in the kitchen for something to eat and notices that there is no electricity. He is apparently unperturbed by this. I notice a gas stove and large empty jerry-cans standing in the kitchen. We sit outside on the verandah for the duration of the interview. Justin is more relaxed than I have ever seen him, given that when we have met in the past, it has been in a work context. He later tells me that he has just been to a sweat lodge where he participated in a traditional Native American purification ceremony.

4.4.1. Work

Tell me about the work you do.

How did you get into/find your way into your current field of work?

What global and local trends do you see currently impacting on your work?

Which of these trends give you hope for the future?

In response to my opening question as to the work which Justin does, he replies, "I am in the business of raising...or cultivating awareness and for me work is an opportunity to create social and environmental change in the world. If you're not doing that in your work, then I'm not really sure what you're doing". There are two parts to his work: he has a business called Greenhouse Thinks ('cultivating ideas into reality') which focuses on strategic work, consulting, idea generation and facilitation work with regards to green and social ideas. In this arena he works with large corporates, small businesses and individuals through a workshop process which, he says, is really about "aligning your heart with the work that you do and with the ideas that you have because I believe that if your heart aligns, truly aligns, with the work that you do the chances of success are so much greater".

The other part of his work is an NGO or public benefit organisation which came about as a result of the concept of FLOW (For Love of Water) which "is about creating awareness and inspiring action in order to create a deeper understanding and respect for water". Using current consumer-based platforms, FLOW aims to raise awareness and collective behaviour change. Justin believes that because "we're all made up of water it becomes a way to connect and...unify and level because water is the ultimate leveller" in

that it affects everyone in the same way and crosses political boundaries. FLOW inspired Justin to “approach people from a heart base and...look at...heart-based platforms that allow people to feel [e.g. film and song]. Because only if you feel it will you actually create the behaviour change”.

According to Justin, “work is not separate from life so the work that I do is how I am in service to those around me and that’s what I define as work”.

As to how he found himself in his current field of work, Justin believes that the work he currently does effectively began when he was in high school.⁴⁴ During this time he organised an event which he called ‘The Student Executive Conference’ to which he invited 160 head boys and girls from schools across the Cape Peninsula to participate in a leadership seminar. “The intention was to bring together the potential future leaders from diverse schools to hear inspirational speakers from our society.” Justin says, “As I watched my peers listening to the presentations and debating core issues that affect each person worldwide, and trying to create real solutions for themselves and the future, my eyes were opened to the power that exists in each individual”. This experience inspired much of Justin’s current work.

In terms of the local and global trends impacting on his work, Justin recognises that water is both a local and global issue and that he needs to stay current with what is happening with respect to water so that he can effectively raise awareness of the issues. He has also become aware of the fact that, particularly in the developed world, people “have more time to consider what work they’re passionate about doing and not just working for a pay cheque”. This trend is impacting on his strategic work in that people “want to ask themselves the question why am I doing this, what are the values in my heart and how can I do the work that I love and still support my priorities”. As a result of the economic meltdown, there is less stability in big business and people are realising they need to be adaptable and independent. Justin also believes that the environmental issues facing us, such as climate change, are forcing people to work together because they are faced with a “common enemy” and he suggests that this is perhaps a “stepping stone” to what he calls “a heart-based economy”. As people work together on solving environmental issues, they open up to being more socially aware and more willing to engage with one another because they realise that they are not so different from each another. Justin refers to a ‘heart-

⁴⁴ All the quotes from Justin in this paragraph are from an email exchange I had with Justin after the interview. Friedman, J. (justin@greenhousecreates.com). 12 July 2011. RE: a question re your work. Email to H. Lockhart (helen.lockhart@aquarium.co.za).

based revolution where people suddenly start opening up to each other, to treating each other with respect because we all have a common thing we need to work [with]...”.

In terms of what gives him hope for the future, Justin says that it’s “people’s realisation that we’re all actually the same and that we all need the same things to survive and we all want many of the same ways of living and being”. He is inspired when he sees people “stop separating themselves and...start unifying in the same way a tribe works together for the benefit of the tribe”.

*the green trend that’s bringing us together
which I think is a stepping stone to the heart-based economy
is the trend which inspires me
to show that people...deep down
...want...the same for themselves,
for their families, for their communities.
They want clean water,
they want fresh food,
they want sunshine,
they want a safe environment,
they want safety.*

Justin is also inspired by those he refers to as the “the culture creators” who are becoming more conscious about the products they buy: they want to know where it comes from and that no one was hurt while making it. They want healthier food and lifestyles and to focus on self development. He says:

Guys in India reading *The Power of Now* for fifteen rupees on the street – that trend also inspires me because it shows that we’re in a stage of real reflection and more and more people, regardless of their income bracket, are actually reflecting on what are they doing here, what is their purpose, why and what is it all about and, the more people...ask themselves that question, the more I think we get to the root and that leads into a spirit-based living where we start aligning our head and our hearts and we start being honest with ourselves and we start listening to that true voice which I say that is like the divine voice.

Justin says his goal in life is to listen and to just be able “to be still, to hear and feel that guide and if we listen to that guide I feel we can’t go wrong”.

4.4.2. Nature

What early memories/experiences do you have of Nature?

Have you experienced times in Nature which you would consider as turning points in your life? Please describe one such moment.

What do you understand by the concept of a person having a “relationship with Nature”?

Do you feel that you have a relationship with Nature?

How and why are people generally considered to be “disconnected from Nature”?

How does this disconnection manifest in our daily lives and what implications does it have for us?

How do you think we can restore connections with Nature?

Justin’s early memories of Nature are visiting the Rondebosch Common (a park in the neighbourhood in Cape Town in which he lived) and the Liesbeek River with his father. He remembers going to Muizenberg beach with his family on Sundays and then, as he got older, going on hikes and to game reserves.

With regards to having experienced turning points in Nature, Justin recalls two experiences. The first was in Germany shortly after separating from his wife. He felt that he wanted to “be in my darkness, face the fear of the darkness” so he cycled around the forests of Germany and eventually set up camp near a vast lake. There was no moon on that particular night and he heard various sounds, but didn’t know what they were or where they were coming from. He meditated in the darkness, asking for protection and eventually fell into a deep sleep. When he woke, having had intense dreams, he had a sense that something or someone had been in his tent and he was terrified. He was about to run when he heard “a voice in nature that said to me, ‘It’s okay, Justin, you don’t have to, you don’t have to’.

Darkness is there to teach us something, it’s there for a reason. It requires respect and that’s the integration that you need for your life”. Justin heard this message and sat still instead of running.

The other experience was being in the redwood forests in Humboldt County, California. Justin recalls:

I just became totally in awe of my place and the incredible healing power of these trees.

Besides their size, [and] how long they’ve been around, they just seem to give off this

incredible life force...almost to the point where, I'm going to talk a little bit about Gaia, I couldn't speak there was no reason to speak. I didn't want to speak. I actually I didn't have anything to do. It felt like there was nothing for me to do anymore. I just had to be here and I felt really at home.

*trees were my...connection between above and below.
The roots represented being in the earth and
the branches represented going up to the sky...
how can I be in my life like a tree –
connected to above
but very grounded on the earth?
...trees I saw as my teachers
perhaps that's why I sought them out for those experiences
to guide me in those experiences...
I often feel safe when I am with...big trees.*

When I ask Justin as to what he understands by the concept of a person having a 'relationship with Nature', he says that it is about "feeling connected to it. It's about being aware of her needs and understanding a bit about nature and how she operates and how things work". He also acknowledges that a relationship with Nature is about gratitude, respect and love, given that Nature is responsible for so much in our lives. Justin refers to the Greenhouse vision which calls for "business, brands and consumers and government to work together with the natural world in order to create a sustainable and profitable future for all" as an example of the extension of a relationship with Nature. However, he says he looks to indigenous people, who have a relationship with Nature, for inspiration and teachings as to how to be with Nature. "It seems to a gratitude and a blessing, an acknowledgement and a listening and a learning, but doesn't everybody know that?"

In response to the question as to whether he has a relationship with Nature, Justin admits that he does have such a relationship, but that it is very much like his relationship with God:

It has its moments when I don't feel connected...my relationship with nature and my relationship with the divine mirror each other so when I'm in nature and I've been in nature for a while it's easy for me to see God and it's easy for me [to] feel connected to the divine

so when I'm not and I don't feel connected to nature then I usually don't feel connected to my faith or to spirit as much and so my relationship with nature is such that it's always there if I remember, but my mind...I often create reasons to separate from it.

He feels that the mother-nature analogy is appropriate given that "she has an unconditional love" for him yet he is like an insolent son who only comes to her when he needs something.

As to why people are generally considered to be disconnected from Nature, Justin is at first slightly confused by the question and starts off by saying that people disconnect from Nature when they disregard it, abuse it and take it for granted. He then goes on to say that he thinks people disconnect because "their mind[s] tells them that there's something more" and because they crave instant gratification. He argues that Nature has her own pace and cannot be controlled yet people seek to control their lives and Nature gets in the way of them getting what they want. People "forget about their context in the world and...forget that it's not all about them". He says that people disconnect from Nature when they disconnect from themselves: "...they stop being aware of who they are, what they're doing and why they're doing it and get caught up in some other fantasy...". Another reason for the disconnection from Nature is that the majority of people live in urban environments which "are not designed with nature in mind" and in which Nature is controlled and again it's about Nature being there only to satisfy the self.

Justin also believes that people are afraid of Nature. He explains that they are "so used to the urban environment and [being] stimulated with so much media that nature almost seems...too calm. It doesn't have enough constant stimulation...[and]...calms us down to such a point that we really need to face our stuff and...become more aware of who we are". He proposes that Nature is "...a mirror, an opportunity for reflection...[and] a lot of people are not happy with who they are or what they do so they don't want that reflection". Here Justin refers to the fact that people who spend a significant amount of time in Nature often have some sort of epiphany, spiritual rebirth or transformation. He is not sure how this happens, but says for him, it "provides a time when I can observe the natural way of how things are and realise my part in it and it gives a stillness and quiet to such an extent that I grasp again who I really am...".

He then goes on to say that “people are inherently petrified to feel in some form”. He says, “We’ve numbed ourselves into another sleep whereby we don’t want to be very awake [or]...fully in our lives for some reason”. Nature brings back our sense of feeling and stirs up emotions which most of us are too scared to experience. However, if we spend more time in Nature and, as a result, “start to feel more and connect more with ourselves then it makes sense that the next revolution will be this heart-based experience...”. By connecting more with more ourselves, we’ll connect with our hearts and with spirit, which will lead to more spirit-based living.

According to Justin, the first step in restoring our connection with Nature is to walk barefoot and then to do as Satish Kumar says and plant a garden. He says that we need to simply observe Nature and “see it as our greatest teacher” which is why he likes the concept of biomimicry. Justin believes that, by being students of Nature, we will learn how it works and experience its beauty which will in turn engender awe, respect and reverence. By making Nature our friend and realising how much it does for us and gives to us will also inspire an appreciation for Nature.

He returns to the aspect of gardening and working with our hands and says that “nature works energetically – when we touch it, it does something to us”. He acknowledges that a realisation that Nature provides us with what we need and makes us feel good may be present before an awareness of a spiritual connection with Nature. His final comment with regards to restoring our connection with Nature is that we need more green spaces in our cities.

4.4.3. Spirituality

What do you understand by the term/concept of spirituality?

What is/constitutes/characterises a spiritual relationship with Nature?

Do spiritual people necessarily behave in sustainable ways?

Do religions have a role to play in the transformation to a more sustainable world? If so, what kind of role?

Do you participate in regular spiritual practices, rituals, etc.? Please explain.

Can one have a spiritual relationship with Nature and if so, what does this entail?

Justin understands 'spirit' to be the "life force which exists in all of us, which connects us all, which is the energy that is present in everything, the grace, the perfection of the way that life is perfect balance" and 'spirituality' is then feeling connected to spirit. He is inspired by the Sufis who regard spirit as a lover and recognises that there have been times in his life when he has had an affair with spirit and there hasn't been space for anyone else. Justin also believes that human beings are "vehicles to connect with spirit" and that by connecting with each other, we are able to "come back from the separation". He suggests that "pain and suffering comes from this concept of separation – that we are not home. We're separate in this physical form. We're separate in some way from our true nature and our true nature is the land of spirit". Justin uses the metaphor of flame to explain spirit and says that humans are all sparks of this greater flame.

As to what constitutes a spiritual relationship with Nature, Justin replies that it is difficult to separate spirituality from Nature. "I see my relationship with nature as my spiritual relationship or as my way of exploring spirit and the more I tap into nature the more I tap into spirit". A spiritual relationship with Nature implies consciousness and an awareness of "whatever's happening to nature is happening to me". He then suggests that "when you see God in nature that's having a spiritual relationship with nature".

At this point I ask Justin to explain what God or the divine means to him. He explains that it is the perfect balance and a deep knowing. It is grace, mercy, unconditional love, complete acceptance and constant.

*in the morning when I pray
...I first put my hands on the earth and
I thank the earth for all she gives and
then I put my hands in the sky and
I thank the sun for the energy, the light and the warmth and
then I hug myself and...
I thank people for the inspiration and
then I thank my teachers who are alive and who are not and
I touch my forehead and my heart and
then I put my hands on my knees and
I thank the divine at the end*

*for...the divine's constant way...
the divine's grace is never changing,
the perfection is always there and
the love is always there.*

In response to the question of whether spiritual people necessarily behave in spiritual ways, Justin says “it depends on who is labeling them [as] spiritual”. People define themselves as spiritual according to their own terms and conditions. However, those who are “truly connected to spirit and...have done the work and [are] aware [that] what they do affects everything else...are sustainable because they’re aware of their place”. Justin cautions against those who are dabbling in spirituality and trying to control it because they tend to think that whatever they do, “spirit will take care of it” and therefore don’t take responsibility for their actions.

At this point Justin indicates that he does not define spirituality and religion as the same thing and that there are “religious orders that don’t necessarily align from a spiritual point of view”. He acknowledges that the texts of the prophets contained an awareness of Nature, but feels that the church has become a way to control people and, at the same, to control Nature.

Justin believes that religions have a “huge” role to play in the transformation to a more sustainable world. He says, “if the major religions [were to] push environmental issues above everything else we would have radical transformation pretty quickly”. He argues that, like business, not only do religions have a role, but they also have a responsibility because they have influence. “If you’re not inspiring [and] not influencing people with some positive way of living that’s going to support a sustainable way of living then what...are you doing?” However, while he acknowledges that the original scriptures speak of working with Nature, he feels that people have distorted and adapted religion to “satisfy their own cravings, their own desire for control”. Further he believes that, while religion has been responsible for destruction and war, it in itself is not inherently bad – it is what it has become because people have changed it to suit themselves. He concludes his answer, saying “I must learn more about religion before I make statements like that”.

Justin participates in a number of spiritual practices and rituals. He performs the same practice most mornings and twice a year he goes to a sweat lodge where he participates in a traditional Native

American purification ceremony. He also occasionally attends synagogue as he was born into the Jewish faith. Justin says that dance is “is a very spiritual experience – it’s very much a form of prayer so every time I dance I feel like I am connecting with spirit” and he also practices devotional chanting, meditation and yoga.

*Song and dance are
for me some of the most
powerful ways to connect with spirit.
Now, add the element of nature...
song and dance in nature
well, it doesn’t get better than that.
I think that’s what we were born to do –
sing and dance in nature.*

He also acknowledges that his work is a spiritual experience because he is “working in the realm of people’s hearts”. With reference to his work with FLOW in which he uses the word ‘love’ and says “I am for love of you”. Justin believes he can only say this if he feels spiritually connected. He says “...being of service is the greatest form of spirituality in many ways”.

He then tells me about an idea which he refers to as ‘the gem’. He believes that every interaction we have with other people could be a spiritual experience because we have the opportunity to see the gem in them which is essentially the essence of who they are. If we are able to connect with this, “then that interaction is a spiritual experience because we’re helping spirit to reconnect with itself”.

Justin believes that we need to bring the inspiration from ceremonial spiritual practices into our everyday activities and here he refers to Thich Nhat Hanh who apparently says “make having a cup of tea a spiritual experience”.

4.4.4. Sustainable development

What do you think the world needs if we are to overcome the global crises facing us?

Do you think consumption and materialism are problematic? If so, why?

How do you think we can overcome consumption and materialism?

What is your view on why there is suffering in the world?

In your view what is the world 'calling' for?

How do you think we should go about 'sustainable development' in South Africa?

Do you think there is a relationship between Nature, spirituality and sustainable living? Please describe this relationship.

In response to the question about what the world needs if we are to overcome the global crises facing us, Justin replies that action, awareness and responsibility are needed. He also believes that “radical unification...radical assessment...radical measurement...[and] radical alignment of head and heart” are needed together with a genuine desire to do this within a set time frame: “To solve [the] global crisis it needs to become the number-one priority”. Justin argues that environmental issues and social issues cannot be seen as mutually exclusive and that harmony between people will lead to harmony with Nature. He suggests that we need to see the crisis as an opportunity and as a gift to work together, to unify, because “we’re going to need each other more than ever before”.

While Justin thinks that materialism is problematic because it means we place priority on things, he views consumption slightly differently because we need to consume in order to survive. However, he argues that consumption must be conscious and it must be in balance. He challenges corporates by stating: “If you are not producing a product that’s having a social and environmental benefit or is [just] a waste, then you’re just being boring”. He encourages consumers to consider the entire value chain and to look to the principles of biomimicry (“how does nature do it, how does nature make it, how does nature get rid of it?”) in order to learn. He also persuades consumers to realise that they vote by spending their money on certain things and they have power because of this. Getting back to materialism, Justin believes that we can overcome this by spending more time in Nature and getting out of the self and the ‘me’ way of thinking and acting in the world. He also thinks that people will make healthy choices if they are given the time and space to do this.

As to why there is suffering in the world, Justin does not feel he is in a position to answer this because he doesn't understand it. He believes that everyone is suffering to some degree or another and humans are born with a sense of suffering. On an esoteric level he thinks there is suffering because we are disconnected from spirit, because "we are not home". On a physical level, people are suffering because they don't have access to certain things, e.g. water, because others control it. Suffering is therefore related to power and inequality. However, having spent time in India, he realised that, while he may have perceived people to be suffering, they were actually fairly satisfied and happy because they believe in karma and that things will be different in the next life.

According to Justin,

*the world is calling for
love and acceptance
unity and balance
harmony and action
sensitivity and honesty...*

what do I feel when I listen?

*The world is calling for humans
...to be in service
To return to a spiritual way,
To return to a consciousness of unity.*

*The world is calling for us to ask the question
who am I?*

*To take a look in the mirror.
what do you really see?"*

When I ask Justin how he thinks we should go about sustainable development in South Africa, he replies that we should start by learning from the indigenous people of this country. He argues that we need a

strategy in place, but that we first need to become aware and then make a commitment to sustainable development, making it a priority. It needs to be integrated into our everyday lives and become the basis of what we value. It needs to form the basis of our economy so that “social and sustainable development [become] the root of our currency value”.

At this point in our interview Justin’s friend Daniel arrives with some water from a spring in the Karoo. Justin uses this example to illustrate his argument: Daniel has prioritised bringing water to him because he is sick. Although he could have chosen to do something else with his time, Daniel instead chose to be in service to others and according to Justin, this is the crux of the sustainable development.

In answer to the question as to whether there is a relationship between Nature, spirituality and sustainable living, Justin is emphatic that there is and says, “...imagine if those three had to become the pillars – nature, sustainability, spirituality - which means we judge everything we do based on those three?”. Then, thinking out loud, he explains how he sees the relationship. Nature, spirituality and sustainable development are inter-related and impact on one another in a three dimensional, cyclical manner. We learn from Nature and it teaches us to become more spiritual. As we become more spiritual, we become more connected to Nature and a result start to embrace sustainable development which in turn reconnects us to Nature and leads us to being more spiritual. It is impossible to separate them out from one another. “Sustainable development could become the spiritual expression of the modern era because it will mean living in harmony with yourself, it will mean living in harmony with others [and] it will mean living in harmony with nature [and] so it becomes a spiritual experience”.

He takes this idea further, saying that “spirituality is...the mind, nature is the heart and... sustainable development is the base chakra...Nature brings us to our heart and spirituality clears the mind and brings us into alignment and is...the guide...and sustainable development is what we do, our action”. Justin then suggests we draw this idea as a simple stick person (see Figure 4.2.).

He concludes by saying: “We must all be driven by spirit...and nature...[by what] inspires the heart [and] allows us to feel and sustainable development is how we integrate it all into a base where we can keep going [and] keep producing whether it’s our own seed or...creation”.

I thank Justin for his time and input and he returns the thanks, saying, “It’s quite a gift to spend the time thinking about it and talking about it”.

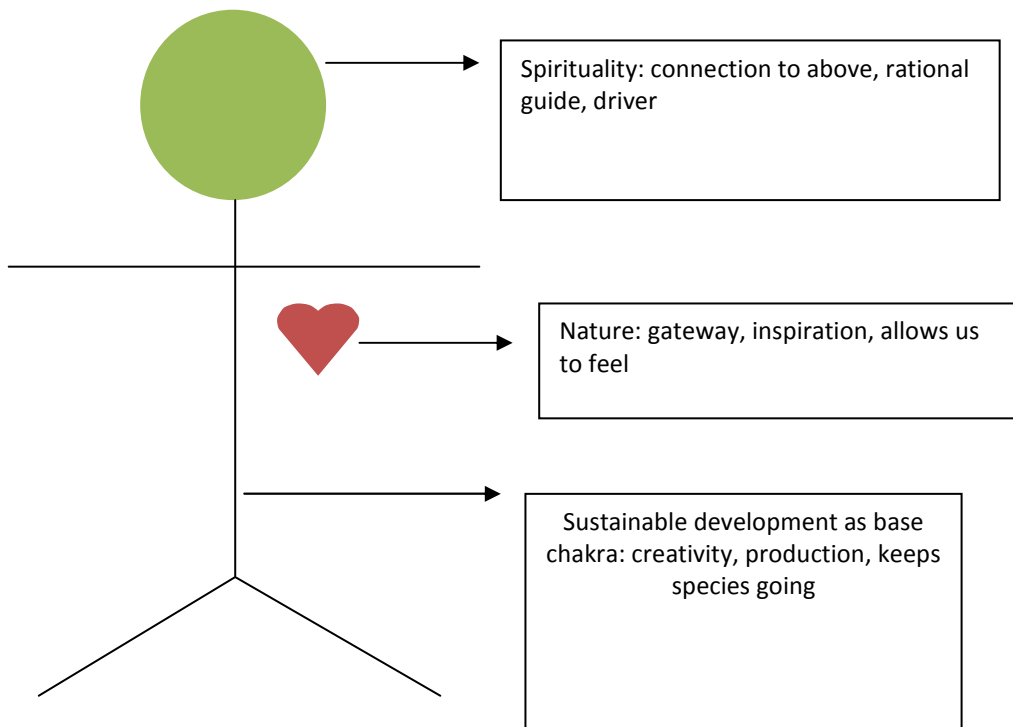


Figure 4.2. A simple stick person embracing Nature, spirituality and sustainable development

4.5. Mphatheleni Makaulule (see Appendix H and Appendix K)

On 25 April 2011 my father and I leave Pretoria at 04h30 to drive north to meet with Mphatheleni Makaulule in Venda (which is now in the Limpopo Province). The sunrise is spectacular and silhouettes of dead trees clasp against the flaming sky. We turn off the N1 at Makhado (formerly Louis Trichardt) and take the road to Thohoyandou. This road is narrow, pot-holed and lined with prolific vegetation. We pass vast plantations of macadamia nuts, bananas and blue gum trees. The soil is deep red – very different to the grey sandy soil where I live. As we approach Thohoyandou we see fruit sellers setting up their stands alongside the road – their tables are laden with bananas, huge avocados and tomatoes. People are also setting up *braais* along the road and in some instances there are small gazebos under which tables and chairs are set out.

I try to reach Mphatheleni on her cell phone to get directions, but to no avail, so we stop to have breakfast in the Wimpy in Thohoyandou. I eventually make contact with her and we drive back in the direction from which we have just come to Vuwani where we meet up with her at the side of the road. I recognise her instantly (from the video footage and photographs I have seen on the Internet) although she is much smaller than I imagined – a slight woman dressed in green. She gets in the car and directs us to her home. When we arrive I notice what I think is maize growing, but I learn later that it is finger millet. When I told Mphatheleni earlier on the phone that my father is with me, she said, “He is welcome, he is welcome in my home”. Her nine-year-old son, Thama, comes out to greet us and we go inside her house which has one main room – a kitchen area with a table in the middle of the room – and two doors off this room which I guess are the bedrooms. On the wall is a poster of Chief Seattle with the quote:

*Only after the last tree has been cut down,
Only after the last river has been poisoned,
Only after the last fish has been caught,
Only then will you find that money cannot be eaten.*

There are also photographs – some of Mphatheleni and some of older people which I later learn are her father and mother. There is also a photograph of Mphatheleni with Bill Clinton.

Just before we start the interview another woman comes into the room and proceeds to lie on the floor as a way of greeting me. I feel decidedly uncomfortable and asked Mphatheleni if I should do the same, but she says no. Because there is only one room and it doesn’t feel appropriate for him to listen in on the interview, my father goes back outside and waits patiently in the car.

During the course of the interview I have to ask Mphatheleni to explain words and concepts which are integral to her culture. This often takes us on fairly lengthy detours, which will be evident as you read through this particular narrative summary. However, I have followed the flow of the interview to remain true to the process and to what emerged during our interaction.

4.5.1. Work

Tell me about the work you do.

How did you get into/find your way into your current field of work?

What global and local trends do you see currently impacting on your work?

Which of these trends give you hope for the future?

Mphatheleni's work focuses on reviving the role and value of *mupo* amongst the Venda people because they are disconnected from *mupo* and regard it as something which exists only to meet human needs. Before we go any further I ask her to explain what *mupo* means. *Mupo* is a Venda word which describes the "natural creations of the universe". Mphatheleni explains further:

...if we see the soil, it's mupo.

*When we look at nature at the whole – the trees, the animals, rivers,
everything which is in nature is mupo.*

*If you look up there at...the stars, the moon, that light we say
it's mupo light because it's a natural light.*

*When you are in the river, listening to the sound of the river, the water when it is flowing
it's the sound of mupo.*

*When you are in the forest, when you hear the many sounds of insects, trees,
when air is blowing,
you can feel the sound, it's mupo.*

Mupo is also a way of life. Mphatheleni says that people can only be healthy if *mupo* is healthy. According to the elders, if there is no *mupo*, there is no life. *Mupo* is life.

In order to revive the values of *mupo*, Mphatheleni started the Mupo Foundation, which focuses on a number of programmes. These include:

- *intergenerational learning programmes* which are conducted through the schools and provide a space for the younger generation to learn from the elders;

- *seed programmes* which aim to revive and protect indigenous local seeds. These programmes also consider the soil, the water and the role of women because seeds are not only important for the provision of food, but are also considered sacred in Venda customs;
- *sacred site protection programmes* which are led by a committee called Dzomo la Mupo (Voice of Nature). These programmes seek to protect not only the sacred sites, but also rivers, wildlife and trees;
- *eco-mapping programmes* (which aim to transfer the knowledge and store the memories of elders before they die) and eco-calendars.⁴⁵

Central to all these programmes are the knowledgeable elders and, in particular, women referred to as *makhadzi*. According to Mphatheleni, the *makhadzi* “are chosen, they don’t choose themselves. They are chosen by the ancestors to be the mediator between the creator [known as Nwali] and people”. She explains further that, “according to our culture you cannot go straight to Nwali, to God without *makhadzi*. *Makhadzi*’s the one who...prays for you to go to God”. Every family and every clan has a *makhadzi*, sacred sites have *makhadzi*s and chiefs cannot be chiefs without *makhadzi*s (the *makhadzi*s do not chose the chiefs, but take care of them as children before they become chiefs). The chiefs are the leaders and custodians of the sacred sites.

Dialogue with the elders is key to the Mupo Foundation programmes and Mphatheleni sits and talks with the elders, asking them about the challenges and problems which they see in today’s world. According to the elders, the main problem is an ignorance of *mupo*. As a result of this ignorance, the youth are misbehaving – they no longer attend initiation schools and there is no guidance. Schools and the government are also responsible because they do not provide rules as to how children should behave. The social structure of families has broken down because there are no longer *makhadzi*s and no respect between children and their parents. The elders also hold the view that people are sick and unhealthy today because they no longer eat the ancestral food. Girls are starting to menstruate at a younger age because of the food which they eat.

The protection of sacred sites was also started through dialogue with the elders because they explained that there can be no *mupo* without sacred sites and that the sacred sites need to be protected because

⁴⁵ An eco-map is a “visual record of...territory...way of life and the knowledge which is shared by a community” (African Biodiversity Network, 2011)

they are important for rituals. Mphatheleni says: “Nowadays the people are just coming into the sacred site, young people go there with condoms...because they no longer have manners. People go there to sacred site as [a] place for entertainment. Littering in sacred site, disrespecting...the rituals”. According to the custodians of sacred sites, they are being destroyed because the “*makhadzi* have forsaken their roles. They no longer plant millet, millet has to be there for rituals. They no longer plant tobacco, tobacco has to be there for rituals...We have to revive the role of *makhadzi*”. Mphatheleni explains that only the *makhadzi*s can touch millet because it is very sacred in the Venda culture.



Image 4.1. An example of eco-mapping. Image courtesy of Don Pinnock

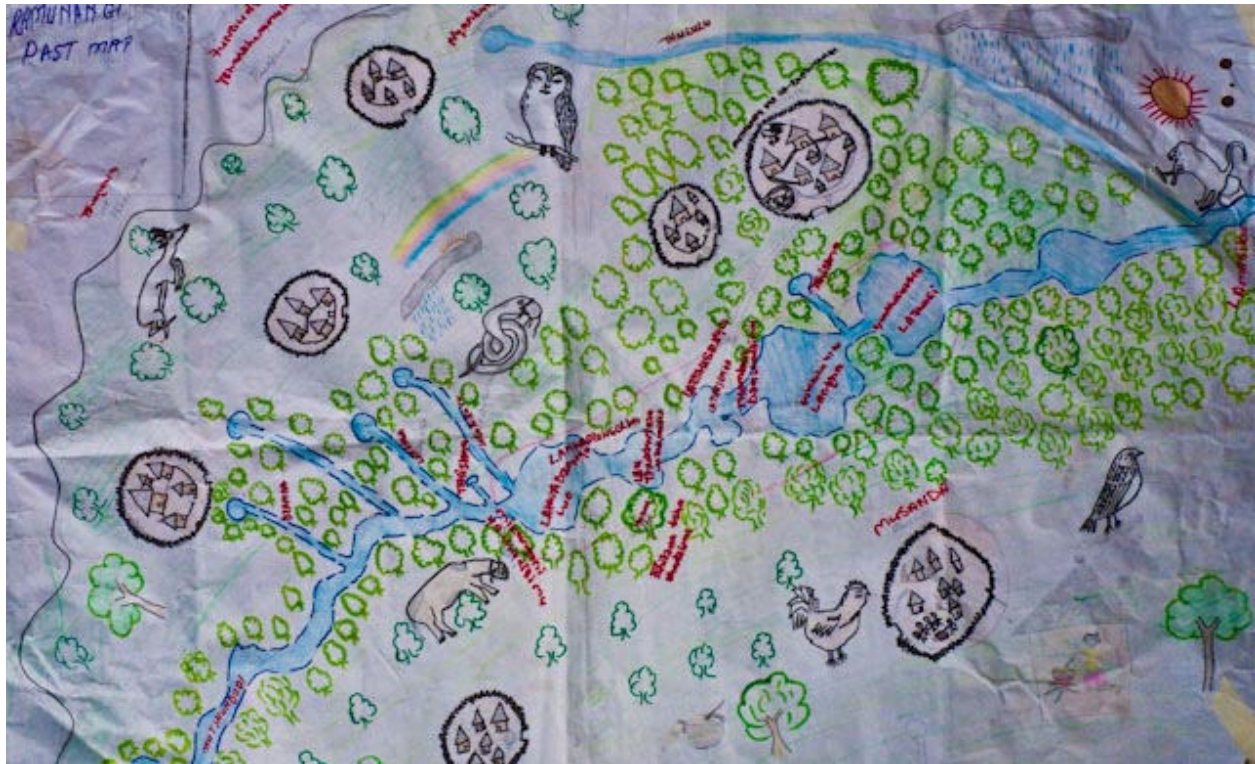


Image 4.2. Another example of eco-mapping. Image courtesy of Don Pinnock

Mphatheleni tells me that she spends days with the elders, following them around and watching and learning how they do things. She does this she says “because this is the way I grew up. My father was very old, my grandmothers, my *makhadzis* were old and I followed them wherever they are doing...I grew up in *mupo* life and in the traditional way. That’s how it became a passion to me, this work”.

I ask her if she is a *makhadzi* and she confirms that she is a *makhadzi* for her father’s clan: “You become *makhadzi* to your clan, but when you are *makhadzi*, you are *makhadzi* everywhere”. She explains that *makhadzi* are not formally trained or taught. She recalls how her father, who was a traditional healer, would send her to his hut, which was “like a chemist”, to fetch things. Although she wasn’t aware of it at the time, he was training her and this is how she developed the knowledge and the passion for the clan.

Mphatheleni explains that *makhadzis* use snuff in their rituals because it is “a tool to communicate...our tool for the prayers”. They also use millet and water from the spring or the river. *Makhadzis* carry healing power in their voices and their hands. They are responsible for holding the clan, healing the clan and keeping harmony in the clan. They are required to bless marriages, babies and sometimes even new cars. The *makhadzis* are present throughout a person’s life and perform important rituals at each stage.

Unfortunately, because people have moved to other religions and ignore the *makhadzis*, they are often labelled as witches. This happens because, when things are going wrong in their lives, people often turn back to the *makhadzis* and after they have performed a ritual, it is as “if a door has been opened”, which people then misinterpret as having been bewitched. Although the *makhadzis* face many challenges, they have incredible power and strength.

According to Mphatheleni, the new governance system ignores the *mupo* values and as a result there is disorder. The vision underlying the programmes of the Mupo Foundation is to restore order for future generations so that they will also have the opportunity to benefit from *mupo*. She says: “Our ancestors have lived and left us with this opportunity and these benefits. Clean rivers, trees, all wildlife there – order was there. But we are the generation [o]n the edge which want to destroy this, what about the future generation of our children? That’s the main thing why we are doing this work. We want to bring order”.

When I ask Mphatheleni how she got into her field of work, she replies, “I don’t call it work. I call it life. Because it’s not an employment which I am doing”. She continues, “I find myself in this field because I grew up that way. My father was a traditional healer, a traditional farmer and a traditional leader and he was very old when I was born”. Her father was seventy-four when she was born and she is the eleventh of twenty-four children. Her mother also came from a family of traditional healers and her maternal grandfather was considered the king of Venda, the leader of all the chiefs in Venda. Mphatheleni explains that she found it very difficult growing up: “I struggled a lot because life was dominated by the modern way, that you have to live the modern way in everything, you eat the modern food, you stay in modern family which do not regard tradition’s values. On top of it you have to get the modern religion, which [means] you have to disconnect with your ancestors”. Part of her struggle was that her father was regarded as a demon by the modern, Christian world and so she began to seek out the elders, spending time with them and making them her friends. When her father died, she went to a forest at the foot of the sacred mountain of her clan. She tells me that she

wanted to build a home, a traditional home, like my father’s home where there is a traditional kitchen. The set-up of the traditional homestead, with the community there, elders there and the young people, as a place where we can go and talk about culture. We find ourselves establishing a homestead in the forest. Then this traditional homestead, the

tourists when they see it, when the tour operators see it, they started to bring people there.



Image 4.3. The Phiphidi Falls – one of the sacred sites of the Venda people. Image courtesy of Don Pinnock

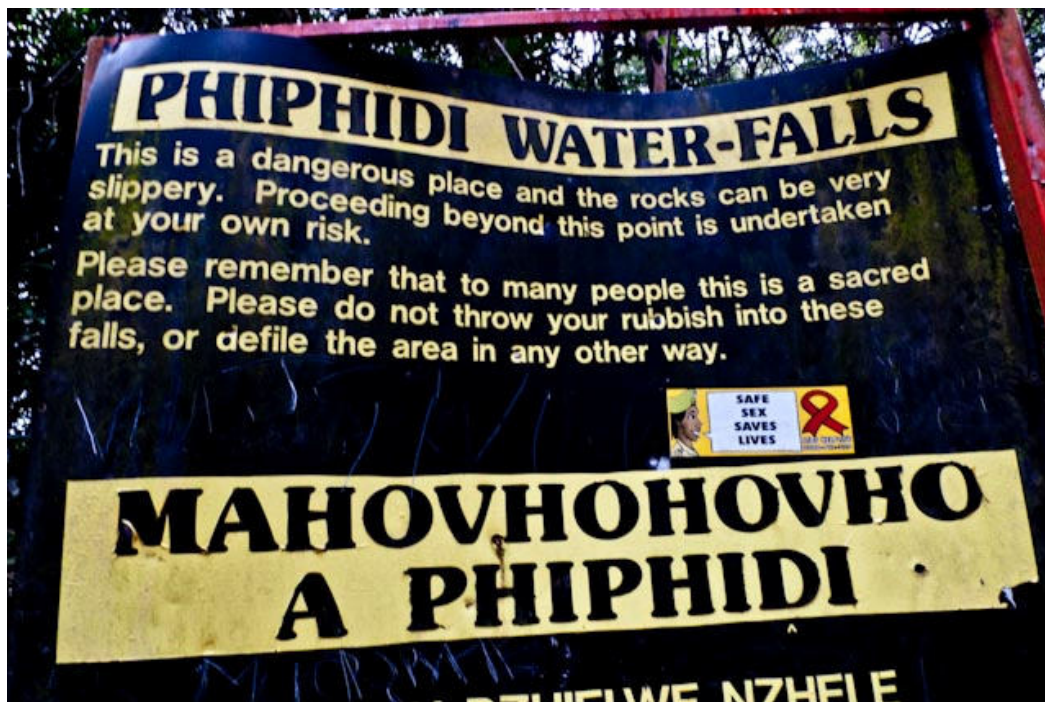


Image 4.4. Sign at the Phiphidi Waterfalls. Image courtesy of Don Pinnock

Mphatheleni would tell the tourists about her life and how order existed while she was growing up, but that the new governance system had destroyed this disorder. She started to make friends with people from all over the world who held similar interests and passions. It was at this time that she met people from the Gaia Foundation, the African Biodiversity Network and GRAIN, amongst others and eventually established the Mupo Foundation.

Mphatheleni reveals to me that after the death of her father and her *makhadzi* and because of the conflict she experienced between Christianity and her traditional spirituality she wanted to commit suicide and ended up in hospital with health issues. Her uncles who were both Christians took her away from her father before he died and she did not see him for eight years. She was told that she was not allowed to dream about her father because he was a demon. Her uncles also burned all her father's books in which he had written about traditional healing.

In response to the question about which local and global trends she sees impacting on her work, Mphatheleni refers to globalisation, money and economic development. Because of economic development, she says:

They're domesticating the whole nature for human need, for money, up to depriving all the wildlife [of] *mupo* benefits. Globally economic development seeing nature as the resource for human need only. When they see the river, they think of human need that a man will get thirsty and do not have water to cook and to bath with and we have to block this river for...They don't care about that this river has to flow, feed all the things which has *mupo* created.

She adds, "When they see the dense forest, they want to mine it...When they see the forest, they just think of debushing it and making their plantations and plant their macadamia". She also talks about the fact that animals are kept behind fences and can no longer migrate to find water. With regards to the sacred sites, she says people just want to make money by building hotels with electricity in the sacred sites. They forget that the sacred sites are ecosystems which bring rain and that they provide sanctuaries for animals. Instead, people think: "You don't have right to live. You insect, you don't have right to live; you soil, you don't have right to live, not mentioning the big animals".

Mphatheleni says she doesn't understand why humans have the desire to domesticate everything in the name of economic development. She explains that everything has the right to exist.

*Mupo – we don't protect only
the world where people live...
we don't only care for the human.*

*Mupo – we care for every
creation of the universe.*

*We care for the sustainable life,
not sustainable development.*

*Sustainable life: that there is a life
after us...*

*Future generations
not children of women only,
children of the whole planet,
children of the plants and the animals.*

Economic development means that animals have to be seen in zoos and in game parks only. However, the Venda people regard wild animals as their totems. Mphatheleni explains: "They are our life, they are part of our lives and our custom is that you respect this animal...we understand that we live with animals...they are not dangerous. I grew up in that way. I stayed in that forest when I was sick. There are many wild pigs there, they never hurt me...it's my animal, it's my totem".

Mphatheleni returns to the subject of sacred sites and explains that the trees in the sacred sites bring rain. She comments that people who call themselves environmentalists and who work in government in the Department of Environment do not understand how the ecosystems in the sacred sites work and how important these ecosystems are. Instead they cut down the trees, pave over the soil and install electricity. She says, "I don't understand them, they're the people who just want to earn money and live for now and don't care about the future". She doesn't understand this because she was brought up with

an understanding of and a connection to *mupo*. Her father would bring wild fruits and insisted that they drank water only from the river and not from the machine (the tap), but she says that today children think that fruit comes from Shoprite.

At this point in the interview Mphatheleni sends Thama to call my father to come inside and have some rooibos tea. He sits with us for a while, drinking his tea.

I ask Mphatheleni what gives her hope for the future. She responds by saying that people are looking to the west to solve the problems, but this is not working. She refers to a wide variety of problems, including uncontrollable youth, disease, food insecurity and failing governance systems. “My hope is that people will realise what is life, what is *mupo*”. Mphatheleni refers back to the fact that the *mupo* programmes are aimed at restoring order and that people around the world, from the Amazon and Russia to the Schumacher College in the United Kingdom, are all working towards the same vision of earth jurisprudence and looking for solutions to the problems.

4.5.2. Nature

What early memories/experiences do you have of Nature?

Have you experienced times in Nature which you would consider as turning points in your life? Please describe one such moment.

What do you understand by the concept of a person having a “relationship with Nature”?

Do you feel that you have a relationship with Nature?

How and why are people generally considered to be “disconnected from Nature”?

How does this disconnection manifest in our daily lives and what implications does it have for us?

How do you think we can restore connections with Nature?

When I ask her what early memories or experience she has of Nature, Mphatheleni recalls bathing in the river and collecting water from the spring. She says, “The river is...still now I cannot last a month without going to bath in the river. A river is very...I’m very much connected with the river. I don’t swim. I just want to go and sit in the river, in the water, bath”. She remembers seeing fish in the water and other creatures, “which thanks to my father, we figure out to be ‘water boatmen’”, which they used to play with. There were also lots of frogs near the river.

She also remembers eating wild fruits: “I grew up eating the fruits from the forests. At my father’s field, there were many fruits. He didn’t cut the wild fruits; we go there to climb the trees, up up there, we go to pick the fruits and we were having seasonal fruits”. She remembers seeing baboons, monkeys and birds in her father’s fields, and says, “We have songs which we sing about the fruits, birds, the animals”.

Mphatheleni’s other memories of Nature are related to her father. She recalls seeing his patients coming to the river to bath or sitting in the shade of big trees. She recollects her father coming home from his fields at sunset: “We will see him coming from the field, walking along the river and...turn and come home. We know that now the sun is going to set, when he arrive home. Because when he arrive home, he will sit at the verandah there which face sunset...I still remember him every time”.

In response to the question as to whether she has experienced turning points in Nature, Mphatheleni refers back to the time when she was extremely ill and ultimately diagnosed with pulmonary tuberculosis. She was admitted to hospital, but she knew she couldn’t stay there. She bargained with the doctors, saying she would take the medicine if they would discharge her, which they eventually agreed to. The following day she ran away to the forest, leaving the medicine behind. She knew that if her father was alive he would be able to heal her because he had healed so many people. She stayed in the forest, eating wild fruits and herbs, and drinking spring water. Fortunately her *makhadzi* was still alive and helped her through this time. Mphatheleni then describes her turning point:

One day when I was sitting on this big tree. I was very thin. Then I was feeling that life had stopped because I was on my own at that time. And when I walk in the forest I just want to be on my own. Then I was sitting there and I see this big tree here down there was compost, dead leaves and things walking on it. I was thinking much about my father and then when I look at these dead, brown trees and things walking there I see that this tree is completely dead. I was thinking much about when a person died because this person cannot come back at all. Then my mind was looking and concentrating on those dead leaves, that they get finished and they will not come back to the tree. I remember that time I was like, I don’t know, I feel like I fainted until I was somebody pull my head to wake up and see the leaves, moving like this...I can’t forget that spot. When I see those leaves moving, I feel some strange happiness coming to my heart...That happiness make me to stood up and said I have to live like this tree, leaves, not like this dead leaves.

The tree gave her hope and made her want to carry on living. To this day she loves trees and this is why her colour is green. She says that when she looks at trees, she forgets everything and she hopes that the future generation will one day still be able to see indigenous trees. "I could listen...to the sound of the wind when the leaves are moving, hey, it is life. And also to watch this movement. That's why for me I always say, just leave the trees to feed us with the *mupo* movement".

With regards to her understanding of the concept of a person having a 'relationship with Nature', Mphatheleni says she sees *mupo* as sacred life. At sunset she has her sacred hour during which she sits and looks at the stars and the moon rising. Once a month or so she wakes up at three o'clock in the morning to watch and experience the stages of dawn. She says, "There is so much healing on that, because that air which comes, and when you look the colours when they are starting to appear even the stars when they start to disappear, for me its healing, it's the relation". This time is very special for her because it is also when she does the *patla* or prayer. She also does silent walks during which she sees and listens without talking. She explains that people also have a relationship with Nature through food. When she visits the old women in their fields she sees that they have a relationship with the soil and with the seeds. They know when things will germinate and when they will ripen because they are in tune with the seasons. Mphatheleni also feels that one can have a relationship with Nature through reading about it in books. She refers to Thomas Berry as her favourite author and recommends his book *Evening Thought*.

Mphatheleni believes that, when people are down or sick, they should get outside and into Nature and breathe fresh air. She feels that hospitals are places of suffocation rather than healing, which is why she had to get out of the hospital and into the forest when she was sick. She compares the elders who live in townships and those who live in the villages. The elders who live in villages are strong and healthy and still work in the fields up to the age of ninety whereas those living in the townships are weak and can barely walk.

According to Mphatheleni, people do not see Nature as part of their lives and as life itself. She says that the people in Venda are disconnected from Nature because they no longer value or respect *mupo*. They don't respect the rivers because their water comes out of a tap: "They don't even think or remember that this water they are drinking is coming from sacred site". Apparently all the big rivers in Venda and in the Kruger National Park originate in the Thathe Forest, which is another of the sacred sites. She is

concerned that, not only have people forgotten where their water comes from, but they also pollute the rivers by dumping their litter.

People are also disconnected from Nature because everything is provided for them in their homes or in the shops. Mphatheleni uses the example of milk in the programmes she conducts with children to illustrate the importance of grass. She explains to the children that in order to produce milk the cows have to eat grass and in order for the grass to grow there needs to be rain. The rain is produced through evaporation by the trees in the sacred sites. When people buy a box of milk, they do not appreciate the connection between all the various elements which have gone into producing the milk: "How can a person connect the milk with the grasses and rain because there is no connection between rain and box of milk? There's no connection of box and milk and grass".

Mphatheleni states: "If we don't have nature, we don't have our spiritual way. Because we respect God through nature. If I disconnect from nature, how can I continue to be connected with my ancestors?" She says, "We don't pray without nature. We pray outside in nature". Although she does not want to undermine other religions, she is critical of Christianity because it has caused so much conflict and pain in her life. She doesn't see any connection with Nature in Christianity because it doesn't seem to care about other species and God only loves humans. She does not understand why Christianity talks about burning in hell: "For me, I don't know whose God who is that God who will cut all the trees and burn people? It's like a joke for me. But if fire comes from the wood, how can God punish all...the trees by burning a person?"

According to the Venda people, one may not cut trees, kill animals (even insects) or disturb any aspect of Nature in the sacred sites. Mphatheleni says that the sacred sites are like churches for her people and this is why they are fighting against developers. The sacred sites are also important because the ancestors "go back to the soil...They go back and their spirit is in the trees...the spirit of our ancestors go to Nature". This why the Venda people seek a connection with Nature and why they cannot live without Nature.

When I ask her how she thinks we can restore connections with Nature, Mphatheleni once again refers to the elders. She says that when she hears that an elder has died it is as if an entire library has burned down. Every elder is an irreplaceable reference as they each have their own memories and their own

knowledge. The only way to restore connections with Nature is through the knowledge, and more importantly, the experience of the elders. However, it is not good enough to simply talk to them and then run workshops or reproduce their knowledge in books. The physical presence of the elders is extremely important in the process of transferring the knowledge – without their presence you might as well read a book or visit a museum. Mphatheleni says:

An elder is not going to teach you that this is the law that you don't cut the tree, this is the law, that this tree is sacred. An elder will go and sit under the shade and talk this story...An elder go with you to the river as a woman and you learn what she is doing. You feel the water, you feel it when you walk, you listen to the story and you see.

4.5.3 Spirituality

What do you understand by the term/concept of spirituality?

What is/constitutes/characterises a spiritual relationship with Nature?

Do spiritual people necessarily behave in sustainable ways?

Do religions have a role to play in the transformation to a more sustainable world? If so, what kind of role?

Do you participate in regular spiritual practices, rituals, etc.? Please explain.

Can one have a spiritual relationship with Nature and if so, what does this entail?

With respect to her understanding of the term or the concept of spirituality, Mphatheleni refers to *vhadzimu*, the ancestors, which are “the ancestral connection to Nwali. I connect to Nwali through my *vhadzimu*”. Nwali refers to “the one whom we don't know, but we know that he created everything”. Through *vhadzimu*, Mphatheleni respects Nature because they connect her to Nwali and she respects others because they share the same Nwali. Her *vhadzimu* also drive her to live according to the laws of Nwali. Mphatheleni explains that, through rituals, ceremonies and initiation school, the *vhadzimu* assist to connect one with Nwali through the various stages of one's life. When a baby is seven days old the umbilical cord is cut off and returned to Nature. When one dies, water and seed are used in the burial ceremony. Spirituality, through the ancestors, is part of one's everyday life: “For us you do spiritual connection every minute, even when you are not doing anything, you are already connected”. Mphatheleni illustrates this saying, “When I sleep, my ancestors come in the dream. I dream my father, I

dream my grandmother, I dream this people who have died. Then this is the connection. For us this is spiritual connection”.

The *vhadzimu* chose chiefs, leaders and *makhadzi* before they are born. According to Mphatheleni, “I didn’t choose myself to do what I am doing. Nobody who chose me. Nobody. And I cannot have power to deny or power to choose...*Vhadzimu*...choose before you are born. That’s why when they chose you they also gave you wisdom or strength. They prepare the whole journey for you”. Because of *vhadzimu* people look similar, which is why Mphatheleni looks like her father and why she dreams of her father. She says she was given her name by her father through the *vhadzimu*.

The ancestors may be dead in the flesh, but they are present in spirit throughout one’s life. If one tries to ignore, dishonour or disconnect from the *vhadzimu* there will be problems such as sickness and one will then have to go to the *makhadzi*s and ask them to perform rituals to restore the connection.

Mphatheleni then explains to me why she thinks that Africa is suffering. There are two reasons: language and religion. As a result of colonisation, the younger generation no longer learns in their own languages. Children no longer learn from the elders because they go to school and the teachers are not their elders. They longer respect the elders because they don’t speak the same language anymore. Religion has taught people to live their lives in fear of going to hell and it has disconnected them from their original spirituality. It refers to the ancestors as demons.

Mphatheleni reiterates that “spirituality’s not a way of doing things for a certain hours or a certain day, it’s a way of life. That’s why for me spirituality is not that I have to dress neat and to go somewhere and somebody is sitting up there and teaching me spirituality. No, it’s not that, it’s way of life”. She adds that “spirituality is in nature. Spirituality is everywhere where you are. It’s not the place [that] you build”.

In answer to the question as to whether spiritual people behave in sustainable ways, Mphatheleni believes that if people are living in connection to *mupo* and recognise that their spiritual connection to Nwali is through the *vhadzimu*, then they will live sustainable lives. She says that “spiritual people they live the sustainable way because they care even for the future generation and they don’t even forget those who have died...When you live you connect with those who have gone. And also prepare for those who are coming. That’s for us is sustainable way”.

She believes that religion could play a role in the transformation to a more sustainable world if it recognised *mupo* values. She argues, however, that it should not promote the domination of other species or focus on human need only, but it should embrace Nature and acknowledge that it too has a right to exist independently of human need. She says that religion should not only be about saving the human soul, but the whole of creation as well. Mphatheleni refers to the “law of origin” which respected Nature and recognised the value of *mupo*, but the new imposed religion “interferes in the whole fabric of governance system of *mupo*. It brought disorder”.

While she has alluded to rituals throughout the interview, I ask Mphatheleni to tell me more about the spiritual practices and rituals which she participates in. She refers to two rituals: *thevhula* and *u phasa* and then tells about the ritual of *rhuma* which is “biting the things which we...reap...Thanking Nature has provided us, thanking ancestors they are telling Nwali to bring us food”. She also mentions a ritual to ask for rain so that they can have healthy food. As a *makhadzi* Mphatheleni puts snuff on her pillow so that she may sleep well and so that she will dream of the ancestors.

4.5.4. Sustainable development

What do you think the world needs if we are to overcome the global crises facing us?

Do you think consumption and materialism are problematic? If so, why?

How do you think we can overcome consumption and materialism?

What is your view on why there is suffering in the world?

In your view what is the world ‘calling’ for?

How do you think we should go about ‘sustainable development’ in South Africa?

Do you think there is a relationship between Nature, spirituality and sustainable living? Please describe this relationship.

In response to the question as to what the world needs if we are to overcome the global crises facing us, Mphatheleni says we need to go back to the root, which is to go back to *mupo*. She reiterates that “the world’s forgotten the root because of economic development”. She argues that the world does not need money: “What are we going to do with the bags of money if there are no more trees, no more rivers, the sea and the ocean is polluted? What are we going to do with the money?” Mphatheleni believes that “if the world want[s] to overcome the global crisis it must stop looking at the human need only”. She says

that she wishes that she were Mandela or someone whom people would listen to and that they would save every indigenous forest and every indigenous tree because they are the “key to life”. Policies are also critical as far as Mphatheleni is concerned, but she warns that the world will not overcome the global crises if the policy makers do not consider the consequences of their actions. She suggests that they visit the rivers which have been dammed and the areas which have been mined to see the results of their decisions.

I ask her whether consumption and materialism are problematic and if so whether they can be overcome. Mphatheleni believes they are problematic because they are about meeting human needs only. She says “People see the water in the tap...they don’t see the value of the river. People see the market or the shop...they don’t see food as connected with the nature”. As an example of materialism and the mindset of “I own, I own”, Mphatheleni refers to the fact that seed is now owned and has to be bought. Chemicals have to be bought and used in order for the seed to grow. As a result the seed and the soil have been poisoned. She says that people no longer value well-being: “Worth is not necessary as long as I have”.

In terms of overcoming consumption and materialism she again refers to the fact that the policies need to be changed so that they recognise the value of *mupo* and take into a consideration a holistic view of life. Unless the policies are changed it is impossible to defend the indigenous forests from exploitation. The policies also have to recognise the rights of all species to exist. Mphatheleni argues that the education policies must also be changed so that children are educated for life rather than just for careers and making money. She points out that in the end money does not satisfy and that people then seek other ways of satisfying themselves. She asks the question as to why people want to visit the Kruger National Park – what are they looking for that they can’t find at home? The reason she proposes is that people are lonely without Nature and without animals.

According to Mphatheleni, “Life does not come from owning nature or dominating nature. Life comes from when a human being is...whole...” and when we protect *mupo* which is “the bowl of life”.

She refers back to the policy makers who are educated people yet they make poor decisions about the environment and then go off to Woolworths to buy organic food. While the minister of education buys organic food which is expensive, the schools are not provided with organic food in the feeding schemes.

Mphatheleni believes that there is suffering in the world because people have ignored *mupo*, “the bowl of life” and because they are disconnected from Nature. The threats which are facing us are a wake-up call to remind us that we have forgotten the root. Sustainable development in South Africa can only happen through a change in policies and by a return to order which is what the Mupo Foundation is working towards. She says, “South Africa...has to learn about the values of *mupo* and remember the value of *mupo*”.

When I ask her the final question as to whether she thinks there is a relationship between Nature, spirituality and sustainable living, Mphatheleni says yes and clasps her hands together, with her fingers intertwined: “It's just like this...All this is under *mupo*”.

Four and a half hours later we finish the interview. Mphatheleni tells me she thinks the questions I have asked are “nice” questions and that they have made her think a lot. She asks me whether people will understand what she has told me and whether there are other people who think the same as she does. I tell her that I do and that I tracked her down because I believed that she had so much information and wisdom to share with me. I tell her that I think that the work she is doing is very important and that more people need to start living sustainable lives. I then explain the process of typing up the interview and I promise to send her a copy of the recording, for which she is most grateful. I thank her and say that at least she can now get on with her day. She replies that she has pineapple seeds which she wants to plant – her father used to plant pineapples. I share with her the fact that I have learned a lot about Nature from my father and that he has influenced many of my beliefs about my relationship with Nature. Mphatheleni replies, “Fathers are very special, old fathers, not the new ones like today's fathers, the old ones. I admire everybody who has an old father...I didn't get enough time with my father”.

4.6. Nirmala Nair (see Appendix I)

*Memories awakening,
Cellular memories of one consciousness.
One being,
Oneness, at peace with myself (Nair, 2006:146).*

I meet with Nirmala at her home on a rainy afternoon. She makes us rooibos tea and we settle down on cushions in her lounge to talk through the interview questions.

Nirmala is originally from India, having grown up in Cashmere at the foot of the Himalayas. She came to South Africa in 1993 after having completed a Masters in gender development in the Netherlands. Nirmala is the co-ordinator of the southern African branch of the Zero Emissions Research Initiative (ZERI).

4.6.1. Work

Tell me about the work you do.

How did you get into/find your way into your current field of work?

What global and local trends do you see currently impacting on your work?

Which of these trends give you hope for the future?

Through ZERI Nirmala is currently working with the Bhutanese government to develop “new economic initiatives in alignment with gross national happiness”. Bhutan, which is a tiny mountainous country sandwiched between China, India and Nepal, was the first country in the world to refer to ‘gross national happiness’ (GNH), which essentially implies “happiness of the people, of the ecosystem and overall wellbeing”. In an effort to align people and ecosystems and the well-being of both, ZERI has created “thirty-five new portfolios, innovations and technologies that Bhutan could use without really degrading their ecosystem and their forest”. In order to showcase Bhutan’s initiatives, Nirmala is involved in the organisation of a week-long seminar, chaired by the prime minister and the Gross National Happiness Commission, which will be attended by about seventy-five people, including

business people, investors and innovators, from around the world. While this has kept her extremely busy, Nirmala says that this has been

deeply meaningful and soulful work for me because it allows me to see that there is a small country in a mountain kingdom in the Himalayas who's really ready to take...very out-of-the-box thinking where you're not trapped with just the economic incentives, but you can also work with them and show that this is possible. If a country as small as Bhutan can do this, anyone can do it...

According to Nirmala, her work has always been about trying “to bridge development with well-being, but with a deeper consciousness because my frustration with most of the sustainable development work is that it's not touching upon the consciousness aspect”. She argues that we are hesitant to use words such as ‘consciousness’, ‘spirituality’ and ‘meditation’ in regard to sustainable development, yet this she questions since, as she understands it, “sustainable development is sustaining life and sustaining life has to be in many other ways, not just in material ways, so you sustain life from the source of energy, you sustain life from the world of matter”. She explains further that “the dance between the world of energy and the world of matter has to be somehow meaningful[ly] articulated in the world of sustainable development”. Although Nirmala recognises that the concepts of spirituality, consciousness and mindful living are slowly being integrated into the sustainable development discourse, she says that this is still happening at an intellectual level and not from the heart: “From a head space we are accepting it and we are theorising it and doing seminars and workshops, but really accepting it from a heart space means having to undergo a lot of one's current assumptions about lifestyles and assumptions about our roles and identities and belongingness and rootedness...”. Nirmala believes that these areas are so “murky and deep” that we tend to remain in “our neatly boundaried comfort zones”, but when we do venture to talk about them, we get caught up in “intellectual debates” about what they really mean without “coming down into a heart space”. This is her frustration and she believes that this reason that she has struggled in the worlds of sustainable development and academia because she feels she needs “to do more justice from the world of energy and...consciousness space”.

However, she believes that her work with ZERI has given her credibility in that it has given her a ‘scientific stamp’ “because a lot of the work we do in ZERI is with scientists and this has basically allowed me a forum to prove that we can actually talk about wellness, wellbeing, deeper consciousness – all of these things while being able to challenge existing business and technology and...economic

systems". Although she admits it's a juggling act and that sometimes her head "comes in every now and then and knocks me here and there", she feels that she has created a "safe space...without having to compromise my heart space. That's my priority...I cannot actually operate as a being unto myself if I have to compromise on my heart's belief system". Nirmala feels "deeply blessed and honoured" that she has the opportunity to work with the Bhutanese because "the more I work in that context, the more I'm able to fine tune the whole concept of mindful living...[and] how...we do that in a way without compromising quite a lot of the other essentials of living practically and...economically".

Nirmala's story in terms of how she found her way into her current field of work starts in the early 1970s and 1980s when she was working with rural women in Rajasthan in India. Her work focused on development issues, particularly in community development, and on leadership training for women. Through feminist conscious-raising workshops she was involved in "assisting them and enabling them [to] find a voice and pushing for women's participation in local government". With a Masters in sociology already under her belt, Nirmala was awarded a fellowship to continue her studies in gender development at the Institute of Social Studies in the Netherlands. Here she was exposed to classical development theory and critiques of developmentalism and it was during this time she started to question the role of development and how it impacts on people's lives and started to look at the concept of consciousness and its relationship to development. While she still considered herself as a "hardcore developmentalist" and was "still quite into the development philosophy", coming to South Africa "toppled the apple cart, so to speak". She explains that she arrived in South Africa

with quite a big ego, thinking here I am a hardcore feminist, really into gender and development its global issue, it's a global thing and I can go and work with this anywhere and the world needs this so I'm kind of one of these indispensable beings who can float around, do this work anywhere and everywhere, but I think South Africa really gave me a big whack and wakeup call.

This started her on a "journey of self-discovery" because she "suddenly discovered that I couldn't really do much with my expertise and knowledge, etc in South Africa for various reasons". Some of the reasons she cites are race, class and the struggle against apartheid. She says, "it was just before 1993, just before the elections so...development issues were not a priority at that time...the country's focus was all on other aspects [such as] the elections and the new government".

It was during this time that Nirmala started thinking about the role of identity, particularly as she was a “Hindu, Indian, rebel woman married to a white English-speaking South African”. She started to explore issues of “how do we construct...identities, about who we are and where we come from and where does our whole idea of belongingness comes from and who shapes our belongingness and how is it being shaped by our own immediate social realities”. She realised that, when one is not in one’s own country, one’s “psyche and...sense of who [one is] change drastically and dramatically and it was a big wake up call for me that how whimsical and flimsy this whole notion of identity is especially if you’ve done a lot of deep inner work”. She is critical of the fact that “in the absence of not being able to do deep inner work, what I call soul work”, people develop identities based on “externalities or external realities” which have “no relation to a deeper aspect of [one’s] inner being”. She realised that there was a “disjuncture” in her relationships with people in South Africa because “people [were] not even able to understand what I am talking about because everyone [was] talking...from an externalised construct of who they are”. The hesitancy of people to get into the “deeper, murkier stuff [of] the soul and the self” resulted in Nirmala finding it increasingly difficult to engage with people in her personal and professional life to the point that she felt they weren’t even talking the same language. She recalls attending a COSATU meeting,⁴⁶ during which, at lunch time everyone was eating burgers and drinking Coca Cola, and she raised the issue of health and health politics and “they would all kind of look at me and think that I am kind of crazy to be raising all of these kinds of issues. Here we talking about rights...why we would we now meander away to what we’re drinking and eating during lunch time?”

Nirmala says it was at this time that “I almost went through my dark, darkest phase in my life...I lost my belief in development, I lost my belief in the kind of gender development we were all doing at that time”. She retreated and started doing her own research and self-study and during this process discovered ZERI in Fritjof Capra’s book *The Hidden Connections*. She wrote to Capra who introduced her to Gunter Pauli, the founder of ZERI, and she has never looked back. She finally met Pauli in Kenya in 2000 where he invited her to complete ZERI practitioner training and she became a fully accredited ZERI practitioner. Pauli then gave Nirmala permission to start ZERI Southern Africa and she says this was “the start of a new life for me. At least I’ve found a niche where I feel as though I [can] work with all of these mish-mash of unarticulated so-called unviable concepts, but put them all into some kind of a package with the science and innovation and technology and deeper concepts of well-being”.

⁴⁶ COSATU: Congress of South African Trade Unions

Nirmala found herself moving away from development discourse and particularly sustainable development because “it wasn’t making sense for me...it wasn’t addressing quite a lot of my own personal belief systems of how to marry the whole notion of living well-being plus continuously changing ecosystems...and I found quite a lot of it very hypocritical”. She is critical of sustainable development because she feels that it has become a “big, consultant-driven, multi-national industry” as opposed to ZERI which is not an economic institution and rather functions as “a network and emulates...nature’s network systems”. Nirmala says this has

allowed me to sustain my life’s work and my soul work in a way. I found a place where I can marry both and...they can both co-exist without causing discomfort to each other so I could kind of say that I am being truly mindful in this kind of work that I am doing, that I don’t have to compromise any of my belief systems.

In terms of the global and local trends impacting on her work, Nirmala believes that the unravelling of the economic system and the unravelling and collapse of natural systems is a “direct blessing, not even in disguise”. While ZERI has been talking about localised decentralised systems for a long time, she says that “it has not been really wide heard [of] or if it has...it has been hi-jacked and manipulated and contorted to make it look as though it’s [a] decentralised system, but actually it’s still controlled by small groups of people”. For this reason Nirmala believes that the work in Bhutan is significant for ZERI because a “whole country whose government and policy makers, including the investors and bankers, are sitting with us and designing the entire country’s initiative, based on our principles and philosophies”. ZERI has also done a lot of work in Japan and, since the disaster of Fukushima, has also been working in Germany to assist this country in its move away from nuclear energy. According to Nirmala, “people are beginning to realise that what ZERI has to offer in terms of a cascading portfolio of packages to really enhance the local ecosystem and the well-being of the people and their economic situation is possible”.

She tells me about a project in the Eastern Cape in which ZERI is designing a zero-waste agricultural business cluster, which will create about 3,000 different jobs. She was requested by the agricultural ministry to submit a concept paper on agro-ecology, which draws on various Cuban models of agro-ecology, but applies ZERI principles and practices. Nirmala also refers to a new urban space development in the Western Cape which will be based on ZERI ideas – she says she can’t mention the project yet as it is awaiting political approval.

Other training programmes are being developed around the country which are “really leveraging quite a lot of that whole deeper consciousness about well-being and harnessing the principles of compassionate co-creativity and all of these deeper aspects which sustainable development discourses are not really touching upon”. Nirmala says she and a colleague will be training conservationists and ecologists in August 2011 using an approach inspired by ZERI and biomimicry. ZERI has also been asked to develop an evaluation tool and resource kit to do environmental evaluations differently. Nirmala acknowledges that “so many of these programmes [are] happening, but none of them...really tap into these deeper aspects that we’re talking about”. She says “So...slowly the world is embracing ZERI”.

Nirmala believes that, by bringing in some of the “Bhutanese energy” into South Africa, we can “create a space in South Africa where we can start meaningfully addressing the issue of well-being and the happiness aspect”.

*We know that people are deeply deeply unhappy here
and deeply wounded,
deeply angry and then we bask in this whole
facade of happiness outside with big smiles
but there’s nothing inside,
there’s a deep
hollowness
and
emptiness
so I really want to somehow...address it in a way that
we can move away from that place of fear and discomfort
to a...place of liveliness and deeper honesty
even if it’s a discomfort, let’s face it honestly.
Yes, it is discomfort, yes it is hurting
but let’s grapple with it and
see how we can move towards
a more resilient notion of well-being.
Nobody goes to be happy one hundred percent of the time
but it’s not a happiness of that kind...*

*it's [a] deeper fullness that we need to look for
instead of this deeper emptiness that we're dealing with.
And then we pretend that we're happy outside.
So somehow if I can bring those into some of the kind of work that we're doing,
then I can think we can make a big headway.*

In terms of her hope for the future, Nirmala says, "What gives me hope is the creation of a space and an ever expansive space [where] we're able to harness and leverage these different emotions and feelings and quite consciously work towards consciousness".

4.6.2. Nature

*What early memories/experiences do you have of Nature?
Have you experienced times in Nature which you would consider as turning points in your life? Please describe one such moment.
What do you understand by the concept of a person having a "relationship with Nature"?
Do you feel that you have a relationship with Nature?
How and why are people generally considered to be "disconnected from Nature"?
How does this disconnection manifest in our daily lives and what implications does it have for us?
How do you think we can restore connections with Nature?*

In response to my question regarding her early memories or experiences of Nature, Nirmala admits that she could go on and on. She says:

The reason why I am doing what I am doing [is] because I never went to school for the first eleven years of my life. I grew up in the mountains of Himalayas in Cashmere. No schooling and my playmates were stalactites, looking at the snow and playing in the wild and going out in the open. No formal structures so, no restrictive conditioning about what to be and how to be.

While Nirmala acknowledges the importance of the experience of external landscapes, "of being one with Nature" in the development of internal landscapes, she says that "we don't have that luxury and...at the same time we need that, we need to somehow enter into our own internal landscapes even

if we don't have the external landscapes". She continues saying, "We have an obligation to create those internal landscapes and, because I had the external landscape of that beauty and pristine wilderness and amazingly majestic nature around me all the time with no boundaries, I was able to tap into my own internal landscapes in the same unfettered way". But she admits that it has been very difficult living in a city and in an urban setting which she supposes is why she lives in Cape Town and not in Johannesburg. She says,

My escape even now is the mountain. I just disappear and do my solitary explorations [in] the nookies and crannies of the mountain which really feeds my soul because I don't think I would have been able to sustain my life in a city if this mountain's not around me. Yes, so that's my nature. Nature is an integral part of one's being.

I am astounded that Nirmala did not attend school until the age of eleven and express this. She admits that

there was a time when I started...schooling I was made to feel so conscious of my lack of proper schooling that I grew up for a long time feeling very embarrassed about my upbringing, that I never went to school and I used to feel really really complex-stricken about talking about it...And now as I got older I began to realise, my God what a privilege!

She definitely recalls experiences in Nature which she considers as turning points in her life and has very vivid memories of her life in Cashmere. She says,

I just feel that every iota of thinking that I have and conceptual clarities and breakthroughs and all of these things I owe it to those few years, the formative years of my time in Cashmere. Somehow it is still so deeply embedded and alive in me that I consider that my treasure chest, I dip into it and I dive into it and come out energised.

She feels privileged to have experienced the beauty of Nature throughout her life and believes that her "own association, my inner work, my deep soul work and my outer work – community and all other kinds of work – is almost like a mirror".

*... if there is an abundant nature around you,
then there is an abundance consciousness around you.
And the abundance comes from being deeply rooted and*

embedded in that fertile nature and amazing ecosystem.

Nirmala argues that we need to really connect with the aliveness of nature, not just through “mundane hikes up the mountain [when you] put your takkies [on] and [your] backpack and [have] a globalised, commercialised interaction [with] nature”. She is hesitant to use the word ‘spiritual’, saying, “It’s not even spiritual, it’s something very deeply primal in us and it’s that primal connectivity that we need to start harnessing when we talk about nature and somehow when we harness that we are simultaneously allowing the creation of that rich, alive internal landscape inside us”.

Nirmala then confesses that she has forgotten the question because she got carried away with her own memories. I remind her and she concludes her answer, saying, “I can’t think of a life without nature actually in a funny sort of way because we’re so integral to nature”.

When I pose the question as to what she understands by the concept of a person having a ‘relationship with Nature’, Nirmala replies:

It’s a tricky question isn’t it?...that question in a way assumes that you are outside nature. There is a disconnect and nature is out there and you are engaging with nature out there. But...for me the way I look at it, I am nature. I am part of nature. I am in nature and nature is in me and I’m in nature.

She tries to explain further, saying

when I go for my walks or when I sit here in my little garden or even when I sleep...there is this sudden seamless. It’s almost as if your skin just melts away and then you have kind of dispersed into nature and nature has seeped into you. It’s a funny experience that I’ve had often which has made me realise that there is no such thing as ‘I am having a relationship with nature’.

Nirmala points out that it depends on how one’s “brain is wired” and that western training has an influence on how one views nature.

*it’s a beingness....
my beingness is nature*

*it's boundary-less because
I am part of this larger cosmic consciousness...
I may be in a solid, physical world
but this solid, physical form is just energetics and
it's just connected to zillions of little particles of nature and
...we all are in a seamlessly, intricately, interconnected energetic...
like lace network...
The beingness of life.*

My next question as to whether she feels she has a relationship with Nature is superfluous in terms of her answer to the previous question, but Nirmala says, "I enjoy the beingness of me which is part of nature".

Nirmala believes that our "globalised, materialised left-brain upbringing" is partially responsible for the fact that people are generally considered to be disconnected from Nature. The other reason she says is that society does not allow "beingness to come alive" – there is no space for this "through rituals or belief systems or celebrations". Because there is no space, children grow up without knowing that beingness is possible. Nirmala says at best children will grow up having a relationship with Nature and at worst "not having a clue about inner or outer ecosystems". If this is the case, children experience a "disjunctured, disjointed, disconnected existence" which manifests as a hole in the heart. She explains that "the hole inside your heart is the beingness, is the nature, is the aliveness" and if you don't fill it with the right kind of ingredients the hole gets bigger and the "goodies" just continually dissolve in this gaping hole. As adults we cannot relate to this hole in our hearts and so we "consume more and more goodies and get into all kinds of obsessive, addictive behaviours and neurotic dysfunctional relationships". Nirmala believes that we are suffering from a "generational hole in the heart [where] there is no beingness".

Having children herself, she concedes that it is difficult to raise children in cities "with these kind of deep philosophies and the deeper connectedness because they go out into the world which is so diametrically opposite to...one's belief system". As a mother, she says that she just has to hope that her children will make the right choices because "the world outside is not easily going to allow them to fill their hole in the heart with the beingness. It's basically trying to teach them to fill it with achievement certificates

and accolades and accomplishments”. Nirmala expresses concern for young people from the local indigenous population and the African cultures who, although they have a deep connectedness, say they feel embarrassed and ashamed to participate in rituals which “create that meaningful filling of the space”.

According to Nirmala, the disconnection from Nature manifests as “dis-ease” and it is apparent in every aspect of our lives. She argues that well-being and wellness have been commoditised in South Africa to such an extent that wellness is beyond the reach of ordinary people. She finds it sad that no one is questioning this in spite of the fact that it is “a birthright of humans to live well and to be well”. This is an example of society’s disconnection from Nature – “if the society’s at one with nature then something like this would not be happening”.

As to how we can restore connections with Nature, Nirmala recognises that this is an exercise in itself and does not really know how we can do this given that if “we’re talking about generational gaps...we’re also talking about generational healing”. She accepts that it is something that will not happen overnight because “so much has to happen simultaneously, that whole intricate web of life needs to come alive”. While she doesn’t believe there is an easy solution, she thinks that

the only way we can start is being very simple and small initiatives, but zillions of these kind of small initiatives at all levels, bottom up and simultaneously doing policy changes, but also using all vehicles that we have at the moment to start interfacing and interjecting ideas which...will turn around the thinking whether it is business or economics or policies or tertiary education. We need to bring in mind-altering and mind-changing stuff into the broader sectors and move away from this kind of a really very anal kind of a approach to quite a lot of these things...[we need to] remove the fear to start with and begin to take the risk.

We’ve got to start looking at nature.

Wild or pristine or abandoned or whatever.

*As long as the conditions conducive to life are there,
nature survives, nature thrives...*

Nirmala believes that we have to start creating conditions that enable different kinds of thinking, which means changing the syllabus, presenting different kinds of workshops and introducing new innovations and designs. While she knows that some of this is already happening, it is happening “at a very disparate level. There is no connectedness...everything is highlighted through...very deeply divisive competitive and ego-driven stuff”. At this point she refers to Mahatma Gandhi’s statement, ‘Be the change you want to see’ and claims that “everybody keeps on using that term, but they hardly understand what it means”. She emphasises that “you’ve got to start walking the talk”. Nirmala uses the example of growing her own food rather than continuing to buy organic food and proudly tells me that she harvested bananas the day before from her small townhouse garden.

She thinks that it is “essential for us to come down from the ivory towers to simple realities, ground zero and start practicing these kinds of things that you can change your life. Living more austere and living more simply is very important to start with”. She argues that “we can’t talk about sustainable development and be living the kind of opulent lifestyle that quite a lot of our sustainable development consultants to live”.

Nirmala also contends that we need to move from a money economy to “a more appreciative economy where it’s not the money that is guiding everything, but it’s more a kind of a value, an appreciation and compassion and exchange and nurturing and fostering...”.

She concedes that there isn’t an easy formula by which we can restore connections with Nature and states that

there has to be a growing body of critical consciousness and if all of us in our own ways, in our own varied different walks of life can become a line of influence, keep on influencing various spheres of our networks, then slowly we’re contributing towards a growing body of critical thinkers and then critical consciousness. Without that we’re not going to really change anything.

At this juncture in the interview I ask Nirmala to tell me more about the concept of gross national happiness which Bhutan developed. She tells me that the fourth king of Bhutan believed that measuring development by economic development was inadequate and that he was concerned about the impact that globalised economic development would have on his country’s ecosystems and on the traditional

beliefs and values of his people. The king believed that the happiness of the Bhutanese people was as important as economic development and so, together with philosophers and academics, the Centre for Bhutan Studies pioneered the concept of gross happiness. After democratic elections some three years ago at which time the king stood down much to the disappointment of the Bhutanese, a new government was elected. The government realised that the country needed economic development, but what kind of economic development? Bhutan's largest single resource is its forests and it realised that it has to preserve this asset – it therefore stipulated in its Constitution that 65 percent of its forests has to be preserved, irrespective of development.

Since there was no model as to how to do this effectively the Bhutanese government contacted ZERI to assist them. In June 2010 Nirmala accompanied Gunter Pauli, the chairperson of Club of Rome and the head of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Doctor Ashok Khosla to Bhutan and they presented the government with thirty-five portfolios which would enable the Bhutanese to produce all their own food (and be totally independent from India), generate all their energy requirements and eliminate municipal waste water treatment plants and landfill sites. They also looked at ways of integrating systems thinking into tertiary education and combining traditional values and beliefs and happiness with a new kind of science, innovation and economics. As Nirmala points out, “happiness doesn't stand in isolation, but is totally...embodied in the plan to sustain the local economic development which regenerates the forests and the wellness of the forest and wellness of the people”.

After this brief, but important digression, we move on to the section about spirituality.

4.6.3. Spirituality

What do you understand by the term/concept of spirituality?

What is/constitutes/characterises a spiritual relationship with Nature?

Do spiritual people necessarily behave in sustainable ways?

Do religions have a role to play in the transformation to a more sustainable world? If so, what kind of role?

Do you participate in regular spiritual practices, rituals, etc.? Please explain.

Can one have a spiritual relationship with Nature and if so, what does this entail?

When I ask Nirmala what she understands by the term or concept of spirituality, she replies that the word is “contentious”, but she admits that she struggles because she does not want to necessarily use the word religion either “because it has got its own rigid kind of notions and ideas”. However, while she understands “how the word spirituality came to almost encompass a kind of a very eclectic way of holding many belief systems altogether” she feels that it has become “new agey and...doesn’t really convey what it should be conveying”.

She is critical of the use of the word spirituality as she believes that people “dabble” in spirituality while ignoring “the practical realities [what is] happening to people or to the planet”. Nirmala suggests that it was a “disconnected belief system that gave rise to materialism, that same thing you’ve tried to replace that same disconnected belief system and change the materialism and put spirituality there”.

*we live in a world of matter
and we live in world of spirit
and it’s a dance...
in the Hindu way it’s a union
of the spirit and the matter together
that has given rise to the physical world.*

On this basis she argues that people have reduced spirituality to just spirit and have forgotten or chose to ignore the world of matter and it will just take care of itself. She recognises that, perhaps because of her Hindu beliefs, she has shied away from using the word spirituality and because she feels that it is narrow and limited.

According to Nirmala, “Spirituality is my beingness, it’s living with my beingness where I am alive, where I am aware of the spirit...that comes through my body in the form of life and then creates the world of matter around me. So for me that’s what spirituality is about: being in touch, being in tune with my own inner spirit”. She does not follow any rigid practices, but believes that it is a “continuously evolving, emerging organic process...[in which] there [are] no hard and fast rules...as long as one is deeply respectful and connected and truthful to that kind of process of messy emergence”.

However, she contends that the difficulty comes in that we can then couch anything in the name of spirituality and this becomes problematic as it raises the issue of responsibility and ethics.

As to what constitutes a spiritual relationship with Nature, Nirmala responds that Nature *is* spirit: “For me nature is also spirit because that’s where I feel I am unified with nature because it’s the same life, it’s that life that unites”. She muses that, although a tree is slightly different to her in terms of cellular structure, they both have life and this is what unifies her – “It’s that spirit that I connect with and life, life and spirit I would use...more or less in the same way”. She explains further, saying, “That’s the connection I have and if [I] revere and respect that life and spirit then I am revering and respecting nature and that’s how I engage or [how] my relationship gets manifested through that reverence”. Nirmala admits though that this connection is multi-faceted and changes all the time.

The little girl who played with the snow aged six in Cashmere had a relationship and was aware of that aliveness and that pulse of life and then she felt at one with Nature, now as a fifty-five-year-old, grey-haired woman I have a different relationship and yet it’s the same. It’s manifested slightly differently through the different ways I engage and talk and deliberate and discourse...but the essence of that is still the same. It’s that essence that keeps me pushing and probing through the kind of work that I do in an uncompromising way.

Nirmala does not believe that spiritual people necessarily behave in sustainable ways because she argues that people can be spiritual and yet be disconnected and not understand what is happening in the world. She states that

we’re here to engage in the world of matter, through the world of spirit so that’s very important for me to be in my spirit, but also not to deny the world of matter because after all I am put in the world of matter to do work on this world of matter. If I just want to be in spirit, the great cosmic forces would not have allowed me to incarnate in physical body. The fact that I am incarnated in physical body means I’ve got to some bloody work in the world of matter otherwise I would just be spirit in the thin air!

Given that the majority of people attend church, temple and mosque and that religions have power, resources and followers in great numbers, Nirmala believes that religions do have a role to play in the transformation to a more sustainable world. She asserts that perhaps religions “will have far more of a

inroad with their believers than people like you and me". She acknowledges the work being done by Bishop Geoff Davies who is involved with the Southern African Faith Communities Environment Institute (SAFCEI).

Nirmala participates in spiritual practices and rituals, but does not follow any rigid formats. Although most of her rituals and practices are influenced by Hinduism (which is the faith in which she was raised), she is eclectic and draws from other practices and shamanic traditions. However, she is clear about the importance of ritual in one's life: "You need ritual space in [your] life and I try to create ritual space every day if possible so that's an essential part of my living. Because I think it's through the creation of the ritual space that you're able to access that beingness". Nirmala believes that this is possible through "meditation and sometimes it is just silently listening to music or walking in the mountain or simply doing my gardening".

With reference to the question about whether one can have a spiritual relationship with Nature, Nirmala feels that she has already adequately answered this so we move on to the section about sustainable development.

4.6.4. Sustainable development

What do you think the world needs if we are to overcome the global crises facing us?

Do you think consumption and materialism are problematic? If so, why?

How do you think we can overcome consumption and materialism?

What is your view on why there is suffering in the world?

In your view what is the world 'calling' for?

How do you think we should go about 'sustainable development' in South Africa?

Do you think there is a relationship between Nature, spirituality and sustainable living? Please describe this relationship.

In terms of what the world needs if we are to overcome the global crises facing us, Nirmala proposes "community-driven local projects" in the tradition of what Mahatma Gandhi referred to as *swaraj* which means "local self-governance". She explains that the concept of *swaraj* is not the same as local municipal structures, but something much smaller at local village level and it is at this level that we need

to bring in the “non-monetised qualities of co-creative co-existence”. Nirmala believes that we are going to be forced to go this route sooner than later because she feels that we are underestimating the impending crisis facing us. While decentralisation is critical, she argues that “consciousness and...mindfulness becomes very very important because if you don’t have an awakened critical mass at local level, you won’t really be able to, even if you’ve got the power and resources...know how to navigate that and live in that kind of decentralised local ecosystem”. Nirmala is emphatic that we need to make a choice about how we live and “decide whether [we] want to live locally, simply and austere” because we cannot, at the same time, “hold on to...power and name and fame and...offshore banking and 4x4s and SUVs. No, you can’t have your cake and eat it”.

Having said that, however, Nirmala believes that the “choice will be thrust upon us whether we like it or not when the global catastrophes strike one after the other”. She cites Japan as being the first to experience this kind of catastrophe and says that perhaps it is “part of the cosmic drama because I think the universe is trying to show us if any country can do it its Japan because they’ve done it, they’ve shown it, they rebuilt that entire country post Nagasaki, Hiroshima. Now they’ll do it again”. She tells me that Tokyo now has the largest rooftop agricultural system in the world because it has realised the impacts of radiation on food production. Nirmala says that Japan “knows how to live authentically and quite simply, they struggle and they survive, but it’s up to us whether we are ready to learn that kind of a lifestyle, [given] that [we will have]...to forgo quite a lot to live like that”. She goes on to tell me a story, contained in an email which was circulated sometime after the March 2011 earthquake, about how the people in Sendai shared their water with others by putting up a sign in the window of their houses to let them know that they could collect water and how every evening old men would go around, leaving plates of food in tents for the refugees. This illustrates what Nirmala refers to as “ego-less compassion” and she wonders, whether if calamity were to strike in South Africa, would we able to respond in the same manner – she is doubtful, given what happened during the xenophobic riots in 2008.

As to whether she thinks that consumption and materialism are problematic, Nirmala argues that we have become “slaves to...a commoditised way of living”, to that which she refers to as “a supermarket syndrome of life”. She refers to consumerism as “a silent killer” and uses the analogy of cancer to explain how consumerism is killing the “social organism”. She says with a wry smile, that although she doesn’t “believe [in] armed revolution”, she would “blow up the supermarkets” because they have

become a “menace” in society, depriving local growers and street side vendors of their livelihoods. Further, she believes that supermarkets “take away our right to enjoy nature at nature’s own seasons” because everything is available all the time, whether it is in season or not and regardless of whether it is locally produced or not. She argues that supermarkets feed into society’s need for instant gratification. In response to someone arguing about how difficult it is to be a locavore, Nirmala responded “[but] we lived like that, you go into any of those tiny little villages, you eat what you get...that season and you enjoy it. You have a community of feast, you’ve got lovely sharing because you can’t store it, you’ve got to share it”. She refers back to the bananas she harvested from her garden and tells me that in her village, every part of the bananas is used, including the stem and because bananas come in bunches, the villagers would create a feast which everyone would share and enjoy. Nirmala is saddened by the fact that she cannot share this with her family, because at this particular time, her children are with their father and he is taking them to a sushi restaurant instead.

She also uses the example of the royal wedding between Prince William and Kate Middleton, which was televised to billions of people on 29 April 2011, to illustrate how, through our addiction to consumerism, we have “lost the magic of creating fairy tale in our own lives” and instead externalise the magic by looking at the fairy tales of other people’s lives. She says, “we’re disconnected, we don’t know how to create magic, we don’t know how to create fairy tales, we don’t know how to fill our gaping hole with the beingness and come alive”.

As to how we can overcome consumerism and materialism, Nirmala acknowledges that it will not be easy, but that it has to start through experience rather than through textbooks and school curricula. She says:

If I taste the spinach and potatoes and stuff grown by me in my garden and I’ve tasted it and I know the texture of it, I know the flavour of it, I know the feeling, I know how well it digests in my body and I know how well satiated I feel when I eat a meal with everything from my garden...that feeling is so empowering.

She explains further that

It starts in small pockets in many different ways – how your life and your body and your being is responding and reacting to situations and stimuli inside you and around you when you eat this and when you eat that. It starts that simply. And then once you discover that

then...opens a whole new journey...of self-discovery and the more you go on that path, the less you'll be able to traverse back.

However, she argues that supermarkets and other centralised structures do not allow the experience of self-discovery. For example, growing food is a process, but Nirmala believes that our need for instant gratification has "short-circuited" this process and taken away its beauty in order to ensure that we have instant products.

When I ask Nirmala what her view is on why there is suffering in the world, she replies, "Do you want my answer as a cosmic healer or as an Hindu karmic person or as a good old cynical developmentalist?" She says that she believes there is suffering "because we asked for it cosmically speaking" and that "we created the suffering ourselves". She explains that, while in the west, there is the belief that suffering, death and disease are bad and therefore everyone must be happy (as sold by the American media), the Hindu belief, in which there is a god of creation and a god of destruction, is such that suffering and death are part of the reality of life and one has to face them whether one likes it or not. The only choice is how one deals with them. According to Nirmala, "if you deal with all these things only with the material perspective obviously you will go on trying to fix the suffering. The more you try to fix the suffering, the more there is suffering. Because you are focusing on it". She suggests that perhaps, instead of focusing on poverty alleviation, suffering and violence, we need to "delve a little bit...deeper into the Buddhist...approach to suffering: you don't get affected by it, you just see how you are responding. Instead of reacting, it's there, okay so what can we do?" To illustrate her point, Nirmala tells me how somebody was expressing concern about the population rates in China and India to which she responded, "Have you ever thought about why the western world is so obsessive about not dying? If you let go of your fear of death, there won't be so many births there".

*"There is a dance of life and a dance of death,
it happens simultaneously.
That's the law of physics, law of entropy..."*

In comparison with the west's obsession with manipulating, controlling and preserving life, Asia does not worry about life and death: "They are not afraid of death so they can actually be born and then die

the next day...They can be poor today and tomorrow they're rich. They're poor in one life and rich in another life. It's a cycle...[which is]...never ending". Nirmala says she thinks that something is creating the planetary imbalance of resources and life so that all the resources get accumulated more and more on this side and the life is getting stagnant because life is not really allowing the free flow of energy so then the other side, because this life is stagnant, the other side is yearning to give birth more and more so it's that kind of a complete imbalance.

She admits that she has been pondering on this theory for a while.

I disclose to Nirmala that I have noticed that, with regards to the issue of overpopulation, it is often raised in discussions by middle-aged white men! She responds, saying that it is based on "fear that somebody's overproducing and that we have to control our resources because those are the mouths which are going to take away our resources. It's that fear which is perpetuating this imbalance". She uses the example of Kerala to illustrate that she has a scientific and sociological basis to her argument. While the rest of India has overpopulation issues, Kerala has never had to control its population because it has "enlightened rules and enlightened critical masses" and because education has played a key role. According to Nirmala, Kerala has the highest literacy rate in India, the lowest infant and maternal mortality rates and a human development index which is on par with Sweden even though its per capita is the lowest compared to the rest of India.⁴⁷ Kerala's traditional belief system and practices, language, medicinal practices and eating habits were all left intact when the left-wing government took over because the masses were educated and enlightened. As a result this critical consciousness, the people of Kerala are proud of who they are and having a strong sense of identity. In comparison Nirmala questions what is happening in South Africa with regards to "identity, ethics, ethos, values and tradition". She contends that "we're just being bought into the supermarket syndrome of who we are... We're all becoming slave[s] to the American, western world view...We talk about *ubuntu* and Africanisation, but we do it driving SUVs and 4x4s, [wearing] four piece suit[s]". She notes: "I keep coming back to this issue of identity. It's so important. That sense of identity, sense of who you are, eventually determines how you engage on this planet so that determines your connection with nature, that sense of identity".

⁴⁷ The Human Development Index: "combines information on life expectancy, schooling and income in a simple composite measure" (UNDP, 2010:3).

Nirmala believes that the world is calling for us to be more compassionate and more realistic about the way we want to live. She says “sometimes at a larger cosmic level I feel we deserve a major catastrophe, a total breakdown, but at a deep compassionate level, I feel, no I need to keep sending more love and light and not make that happen even though it may well happen”. However, she acknowledges that she cannot speak for the world, but can only be true to herself: “to live truthfully and honestly with myself. I think my relationship is to myself so if have an authentic relationship with myself, then that self determines my relationship to the world”.

When I ask how she thinks we should go about sustainable development in South Africa, Nirmala answers: “Scrap it!” I admit that I think I have come to the same conclusion. Nirmala feels that, after seventeen years, sustainable development has not worked in South Africa. She cites some information relayed to her by the South African Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Tina Joemat-Pettersson. Apparently, irrespective of the level of their income, South Africans spend the majority of their income on cell phones, motor cars and clothing first, and then the smallest amount on food. According to Nirmala, the minister said, “So, when you are living in such dire poverty and so-called suffering...how come your spending [on] your food is last, how come? Then why do you want the government to fix that? When it is just not your priority?”

Going back to my question, Nirmala argues that “I think we have failed abysmally to really change the consciousness of the people about anything and we have succeeded immensely in making the people slaves to consumerism and instant gratification”. She refers to a book called *Affluenza* and says that “South Africa is afflicted by 'affluenza' and everyone’s deepest desire to be an affluent person. Maids and madams included”. Nirmala ponders, “It’s quite sad actually hey? I wonder when the healing is going to happen in this country?” She refers to the racial divide here, saying, “They say this is a rainbow nation, but I always say this is a rainbow nation with colour-coded barriers. If you look at a natural rainbow, you can’t see where one colour starts and another colour begins, but in South Africa, yes it is a rainbow nation with deep deep divisive colour codedness still after seventeen years”. She concludes her answer, saying, “As a cynical developmentalist I think [we should] scrap sustainable development...Because we haven’t indigenised it. We just brought it from abroad...We never really tried to harness it and see how we [could] indigenise the whole discourse to South African context”.

In answer to my final question as to whether there is a relationship between Nature, spirituality and sustainable living, Nirmala says:

*Sustainable living is natural and
it is deeply connected with the spirit
because you are respectful
of your internal ecosystem and your external ecosystem...
the world of the matter and the world of energy comes together
when you live truly sustainably
then you're sustaining life...
When you sustain life,
you live authentically,
you live naturally,
you live in connection with spirit
and now...we've taken all those things away and... coined this word
sustainable development.*

She points out that she has a problem with the word 'development' because it has become the focus with attention concentrated on externalities such as providing infrastructure, material goods and service delivery instead of sustaining life. She argues that the "entire [sustainable development] discourse is based on that whole externalised aspect of how one lives" and believes that, even those trying to work with Nature, such as the conservationists, the environmental managers and the biomimicry practitioners, are disconnected and working in opposition to one another. However, when we move away from the "neatly structured, boundaried boxes" we live and work in, "we'll be left with just the pulse of life and then we'll be forced to work with the dance of life at the end".

We agree that sustainable development is an overused and abused term and I comment that "it's so easy to say to someone 'we're developing sustainably' or 'we're applying the principles of sustainable development' [and] people...don't question [it] or...have an understanding [of it]..." to which Nirmala responds that her issue is that the majority of people don't have the capacity to question and, while she doesn't have a problem with 'repair' or 'reuse' in the three Rs ("repair, recycle and reuse"), she points

out that “you can do [a] bloody crap design and then you spend vast amounts of resources just recycling it”.

Her final point is that “we have forgotten a lot of the ways of living because the food that we eat today is designed to make us stay forgetful and never connect to the authentic life force”. She refers to food as being “industrially orchestrated, industrially manipulated, industrially engineered” and suggests that this “techno food...doesn’t feed our soul, it doesn’t give us or it doesn’t connect us with our authenticity at all”. As a result, we can’t expect the masses to question deeply because they are leading a “zombie life and the zombie life is benefiting the corporations”. According to Nirmala, the corporations don’t want awake citizens which is “...why there is such a lot of collusion and the ordinary people are not aware of this collusion, collusion of the medicine world, the techno world, the chemical world...they’re all feeding into each other...and the ordinary people just stay slumbering around like zombies and...never to be awakened”.

The Myth of Sustainable Development

*They told me
Our life is no good
In the bundus,
In the villages,
In the deeps
Beyond the cities*

*Eating like my elders did
Living like my elders did*

*It took me a long time
To change the way I live.*

*But change – I did
To develop myself
And my children*

*To become civilized
Modern,*

*My elders
They tilled their soil
Waited for the moon
Listened to the birds
Looked for signs
In the meadows
When to sow
And what to sow*

*No slave to money and machines,
They lived long and healthy
In the mountains and meadows
Valleys and creeks
With reverence to the sacred land
That nurtured their soul
That fed their body*

*But
My elders were called ignorant
Primitive and backward
So they sent me to school
To become modern and forward
To become civilized and developed
I changed my food
Eating food I no longer
Know where from
Whose farm
No-name food
No-man's land*

*Food fed by poisons
Shaped by machines
Slick and smart
With artificial colorants and flavours*

*It no longer feeds my soul
Just bloats my stomach
Sluggish and sick
With no real energy*

*I became a bundle of ailments
My GP my medical aid
Happy and smiling
Making a living
On perpetually sick living*

*Then came the day
When I was sent off to
Some big meetings*

*Full of experts and
Know-it-all talkers
Real do-gooders*

*By the time they finished,
I felt cheated and robbed
While pretending to be the experts
All they gave was
The story of my elders.*

First they told my people

*They were backward and primitive
Then they made my generation sick and lost
Then they stole the wisdom from my elders
And now they sell it back to me and my children
For a price
A big price
And call it*

*Sustainable development

But they can't read
The signs
They don't follow the moon
Nor do they know
How to read weather
From the blossoms on the meadows*

*Tell me how can they sustain
This thing called Sustainable development
When it has never been lived
By the experts.*

*Tell me how
Tell me how.
(Nair, 2004)*

4.7. Simon MAX Bannister (see Appendix J)

I have always hunted waste...my journey has taken me along the coastlines of South Africa, the relentless rugged and beautiful headlands driving me on. I have made it my mission to transform the waste that I find into an art form, giving these objects new value and meaning and making them the story of my journey (Bannister, 2011).

Simon meets me in my office for our interview on the morning of 5 May 2011. He has returned briefly to Cape Town from Londolozi where he has spent two months,⁴⁸ working on various projects, including the Madiba's Way artworks and the Intention Circle (see Image 4.5 below). That evening he was scheduled to give a public presentation about his voyage across the South Atlantic Ocean,⁴⁹ and the following day he headed up to Plettenberg Bay where he was to begin preparations for an international land art festival (*Site_Specific*) taking place from 21 to 28 May 2011.

Simons uses MAX as his avatar "to connect with the greater creative force of the universe and the collective consciousness" (Bannister, 2011). When I first met him I asked him which name he preferred to be called by and he said he didn't mind – I have called him Simon since then.

4.7.1. Work

Tell me about the work you do.

How did you get into/find your way into your current field of work?

What global and local trends do you see currently impacting on your work?

Which of these trends give you hope for the future?

Simon considers "nature as the ultimate artist". He says, "I've always been amazed at the mystery and wonder of creation and wanted to share that experience and so my work in many ways is a reflection of that wonder, that mystery". Inspired by the idea of land art and the work of Andy Goldsworthy and Ahmad Nadlien, Simon felt that he wanted "to work more intimately with nature" than the traditional

⁴⁸ Londolozi is a private game reserve in the Limpopo Province.

⁴⁹ Simon was invited by the 5 Gyres Institute to join a research voyage across the South Atlantic Ocean from Walvis Bay, Namibia to Montevideo, Uruguay. Over the course of a month the crew trawled for plastic and found it present in forty seven different samples.

mediums of paint and clay (which he considers “not progressive enough and...oversaturated”) would allow. He comments that “waste and...litter has always stuck out within the environment and [has] always been a bit of a thorn in my side and through my engaging with nature, my walking and my time spent in pristine environments I ultimately always encounter this extension of humanity”. For this reason he decided to “embrace or at least confront” this by using “found materials, mixed media combining land art with more traditional fine art and exploring the results”.

From a young age Simon had “a passion for art and creating”, but during his school career he was “led to believe that I needed to use the more traditional techniques”. Although he wanted to explore something different, he says “the world said to me you have to make money Simon and you have to get a job and get a desk and work like that”. He studied graphic design and, after completing his studies, he “was very quickly assimilated into the machine of corporate life”. However, he says,

I found that at the end of the day I had moved around so much information that I did not necessarily care about or feel that I related to. Then it started to trouble me and I also felt that I didn’t have enough energy to pursue in my own time my own passion of how I felt and the expression I wanted to make.

After three years Simon left the corporate world and started to freelance and

from that moment I felt a huge weight lifted and immediately my interests steered me in a more truer direction of what I cared about and projects or groups that were more relevant to how I felt about this responsibility I felt to do something good and positive about the environment and to help the people who were involved in such areas.

Art liberated my creativity, freedom to express.

In terms of the global and local trends which Simon feels are impacting on his work, he cites “the need to be more aware of our impact on the fragile ecosystems, the issues of sustainability measured against humanity rather than measured against the needs of the earth to function as it has done. The economical and political barriers that hinder and distract people from actually being able to change things. And just modern capitalism as it is”. Simon also sees cities and humanity in general as having an impact on the environment and he sees this particularly when “just walking on the side of the road”. He recognises that there is a growing green movement, but that this is hindered by the ‘business-as-usual’

approach which is just about “profit, profit, profit”. He also comments that “we...have an ever-increasing technological tsunami which is enabling more communication, enabling more business, enabling more productivity, but somehow disconnecting us from the basic elements of this world and the environment on which we depend”.



Image 4.5. The Intention Circle: "A frame for nature, a space for our light to shine – An installation in the heart of the bushveld". (http://www.maxplanet.info/#!__work/intention-circle).

Source: <http://www.londolozzi.com/en/galleries/image/page-num/5/>

When I ask Simon which of these trends give him hope for the future, he says, “I think that they all have to. There is the concern, there is the technological capability and the incredible communication network and logistical network that makes the world one village”. He speaks of the duality of life, in which “everything is constantly expanding and constantly contracting, good and bad, evil and pure”.

*What also gives me hope is
humanity's...love affair
with our own mortality,
our apocalypse
and how that still has not arrived.*

I check whether he said ‘immortality’ or ‘mortality’, but Simon confirms that it is ‘mortality’. He elaborates, saying,

It’s a love affair with our own demise as a collective. We’ve always depicted the end of days through many different cultures. I would like to integrate the idea of mythology and myths and stories and legends because those still are very much alive today, represented in different forms, in new stories and in new archetypes, but staying true to their core.

*And the stories of old
are once again a
reflection of
the cycles of nature
and bring forward
the idea of rebirth,
of facing challenges and
being better for that.*

4.7.2. Nature

What early memories/experiences do you have of Nature?

Have you experienced times in Nature which you would consider as turning points in your life? Please describe one such moment.

What do you understand by the concept of a person having a “relationship with Nature”?

Do you feel that you have a relationship with Nature?

How and why are people generally considered to be “disconnected from Nature”?

How does this disconnection manifest in our daily lives and what implications does it have for us?

How do you think we can restore connections with Nature?

Simon grew up in Johannesburg and, as a result, he says he was given “a distorted view of what nature is, of how it’s controlled by people”. He recalls “one of the earliest disturbances I had was the demise of the river that still flows below the place where I grew up, the Braamfontein spruit, [and] watching that become more and more polluted within my own lifetime”. However, he was also fortunate to visit “savannas, the lowveld, [and] the bush” and, although he initially thought these areas had not been

interfered with by humans, he later came to realise that “the environment had been changed by people – the bush had been cleared and made more suited to certain animals in order to attract them and thereby changing the ecosystem that was currently there”. Another major factor in his life has been “walking the coastlines and engaging with the ocean from the shoreline”.

Simon agrees that he has experienced many times in Nature which he would consider as turning points. He says, “Nature is mysterious in how it works and we constantly trying to understand it and thereby projecting ourselves, our own intuitive personas on it, an anthropomorphisation of nature”. He recalls a particular turning point in which he saw

*how nature,
how the waves had transformed certain
household objects into art.
And demonstrating once again how
we are not in control,
we are part of a much greater system.
And there’s always this struggle between,
this disconnection,
this struggle between seeing ourselves
as part of nature
and the tension
that comes with that.*

Simon acknowledges that he has shifted from seeing humans as separate from Nature to rather being very much within that ecosystem. He says that he’d like to think of other moments and asks if we could perhaps return to this question later.

In terms of Simon’s understanding of the concept of a person having a ‘relationship with Nature’, he says this entails “being aware of the weather, being aware of how plants and animals depend on each other, of how it all fits together”. When I ask him about whether he has a relationship with Nature he responds, “I believe so and I think that everyone does. No one is excluded even if they are unaware of it”.

*Every breath we take is felt by the world,
every action we take is part
of the collective progression of this world,
whether we like it or not.*

Through his work Simon has increasingly engaged in “the subtle energies, the subtle relationships, the workings of the environment, of nature. But still those insights only open more doors to more mystery and more wonder which is what I love”. He refers here to science which he believes “has an infinite future as it continually tries to understand and dissect the inner workings” of Nature.

Simon believes that people are generally considered to be disconnected from Nature because they have had to protect themselves from “dangerous creatures, disease and discomfort” and this is why we have shaped and controlled Nature to the degree that we have. He says, “Everything is controlled and I love this word manipulated – for the ‘man’ hidden in that word...It talks of how we shape the world in our image and obviously talks of a male dominance”. He admits to being fascinated by domestication and how we have changed fruits and vegetables and animals to suit ourselves: “We’ve changed how nature works”.

In terms of how the disconnection from Nature manifests in our daily lives and the implications this has for us, Simon suggests that, unless children are taught about natural processes, ecosystems and food chains, they will perceive things not as they are. He uses food as an example and says, “Some people don’t know what a tuna looks like or what a banana tree looks like...So the very core of our daily survival has been distorted by our modern culture”. He believes that the idea of us being separate from Nature is so “embedded in our psyche” that “trying to see ourselves very much as nature continually defeats itself”.

One always has to ask what is natural.

Simon proposes that “there’s a wonderful parallel between physical pollution and mental pollution – of climate, being the weather, and the climate of society, the general movement of ideas and concepts, memes and how that relates to the environment”.

According to Simon, we can restore connections with Nature by

Asking *how*. Asking how things work, where do things come from, how does energy move from one to creation to the next, from an enquiring mind. And that's really the role of art, is to explore those imaginative enquiries, to understand that there is and always will be an element of mystery and nothing is black and white, but rather all the colours of the rainbow and more.

4.7.3. Spirituality

What do you understand by the term/concept of spirituality?

What is/constitutes/characterises a spiritual relationship with Nature?

Do spiritual people necessarily behave in sustainable ways?

Do religions have a role to play in the transformation to a more sustainable world? If so, what kind of role?

Do you participate in regular spiritual practices, rituals, etc.? Please explain.

Can one have a spiritual relationship with Nature and if so, what does this entail?

For Simon, spirituality is “a realm beyond that which is physical, which goes into the realm of the unknown, of the mysterious and that which can never be understood, yet is a strong guiding force that permeates through all things and our quest to know that”. He uses the word “reverence” to “demonstrate a deeper understanding” with regards to his understanding of a spiritual relationship with Nature.

Whether spiritual people behave in more sustainable ways, Simon says he thinks they would like to, but admits that he “struggle[s] with the concept of sustainability itself as we all must die and we are literally passing on information to the next and sustainability is itself seems to be measured against the benefit of humanity, mankind rather than to the benefit of the biodiversity of the planet”. Although he thinks the idea of sustainability is good, he argues that it is distorted by politics and economics. He goes on to say that “there also every day modern needs and desires that are so complex in what they ask of this world that I don't believe it's possible to be sustainable all the time. By our existence we need to consume and survive and with the numbers that are currently out there one really has to question the plausibility of the idea”.

Simon's understanding of religion is that it is "a set of rules, a compass that...is meant to guide one's life", but he feels that religions have been distorted "to benefit certain individuals while almost parading a facade of being better than any other". Because of this distortion, Simon has invented his own religion which he describes as:

*the river flowing,
the sun rising,
the stars shining –
a more ever-present force
that permeates all things.*

Simon's interest and research into mythology has lead him to believe that "things are not as they seem, that there are insights into the ways of the world that are represented as metaphorical analogies which are similar if not exactly the same throughout many different religions and the stories that they use to teach people how to behave and conduct themselves and understand this world and spirituality". In terms of the role of religion in the transformation to a more sustainable world, Simon acknowledges that "these stories do have a role to play, still have a role to play going forward if we can put aside the differences and see the similarities, to make them relevant to our modern...cultures".

When I ask him if he participates in any spiritual practices or rituals, Simon replies, "I am constantly amazed as to the mystery, the feeling of amazement. I also try and see the good and the bad and that gives me a disconnection to the physical and mental". Simon tries to engage with the force which he experiences:

*I stare at the stars,
I stare at the fire,
I stare at the water and
know that the same force
flows throughout those.*

He also blesses the food he eats and considers that which is has gone into producing his food in terms of energy and processes. Simon says, "I try and integrate these insights and energies into my creative

work, my art". He also strongly believes "in the self-policing rule – that we should treat others as we would like to be treated. And try and respect with reverence the world and my impact on that, knowing my hypocrisy through by just being alive". He asks to be reminded of the question and adds, "I'm constantly doing more and more research to improve my knowledge on the myths and legends and insights of the generations which have gone before me so that I may have more compassion for the collective's differences and similarities".

Given that he has referred to 'the force' several times during our interview, I ask Simon what he means by this and to describe it to me. He explains that

by looking deeper into the patterns of this world and its creations, there are...similarities...between different animal kingdoms that are never the same, but always try and reflect the perfect model and my understanding of the perfect model is the very essence of life and through my understanding of what that is, if they had to be represented in a pattern, it would be the sphere...the centre is everywhere and...the boundary is nowhere, which is the best explanation for God that I've come across. And this is what I mean by the force, this energy that guides and shapes things throughout this world.

He prefers the word 'force' as opposed to 'God' as he doesn't believe in the Christian view of God. He believes that the idea of God as an old man in the sky is a metaphor and that "there [are] too many similarities in all the different religions and the stories [they] tell for anyone to [be] the only one. They're all extensions of the same idea, the same understanding and that's what so interesting about mythology, it's on the edge of what cannot be known".

With regards to whether one can have a spiritual relationship with Nature, Simon believes that Nature and spirituality are the same:

They're on one plane. We just put ourselves on different levels in our daily lives and daily needs. I think it's the literally the fertile ground on which a true understanding of our relationship with this world can flourish. It's about knowing that other life forms are conscious, that there are spectrums that we cannot see, dimensions that we cannot understand.

4.7.4. Sustainable development

What do you think the world needs if we are to overcome the global crises facing us?

Do you think consumption and materialism are problematic? If so, why?

How do you think we can overcome consumption and materialism?

What is your view on why there is suffering in the world?

In your view what is the world 'calling' for?

How do you think we should go about 'sustainable development' in South Africa?

Do you think there is a relationship between Nature, spirituality and sustainable living? Please describe this relationship.

With respect to what the world needs if we are to overcome the global crises facing us, Simon acknowledges that it is important that we refer to *crises*: “It’s a very layered, a very layered, complex dynamic inter-related world, it’s not like a broken pipe that can be fixed and I think acknowledging the complexity is a good start”. He feels that the world needs “progressive thinkers to be empowered, to try to new things. We need to confront our own dragons, and we need to share our insights. We need to stop *fighting*,⁵⁰ we need to change this concept of scarcity to...that of abundance, essentially to transform a fear-based reality into one which nurtures life”.

Simon agrees that consumption and materialism are problematic because “they give us new and unprecedented issues to engage with that are often distracting from the basic needs that we have and the sheer numbers that are still rising call for more and more and more”. However, he does not believe that they can be overcome, but does offer some solutions: “What we can try and engage with is the idea of sharing. And...try and strip away the facades that we’ve created for value, for real value. And if we can also feel more compassion for the animals and creatures that we share this world with”.

Simon cites imbalance as the reason why there is suffering in the world. He says that there is “a great imbalance between what resources are available and how people use them” and that people’s greed and power also harm others both directly and indirectly. He concedes that “suffering or struggle is very much part of life. It’s hard to live and easy to die”. He also refers to our egos and the modern culture in which we live, which “abuses our psyches”.

⁵⁰ He emphasises this word.

Simon believes that the world is 'calling' for "less people, more wilderness, a chance to rekindle itself, for a change in value and for a change in lifestyle".

In terms of sustainable development in South Africa, Simon argues that it is time for us to "take it seriously and not see it as another way to make more money, as not another gold star to put on your annual year report". He says that it needs to be addressed with "greater vision of how we really relate to the delicate ecosystems that we rely on. Vast areas need to be cornered off, rivers need to be protected upstream, and we need to move more in the direction of positioning ourselves as a wild, abundant, diverse place, integrating communities and working for nature".

As to whether there is a relationship between Nature, spirituality and sustainable living, Simon is emphatic that "there must be as it's the essence of being alive and working towards a greater future for generations to come and that's not just human generations but generations of all life. We are all interconnected. And have a need to belong, to grow and to reach the sun".

We return to the question about times in Nature which Simon would consider as turning points in his life. He admits that he has not really had too much of a chance to think about this question, but he starts off by commenting that hunting created the need for conservation and that "the interplay between the two which is where we are with our relationship with the animals of this world. Basically seeing good and bad mixed up".

He refers to another moment or turning point, that of

being in the middle of the Atlantic and seeing plastic pollution float by and knowing that...the reach of mankind has gone around the world and there is no practical way to repair it and pick it up where before I thought there was. That was also very interesting experience was to see how these floating objects had been assimilated by the environment and were actually acting as new never-before encountered hosts for new life. And that we and what we do is part of nature.

When I ask him if he wants to make any further comments, Simon says, "It's through my observation and interaction with nature, it has given me insight into the guiding force and the mystery of spirituality.

And without that I don't know where I would be. And I think there would be no possibility of any sustainable future".

I am interested to know whether he considers his art and the creation of art as a spiritual experience. He responds saying,

The creation process is something to be revered and engaged with respect to that greater force. It is my calling, and my greater work. And I am very happy to have found that connection. The challenge now is to make it relevant and accessible to others...I want to say that this may trigger like-minded thinking...more imaginative solutions and observations and answers to the collective subconscious.

In conclusion I ask Simon if he would mind me using some of the quotes and poetry that he used in *Plastikos*,⁵¹ and some of the images of his work. He agrees and particularly refers to *Return* (see Image 4.6.) which he feels is "the closest that I've come to engaging with that spiritual force through such a quirky medium using those guiding principles of nature and stopping time and manifesting that in an object".

⁵¹ *Plastikos* is exhibition that aims to raise awareness about waste – particularly plastic and micro plastic – and its impact on the oceans, all through art. *Plastikos* was displayed in the Two Oceans Aquarium in Cape Town from October 2010 to July 2011.

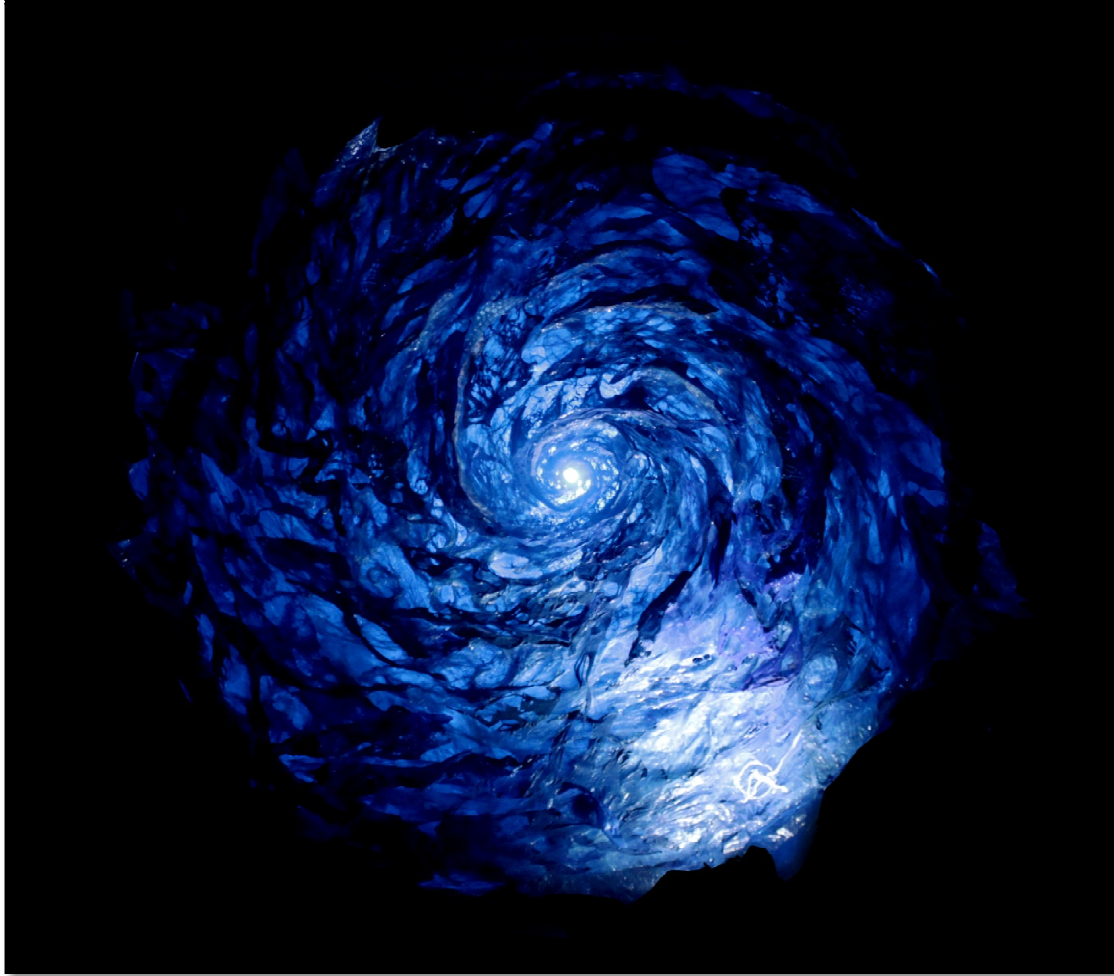


Image 4.6. Simon MAX Bannister, Return (from the series Plastikos), 2010, Reclaimed polyethylene: 187 x 187 x 10cm. "Torn pieces converge on the core, a vortex of ocean bound plastic. Larger archetypal predators chase smaller prey, moving through the 3 states of being: the physical, the imagined, while spinning around 'the light'. Micro pieces swirl around the centre, wanting to return to their source - the plastic egg pellet of their original form. The tiny dot held in the circle shape, represent the aged symbol for the sun. The ultimate source of energy for the ancient protozoa, whose life now lives on as plastic polymers suspended in motion" (MAX, 2010).

4.8. Conclusion

This chapter has presented narrative summaries of the interviews with the change agents.

Each of them shared their thoughts and ideas with me in a very open and intimate manner. In each case I was moved and humbled by the depth of sharing, and inspired (and in some instances, challenged) by

the responses. I realised that each of the change agents have thought about their spirituality and their view of Nature in far greater depth than I have. Even though the interactions were brief, I consider the change agents as valuable mentors in my own work as a change agent.

As each interview progressed, I found myself wanting to ask additional questions, but was aware of time constraints and did not want to digress too far from the focus questions. For example, in my interview with Nicola, I was interested in the tradition of going through one's lineage to heal the split from one's parents. I told Nicola that perhaps I would ask her more about this another time, to which she jokingly replied, "Yeah, maybe I'll charge you!"

In the following chapter I will discuss the key insights of the change agents with regards to the transformation to a more sustainable world.

Chapter Five: The Transformation to a More Sustainable World

5.1. Introduction

Stories arise from the rhythms of a preindustrial order: a world with time to listen, a language that is communal and founded on shared perceptions of reality, a respect for wisdom born of the accrued experience of generations, and a sense of life as still organized around the cycles of nature (Wolf, cited in Brady, 2005:995).

While Chapter Four portrays the perspectives of the South African change agents in detailed narrative summaries, this chapter presents a discussion of some of the pertinent insights which emerged in terms of the transformation to a more sustainable world.

I open the discussion with a brief description of the status quo of sustainable development as per the comments made by the change agents and then focus on the key aspects of moving towards sustainable lives as opposed to sustainable development. These include a shift in values, healing and deeper self-reflection, a “heart-based economy”; religion and ritual; inter-generational learning; learning from indigenous wisdom and knowledge, and the role of women and assimilation of the feminine principle.

Finally, I consider the relationship between spirituality, Nature and sustainable living with respect to my research question: Could a spiritual relationship with Nature assist in the transformation to a more sustainable world?

5.2. The transformation to a more sustainable world

5.2.1. Sustainable development: The status quo

5.2.1.1. Emergency as opportunity

While there is general consensus among the change agents that our planet is in a state of emergency and that we are confronted with a multiplicity of socioecological crises (this is supported by my argument in 2.3.), they see these crises as opportunities. Nirmala refers to the crises as “a wake-up call”

and “a direct blessing” (Nair interview, 4.6.1.). Muna suggests that “every problem is actually an opportunity” (Lakhani interview, 4.2.1.). Although Nicola acknowledges that we are “going into a period of significant disruption and a necessary period of transition and accelerated change... [and that] it is also a future that I think is going to be a difficult one” (Robins interview, 4.3.1.), she sees positivity in South Africa and “in people’s openness to learn and in looking at new ways to approach difficult challenges” (Robins interview, 4.3.1.). Justin says, “We need a crisis to bring us together as humans it seems, but the yield of that crisis is a more heart-based way of living” (Friedman interview, 4.4.1.).

5.2.1.2. The need for new thinking frameworks

However, although many people across the globe aspire to the western lifestyle, the change agents agree that there is perhaps too much emphasis and reliance on the solutions to the global crises coming from the west or from the developed world. According to Mphatheleni, “people are looking for the west to solve the problems which they are experiencing... And it’s not working” (Makaulule interview, 4.5.1.). Nicola argues that “western knowledge is lacking in certain respects in providing us with adequate tools to address the level and nature of the complexity of the challenges facing us” (Robins interview, 4.3.1.). Muna suggests that, by simply focusing on “greening capitalism”, the west is failing to acknowledge that a systemic approach is necessary to address the complexity of the polycrisis. This points to the fact that problems cannot be solved by applying the same kind of thinking which created them in the first place (perhaps Einstein was right after all!).⁵² This is in line with Capra’s argument highlighted in the literature review (2.3.) that the “major problems of our time... are systemic problems, which means that they are interconnected and interdependent” (1996:3).

5.2.1.3. The anthropocentric nature of mainstream sustainable development

The contemporary notion of sustainable development and the application thereof is based on current economic ideologies. It is seen as a means of “making money” and just “another gold star to put on your annual year report” (Bannister interview, 4.7.4.). Mphatheleni argues that, for the majority of people, economic development and sustainable development are just one and the same (see 2.4.2). According to Nirmala, it has become “an industry” in its own right: “it [has] just become a big consultant-

⁵² Einstein is famously quoted as having said: “You cannot solve a problem from the same consciousness that created it. You must learn to see the world anew” (<http://thinkexist.com/quotation/you-cannot-solve-a-problem-from-the-same/1003327.html>).

driven...multi-national industry" (Nair interview, 4.6.1.). She argues that "we can't talk about sustainable development and be living the kind of opulent lifestyle that quite a lot of our sustainable development consultants do live" (Nair interview, 4.6.2.). She also contends that the focus is on the development aspect: "Development became a focus and the development is external, to providing infrastructure and material stuff and service delivery...[the] entire discourse is based on that whole externalised aspect of how one lives" (Nair interview, 4.6.4.). Muna argues that it has "nothing to do with development. The problem of the world is overdevelopment" (Lakhani interview, 4.2.4.).

Simon argues that "sustainability itself seems to be measured against the benefit of humanity... rather than to the benefit of the biodiversity of the planet" (Bannister interview, 4.7.3.). Mphatheleni agrees – "if the world want[s] to overcome the global crisis it must stop looking at...human need only" (Makaulule interview, 4.5.1.).

5.2.1.4. Sustainable development is not relevant to all contexts

Both Nirmala and Muna contend that 'sustainable development' has become an abused term and Muna reckons that "sustainable development is as intelligent as military intelligence" (Lakhani interview, 4.2.4.). Nirmala is adamant that we should "scrap" sustainable development in South Africa since we have not tried to contextualise it in this country: "We never really tried to harness it and see how we [can] indigenise the whole discourse to [the] South African context" (Nair interview, 4.6.4.). She maintains that we "have failed abysmally to really change the consciousness of the people... and we have succeeded immensely in making the people slaves to consumerism and instant gratification" (Nair interview, 4.6.4.).

Muna calls attention to the fact that the widely cited definition of sustainable development is actually not what was originally stated by Brundtland: according to Muna, she said that "sustainable development is the notion of *discipline* within which we are able satisfy the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to satisfy their needs" (Lakhani interview, 4.2.4.).⁵³

⁵³ "Fundamentally, 'sustainable development' is a notion of discipline. It means humanity must ensure that meeting present needs does not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. And that means disciplining our current consumption" (NPQ, 1999:4)

5.2.1.5. *The unconscious in sustainable development*

Nirmala reasons that the current sustainable development discourse does not “touch upon the consciousness aspect. We shy away from consciousness, we don’t use the words consciousness or meditation or spirituality...” (Nair interview, 4.6.1.). She believes that

sustainable development is [about] sustaining life and sustaining life has to be in many other ways, not just in material ways so you sustain life from the source of energy, you sustain life from the world of matter...the dance between the world of energy and the world of matter has to be somehow meaningful[ly] articulated in the world of sustainable development (Nair interview, 4.6.1.).

5.2.1.6. *From sustainable development to sustainable lives*

Mphatheleni argues that “we [need to] care for the sustainable life, not sustainable development. Sustainable life, that there is a life after us. There [are] the future generations not children of women only, children of the whole planets...Children of the plants and the animals as well” (Makaulule interview, 4.5.1.).

With regards to Nirmala and Mphatheleni’s comments above and the opinions that other change agents expressed in the interviews, it seems that the essence of the transformation to a more sustainable world is how we can ensure *sustainable lives* of quality rather than sustainable development. On the basis of this proposal I now look at some of the ideas which emerged during the interviews with regards to how we could move towards sustainable living.

5.2.2. ***Sustainable lives in a sustainable world***

According to Nicola, the world “needs radical co-operation, it needs radical innovation and a profound understanding of what it means to live within ecological limits” (Robins interview, 4.3.4.) if we are to overcome the global crises and create a more sustainable world. Justin believes that “collective behaviour change...is required in order to create a sustainable future for future generations and to preserve our environment, actually to regenerate our environment, because we are destroying it” (Friedman interview, 4.4.1.). He also argues for “radical unification...radical assessment...radical

measurement...radical alignment of head and heart...[and] a genuine desire to do that within a certain time frame” (Friedman interview, 4.4.4.).

5.2.2.1. A shift in values, healing and deeper self-reflection

The change agents allude to a shift in values, healing and the capacity for deep self-reflection as being integral to creating sustainable lives. It seems that we need to be asking what we value most about our lives, about the work we do, and about our relationships with each other and with the other species with which we share our planet. As Phelan points out, “the questions that need to be asked are not what should we do or not do to nature to save it, but instead how do we understand ourselves and our world and how should we negotiate our relationships with ourselves?” (cited in Banerjee, 2003:170).

Nirmala, Justin and Nicola refer to the fact that we need to start aligning our heads and our hearts in order to create sustainable change. Justin refers to a “heart-based economy” and a “heart-based revolution” and admits that “FLOW has...inspired me to see how we can approach people from a heart-base and therefore look at...heart-based platforms that allow people to feel. Because only if you feel it will you actually create the behaviour change” (Friedman interview, 4.4.1.). Nicola suggests that “anything that can inspire humans to act courageously could be useful. And by courageously I mean from the heart” (Robins interview, 4.3.3.). With regards to her work, Nirmala acknowledges that

We’re beginning to use the word spirituality or consciousness and mindful living, etc, but it’s still not embraced from a heart space...From a head space we are accepting it and we are theorising it and doing seminars and workshops, but really accepting it from a heart space means having to undergo a lot of one’s current assumptions about lifestyles and assumptions about our roles and identities and belongingness and rootedness (Nair interview, 4.6.1.).

A more compassionate response to one another and to other living beings is advocated by the change agents. Nirmala refers to the need for “egoless compassion” and “compassionate co-creativity” (Nair interview, 4.6.1.). She says that we need to “be more compassionate and be more realistic about...how we want to live” (Nair interview, 4.6.4.). Muna states that the rule, “respect all life”, which his mother taught him, was probably “driven by compassion” (Lakhani interview, 4.2.2.). He believes that “with compassion and passion, anything’s possible” (Lakhani interview, 4.2.3.).

As a solution to the issues of consumption and materialism, Simon suggests that “we ...engage with...the idea of sharing. And...try and strip away the façades that we’ve created for value, for real value. And if we can also feel more compassion for the animals and creatures that we share this world with” (Bannister interview, 4.7.4.). Mphatheleni urges us to reconnect with *mupo* values and to embrace Nature in order to live more sustainably and holistically.

The need for healing was mentioned by Nirmala and Nicola specifically in relation to creating a more sustainable society in South Africa. According to Nirmala, “a lot of healing...needs to be done at all levels” in South Africa because she believes that it is “a rainbow nation with deep deep divisive colour codedness...” (Nair interview, 4.6.4.). While Nicola acknowledges that there is pain, suffering and bitterness as a result of “the experience of apartheid, the experience of racism, the experience of disparity, the experience of cruelty, and the experience of violence”, she sees sustainable development in South Africa as an “opportunity to move to greater wholeness in some form of healing” and “not just personal healing, but a collective healing of the pain that has been part of our history of the last few generations” (Robins interview, 4.3.4.). Nicola is hopeful because

there are so many people in this country [who] are prepared to express a desire to connect despite the level of pain and suffering that has been part of their life and experience over the last few generations. And it’s that which I think is at the heart of sustainable development [which] will be built on in this country. To be honest I don’t think it will be built on anything else (Robins interview, 4.3.4.).

Each of the change agents showed a capacity for deep self-reflection and questioning about their identity and their place in the world. According to Justin, “We’re in a stage of real reflection and more and more people, regardless of their income bracket, are actually reflecting on what are they doing here, what is their purpose, why and what is it all about...” (Friedman interview, 4.4.1). He believes that we are being called to “return to a spiritual way, to a consciousness of...unity [and]...to ask the question who am I?” (Friedman interview, 4.4.4.). Justin suggests that Nature provides us with a mirror and an opportunity for reflection and he argues that some people deliberately try to avoid Nature because they do not want to be confronted with who they really are and they do not want to remember where they have come from. He proposes that by spending more time in Nature,

we will start to feel more and connect more with ourselves... it makes sense [then] that the next revolution will be this heart-based experience because the more time we’re around

nature, the more we'll connect with ourselves, the more we'll connect with our hearts and what we really want. The more we'll connect with spirit actually because we're giving space for that it will naturally then lead to a more spirit-based living (Friedman interview, 4.4.2.).

According to Nirmala, it is one's "sense of identity, sense of who you are [which] eventually determines how you engage on this planet" (Nair interview, 4.6.4.). In line with this, she maintains that we need to be true to ourselves: "I can only see how I'm able to live truthfully and honestly with myself...if I have an authentic relationship with myself, then that self determines my relationship to the world" (Nair interview, 4.6.4.).

Muna offers: "If I could give people a gift I would give everybody a high sense of self esteem, I suspect we'd solve...the majority of our problems" (Lakhani interview, 4.2.2.). He proposes that we need "to know that we're fine and loved and lovable and beautiful and amazing beings...that we are not vested outside of ourselves. That what's vested outside of ourselves is not a reflection of how beautiful we are. Our sense of self worth does not lie in things" (Lakhani interview, 4.2.4.). Mphatheleni also refers to the fact that a sense of worth should not be based on what one owns, but rather on one's sense of well-being.

Muna advocates that intent, intuition and instinct also play a role in how we live our lives and in the decisions we make. "I believe intent is very important in the way we live our lives...we've lost the ability to listen to ourselves and we do things despite what our intuition and instincts tell us" (Lakhani interview, 4.2.2.). He refers to "intentional living" and says that "if you're attempting to live sustainably in the accepted sense of the word then it's got to be done with intent" (Lakhani interview, 4.2.4.).

5.2.2.2. *"A heart-based economy"*

According to Muna, "the kinds of economics we tend to practise is what I call autistic economics – it bears little resemblance or connection to the real world...so I think we need a new system of economics" (Lakhani interview, 4.2.1.). Nirmala questions: "How do we start moving away from a money economy to a non-money economy...A more appreciative economy where it's not the money that is guiding everything, but it's more a kind of a value, an appreciation and compassion and exchange and

nurturing and fostering ...?” (Nair interview, 4.6.2.). Justin refers to a “heart-based economy” in which people are

more willing to engage and realise actually hold on we’re not so different, we have the same priorities and we need to...work together... and having to work together is perhaps going to...create like a heart-based revolution where people suddenly start opening up to each other, to treating each other with respect because we all have a common thing [which] we need to work towards (Friedman interview, 4.4.1).

Bhutan provides an example of that which Nirmala and Justin are alluding to. Bhutan realised that economic growth alone is not in the interests of people’s well-being or the integrity of ecosystems. As a result it shifted its emphasis from gross national product (GNP) to gross national happiness (GNH). The GNH Index “is comprised of 72 indicators covering nine domains, which are: Psychological Well-being, Time Use, Living Standards, Culture, Health, Education, Ecology, Good Governance, and Community Vitality. The nine domains were selected on normative grounds because they are crucial to happiness and holistic development (UNDP, 2008–2009:7). According to the Centre of Bhutan Studies:

GNH encourages individuals to see all things as interdependent with all other things...The perception of happiness that doesn’t take into account the needs of others happiness is irresponsible and egocentric, and the pursuit of such happiness is likely to be unethical. Happiness blossoms through enhanced relationships, arising unbidden when relationships improve. In this sense, the whole of development is a progress in relationships, not of individuals (2008).

From my interactions with them it was very clear that none of the change agents are excessively motivated by money in the work which they do. Although I wasn’t aware of it at the time of selecting them, they are all self-employed to a degree and generate income in non-traditional ways. Each of them has aligned their work with their values and lives their beliefs through their work. Simon left the corporate environment to pursue his passion for art and to do work which he cares about in response to the “responsibility I felt to do something good and positive about the environment and to help the people who were involved in such areas” (Bannister interview, 4.7.1.). Justin believes that “work is not separate from life so the work that I do is how I am in service to those around me” (Friedman interview, 4.4.1.). He also puts out a challenge, saying, “Work is an opportunity to create social and environmental change in the world. If you’re not doing that in your work, then I’m not really sure what you’re doing”

(Friedman interview, 4.4.1.). Most of Muna's work is voluntary, but he says "I am busy living my passion" (Lakhani interview, 4.2.1.). In her work with the Zero Emissions Research Initiative (ZERI), Nirmala says, "I've managed to create my safe space...without having to compromise my heart space...I cannot actually operate as a being unto myself if I have to compromise on my heart's belief systems" (Nair interview, 4.6.1.). Mphatheleni does what she does because she says "I grew up in *mupo* life and in the traditional way."⁵⁴ That's how it become a passion to me, this work" (Makaulule interview, 4.5.1.). She says later on the interview: "I don't call it work. I call it life. Because it's not an employment which I am doing" (Makaulule interview, 4.5.1.).

According to Justin, there has been a shift with regards to how people view their work, particularly in the developed world, "where people perhaps have more time to consider what work they're passionate about doing and not just working for a pay cheque" (Friedman interview, 4.4.1.). As a result of the economic crisis, he says:

A lot of people are leaving big businesses, starting up on their own and wanting to really love what they do because everybody has to spend so much time working to maintain a certain quality of life it seems...people want to ask themselves the question, 'why am I doing this, what are the values in my heart and how can I do the work that I love and still support my priorities?' (Friedman interview, 4.4.1.)

5.2.2.3. Religion and ritual

The change agents are all very clear that religion and spirituality are not one and the same and religions are not necessarily spiritual (see 2.5.). Nicola does not "see them as being particularly spiritual" (Robins interview, 4.3.3.) and Justin argues that "many religious orders...don't necessarily align from a spiritual point of view" (Friedman interview, 4.4.3.).

While they are all fairly critical of religion, particularly of Christianity, they acknowledge that religion has a role to play in the transformation to a more sustainable world (see 2.5.2.). This role could be enhanced by "making them relevant to our modern cultures" (Bannister interview, 4.7.3.), by "creat[ing] a shared

⁵⁴ *Mupo* refers to "all of Creation, including the Cosmos, all things of natural origin, in the Venda language. This name has deep significance in Venda, evoking the memory of the core responsibility of each generation to safeguard Nature – *Mupo* – for the next generation" (Mupo Foundation, 2011).

story that can inspire people” (Robins interview, 4.3.3.), by “push[ing] environmental issues above everything else” (Friedman interview, 4.4.3.) and by “pay[ing] attention [to] the role of nature...the role of *mupo*” (Makaulule interview, 4.5.3.).

Nirmala believes that, because religions “wield a big power [and have] a lot of resources and...people at their disposal...they will have far more of an inroad with their believers than people like you and me” (Nair interview, 4.6.3.). Justin is emphatic and states that “not only do religions have a role, they actually have a responsibility...if you’re not inspiring, if you’re not influencing people with some positive way of living that’s going to support a sustainable way of living then what...are you doing?” (Friedman interview, 4.4.3.).

Although Muna argues that religion is an “opiate” and is particularly scathing of Christianity as he sees it as being “paternalistic, sexist and objectionable” (Lakhani interview, 4.2.3.), he recognises that it could be a transformative tool: “The glimmer in the darkness is that all the religions claim to be love and mercy based [and] if that is the foundation for...transformation, [then] it has potential” (Lakhani interview, 4.2.3.).

All the change agents, except Muna, practice some form of ritual in their lives. Although he doesn’t participate in any particular spiritual practices or rituals, Muna says, “I think my practice is a sense of wonder” and acknowledges that “whatever practice there is, is a part of my life” (Lakhani interview, 4.2.3.). While he recognises that rituals can offer “a point of focus”, he says: “I try to live my life in love...[and then] there’s no need for ritual because every act should be embodied with meaning...or intent...” (Lakhani interview, 4.2.3.). This reflects Justin’s comment that we make every day activities such as “having a cup of tea a spiritual experience” and “where just being present can become a spiritual experience” (Friedman interview, 4.4.3.).

Nirmala says: “I’m very clear that you need ritual space in one’s life and I try to create ritual space every day if possible so that’s an essential part of my living. Because I think it’s through the creation of the ritual space that you’re able to access that beingness in you” (Nair interview, 4.6.3.).

According to Nicola, all southern African traditions engage in rituals which “have been around for a number of years so they’ve been tried and tested by communities and found to be useful in mediating

that relationship between ourselves as individuals and the community, ourselves, our family, the community, nature and God” (Robins interview, 4.3.3.). These rituals are for the purposes of “engaging and processing ceremony”, for “personal development...to enable that transition to take place in a skilful and positive way, constructive way” (Robins interview, 4.3.3.) and “to mark transition at any stage of the human passing” (Robins interview, 4.3.3.). With regards to these transitions, rituals are important as they “give us the ability to integrate and come to call us through” (Robins interview, 4.3.3.) in a balanced and holistic manner.

According to Mphatheleni, rituals are an integral aspect of the *mupo* way of life, of connecting with and celebrating Nature, of communing with the ancestors, of healing and praying. In another interview Mphatheleni said: “Rituals aren’t empty things. They’re the Earth wisdom of hundreds of generations of wise people” (Pinnock, 2011). Through her work with the Mupo Foundation, Mphatheleni is trying to protect the crucial elements for rituals in her culture, such as sacred sites and growing finger millet.

5.2.2.4. Inter-generational learning

The widely accepted definition of sustainable development refers to future generations. Considering that future generations are already here with us on the planet and yet we have been grappling with escalating socioecological issues for a generation at least, perhaps deeper questions need to be addressed such as: how best can we prepare future generations to find their way in a rapidly changing and uncertain world? What do we need to impart to them so that they can participate in the co-creation of a more sustainable world? How can we engage with them so that their voices can be heard?

Muna is critical of the environmental/conservation movement: “There’s this mindset that says if we take kids into the bush they’ll become environmentalists. I see no signs of that. We’ve been doing it for thirty, forty years – look at the mess we are in. So should we be doing it? Yes...But the conservation movements tend not to make the full connection of the panoply of life” (Lakhani interview, 4.2.2.).

Nirmala points to the challenges of raising children and instilling in them the values and philosophies which she believes underpin a more sustainable world. “It’s not easy to bring up children in the city with these kind[s] of deep philosophies and the deeper connectedness because they go out into the world which is so diametrically opposite to...one’s belief system” (Nair interview, 4.6.2.). She speaks of a

“generational hole in the heart” in which there is no “beingness” or “aliveness” (Nair interview, 4.6.2.), which would come from being part of Nature and in Nature. Nirmala suggests that we need to stimulate “a new generation of thinking...[and] start using every possible vehicles and avenues to start creating those conditions conducive to life”(Nair interview, 4.6.2.).

Mphatheleni laments that “the youth are no longer behaving well, because they don’t know the nature, they don’t go to the initiation schools, they don’t have any guidance” (Makaulule interview, 4.5.1.). However, her work through the Mupo Foundation focuses intensely on future generations so that not only will they inherit the benefits left to them by their ancestors such as clean rivers and trees, but also a holistic way of life.

One of the programmes run by the Foundation focuses on “inter-generational learning” through which the youth are given the opportunity to learn from the elders. The elders are invited “to share with the students their knowledge about life in the past. This encourages the young people to compare the past and the present generation, and to deepen their connection with their roots. They can then draw conclusions that will enable them to build a happy and healthy future for their own children” (Mupo Foundation, 2011). Mphatheleni believes that sustainable living is “when you live you connect with those who have gone. And also prepare for those who are coming” (Makaulule interview, 4.5.3.).

She is also adamant that the education policies should be changed so that the focus is not only on careers and earning money, but that children are also “educated for life”. Nirmala refers to Bhutan which has “integrated systems thinking into their tertiary education and all their other educational systems where they start talking about their traditional values and beliefs, happiness and all of that, along with a new kind of science, innovation and economics” (Nair interview, 4.6.2.).

5.2.2.5. Learning from indigenous wisdom and knowledge

As I suggested in Chapter Two (2.5.1.5) learning from indigenous knowledge and wisdom is perhaps one of the ways in which we can move towards a more sustainable way of living. According to Justin, indigenous people are “the ones I look to for inspiration and teachings as how to be with nature...[with] a gratitude and a blessing, an acknowledgement and a listening and a learning” (Friedman interview, 4.4.2.). Nicola’s work is founded on southern African traditions, which she uses “to inform an approach

to challenges raised today in relation to climate change, sustainability, sustainable living, conflict...that we as people working within a predominantly western framework are struggling to get right" (Robins interview, 4.3.1.).

However, as Nirmala and Mphatheleni point out, indigenous people themselves are struggling to hold on to their traditions and culture. Nirmala says, "A lot of my younger friends from this part of the world...are complaining [that] they...don't want to go that route of the indigenous rituals and spaces [because] they feel ashamed and embarrassed" (Nair interview, 4.6.2.). Mphatheleni gives many examples throughout the interview of how the Venda people are abandoning their cultural traditions: children no longer attend initiation school, "people have forsaken their ancestral food", and "*makhadzi* have forsaken their roles. They no longer plant millet, millet has to be there for rituals. They no longer plant tobacco, tobacco has to be there for rituals" (Makaulule interview, 4.5.1.). She says that "nowadays the people are just coming into the sacred site; young people go there with condoms in sacred site because they no longer have manners. People go there to sacred site as place for entertainment. Littering in sacred site, disrespecting of the rituals" (Makaulule interview, 4.5.1.).

While there is growing recognition around the world that re-learning from indigenous cultures and traditions is vital, Mphatheleni makes two critical points: such learning is most effective when it is experiential and indigenous knowledge and wisdom is inter-generational. With regards to the first point, she argues that the physical presence of the elders is vital in the learning process:

An elder is not going teach you that this is the law that you don't cut the tree, this is the law, that this tree is sacred. An elder will go and sit under the shade and talk this story or talk with you and you will learn something. An elder go with you to the river as a woman and you learn what she is doing. You feel the water, you feel it when you walk, you listen to the story and you see (Makaulule interview, 4.5.2.).

She notes: "Without the presence of the elder in that process it's just like a person going to visit a museum" (Makaulule interview, 4.5.2.). In terms of the inter-generational aspect, Mphatheleni says:

The elders...have this knowledge through experience from their parents, the parents from their grandparents...We are the one[s] who have this knowledge and experience... and continue to live it with the children. The children will also live it then because they can't learn by the book. That's my point is that the presence of the elder is still there so that

when an elder died he left or she left this thing in my veins. I continue to take [it to] the...younger generation to the process...It pass[es] through generation to generation (Makaulule interview, 4.5.2.).

While she makes these valid points, Mphatheleni is also aware that the knowledge and wisdom of the elders is being lost when they die. She refers to the elders as “libraries” and each individual as a vital reference “because every elder has his own her own knowledge, [his or] her own memory” (Makaulule interview, 4.5.2.). For this reason, the Mupo Foundation uses eco-mapping as a “way of transferring knowledge and storing the memory from the elders before they die” (2011). Eco-mapping is “a tool to reconnect communities to the order of their territory, to draw out the ecological knowledge of the elders, to build a common understanding, and to lay the foundations for community ecological governance” (The Gaia Foundation, 2011).

5.2.2.6. The role of women and assimilation of the feminine principle

Most of the change agents allude to gender, patriarchy and feminism at some point during the interviews. As mentioned in Chapter Two (2.2.5.4.), the domination and exploitation of women and Nature are implicated as reasons for our disconnection with Nature.

When talking about why people are generally considered to be disconnected from Nature, Simon suggests one of the reasons is that “everything is controlled and I love this word ‘manipulated’ – for the ‘man’ hidden in that word...It talks of how we shape the world in our image and obviously talks of a male dominance” (Bannister interview, 4.7.2.).

Muna has concerns with Christianity because of its inherent patriarchy. He questions the fact that the Christian God is male despite the fact that women are in the majority on the planet. He also highlights the fact that religious texts were written by men with a particular agenda and sees this as being problematic in religion playing a transformative role.

Both Muna and Justin refer to Nature and the planet in the feminine. In response to the question about what the world is ‘calling for’, Muna says “...I don’t have a mandate to save the planet. She certainly

didn't vote for me..." (Lakhani interview, 4.2.4.). Justin refers to "Mother Nature" and "her needs... and how she operates" (Friedman interview, 4.4.2.).

Nirmala's early development work in India concentrated on leadership training for rural women and "assisting them and enabling them [to] find a voice and pushing for women's participating in local government" (Nair interview, 4.6.1.). She considered herself to be a "hardcore feminist", but when she came to South Africa in 1993, she realised that issues of race and class were higher up on the struggle agenda than gender issues. Later she refers to the key role played by women in the development of Kerala. Apparently the "women rulers were very very enlightened and they made sure that education got a very very prominent place in...the communities and the villages" (Nair interview, 4.6.4.). As a result Kerala has a high literacy rate, low infant and maternal mortality rates and a "human development index...on par with Sweden even though our per capita is the lowest compared to the rest of India" (Nair interview, 4.6.4.).

Mphatheleni refers specifically to the central role of women in Venda culture. The *makhadzis*, women who are chosen by the ancestors, play a central role in families, clans and in the broader community. The *makhadzis* are powerful mediators between people, Nature, *Nwali* (God or the Creator) and the ancestors in the spirit world. They are not only healers and custodians of the sacred sites, but they also perform rituals, pray for the family and the clan, and hold the clan together. Although people are increasingly adopting western lifestyles and other religions, they still turn to the *makhadzis* when they experience conflict or hardship in their lives. However, Mphatheleni points out that the Venda indigenous culture is disintegrating not only because the older *makhadzis* are dying, but because the "*makhadzi* have forsaken their roles...Everybody is moving her own direction. We have to revive the role of *makhadzi*" (Makaulule interview, 4.5.1.).

With reference to Chapter Two and based on what I have said above about future generations and learning from indigenous knowledge and wisdom, it seems that women have a pivotal role to play in leading the way to sustainable lives. In addition, acknowledgement and assimilation of the feminine principle within ourselves and in societal structures appear to be called for in the transformation.

5.3. A relationship between Nature, spirituality and sustainable living

While I have already mentioned some of the concerns which the change agents have with the concept of sustainable development, they also refer to issues of contention, connotation and confusion with regards to the concepts of Nature and spirituality.

Muna suggested that Nature is the wrong word to talk about the other-than-human world. He points out that the word 'Nature' has "a connotation from my upbringing and from our apartheid past" (Lakhani interview, 4.2.2.) and that, for him, 'environment' would have been more appropriate because he feels that Nature is a subset of the environment, which not only includes the beauty of Nature, but also "waste, pollution, toxics, etc." (Lakhani interview, 4.2.2.). He states: "One should have a deep connection with our environment as opposed to nature as a subset thereof" (Lakhani interview, 4.2.3.). However, I specifically chose to use 'Nature' as opposed to 'environment' because, as I pointed out in Chapter Two, the latter is not only politically charged, but also somehow implies a scientific approach, which I wanted to avoid because I feel that we *do* need to reconnect with the beauty and awe of Nature and not just wild, pristine Nature, but that which we experience in our everyday lives, in our backyards and even in cities.

The change agents have varying views with regards to whether we can have a 'relationship with Nature'. According to Nirmala, it is not possible to refer to a 'relationship with Nature' because "I am part of nature. I am in nature and nature is in me and I'm in nature... there is no such thing as I am having a relationship with nature" (Nair interview, 4.6.2.). She explains that "My beingness is nature and I think that it's...boundary-less because I am part of this larger cosmic consciousness..." (Nair interview, 4.6.2.). Muna seems to agree, saying, "Nature's not a thing outside of us so either we're connected with ourselves in which case we're automatically connected to everything else or we're not...I don't see nature as something outside of us" (Lakhani interview, 4.2.3.). Simon argues that the idea of being separated from Nature is so "embedded in our psyche[s]..." that "trying to see ourselves very much as nature continually defeats itself" (Bannister interview, 4.7.2.).

Nicola, on the other hand, says: "I don't think humans and nature are the same thing. I think there's an element of wild nature inside us, but I think that humans are quite distinct from nature in many ways and that we've made that choice relatively consciously as a species" (Robins interview, 4.3.2.). She

refers to the 'split' between humans and Nature which she believes has value: "I don't believe that we're bad for nature because of that split, but I think that we are absolutely required to live in accordance with nature. In other words nature is the big story, we're the small story" (Robins interview, 4.3.2.).

By implication, Justin also seems to see Nature as something separate from humans and on several occasions refers to Nature as 'her'. He says, "Having a relationship implies...being aware of her needs and understanding a bit about Nature and how she operates and how things work" (Friedman interview, 4.4.2.). He adds later on that "I think she has an unconditional love for me, but I go through my own dramas so I almost feel in many ways I guess that Mother Nature idea is quite appropriate because [I am] that insolent son who comes only to her when he needs something and then runs off to do his own thing" (Friedman interview, 4.4.2.).

While Nicola says "a conscious awareness of disconnect is part of what...it is to be human" (Robins interview, 4.3.2.), she also admits that "when I am very deeply into my humanness, very deeply inside myself, I find nature" (Robins interview, 4.3.2.). Muna surmises that "if one is genuinely human then you can't help but be connected with nature" (Lakhani interview, 4.2.2.).

As far as Mphatheleni is concerned, the question is not so much whether one is connected to or in relationship with Nature, but rather that we recognise that Nature *is* life. "People do not see Nature as...part of their, not part, as life" (Makaulule interview, 4.5.2.). Perhaps this is the approach that is needed: rather than trying to figure out whether humans are part of Nature or connected to Nature or in relationship with it, we need to accept that it is life-giving and that we cannot survive without it. As Nicola points out, "We, as western, industrial people, have convinced ourselves that we don't need nature and that's delusional" (Robins interview, 4.3.2.).

When I informed Nicola that we were moving from the 'Nature' section in the interview to spirituality, she joked, "Oh my goodness, I thought we were talking about spirituality!" (Robins interview, 4.3.3.). This seems to be the understanding of all the change agents even though there were concerns about the word 'spirituality'. Nicola says she finds the term "loaded" particularly in western culture: it seems to "refer to something either ethereal, transcendent or set apart from and – not set apart not from nature, but set apart...from ordinary human experience. So I don't really like using the word as a way to

characterise relationship” (Robins interview, 4.3.3.). Muna believes that it is a misunderstood term, which is mainly conflated with religion, and that it “smacks of a practice” (Lakhani interview, 4.2.3.). Nirmala suggests that it is “contentious” and “new-agey”, having arisen out of a “disconnected belief system” and representing a “polarised worldview” (Nair interview, 4.6.3.).

With regards to a spiritual relationship with Nature, Nicola argues: “I don’t believe it’s really possible to have a spiritual relationship with nature in the absence of a spiritual relationship with everything else” (Robins interview, 4.3.3.). Simon believes that Nature and spirituality are one and the same while Nirmala says, “For me Nature is also spirit because that’s where I feel I am unified with Nature because it’s the same life, it’s that life that unites” (Nair interview, 4.6.3.). Justin is also of the same opinion: “It’s difficult to separate them out actually because more and more I see my relationship with nature as my spiritual relationship or as my way of exploring spirit and the more I tap into nature, the more I tap into spirit” (Friedman interview, 4.4.3.).

Mphatheleni says, “Nature [is] our spiritual way. If we don’t have nature, we don’t have our spiritual way. Because we respect God through Nature. If I disconnect from Nature, how can I continue to be connected with my ancestors?” (Makaulule interview, 4.5.3.). She adds, “Our ancestors go back to the soil...They go back and their spirit is in the trees...the spirit of our ancestors go to nature” (Makaulule interview, 4.5.3.).

While there are issues of contention surrounding each of the concepts of Nature, spirituality and sustainable development, to some extent, this is mostly at the level of semantic differences as the change agents are all in agreement that there is a definite relationship between them and that they could help to direct our lives towards sustainability. In response to the question as to whether there is a relationship between them, Simon replies: “There must be as it’s the essence of being alive and working towards a greater future for generations to come and that’s not just human generations, but generations of all life. We are all interconnected” (Bannister interview, 4.7.4.).

Nicola believes it’s logical that such a relationship exists and says that “the thread that would wind between all of them is a greater consciousness or awareness of what it means to be me, what it means to be human, what it means to be part of society and what it means to be part of the world, of nature and spirits” (Robins interview, 4.3.4.). Nirmala explains, “Sustainable living is natural and it is deeply

connected with the spirit because you are respectful of your internal ecosystem and your external ecosystem. That's where this whole the world of the matter and the world of energy comes together when you live truly sustainably, then you're sustaining life" (Nair interview, 4.6.4.). Justin suggests that we base all our actions on spirituality, Nature and sustainable development as the pillars of life. He proposes that "sustainable development could...become the spiritual expression of the modern era because it will mean living in harmony with yourself, it will mean living in harmony with others [and], it will mean living in harmony with nature" (Friedman interview, 4.4.4.). Although Muna has issue with the generally accepted understanding of the words 'Nature' and 'spirituality', he says, if he applies his understanding, that "...they're all part of the same mix...they're three intimately connected things" (Lakhani interview, 4.2.4.). He says:

If you're attempting to live sustainably in the accepted sense of the word then it's got to be done with intent which is for me the version that passes for spirituality and if my intent is not to harm people and planet...[and] living sustainably means not harming people and planet...then it's all linked...I don't see how one can separate any of that. I wouldn't say Nature, I would say planet. I wouldn't say spirituality, I would say intent. Sustainable living...if you're talking about living within the carrying capacity of the planet, then I think it's highly achievable (Lakhani interview, 4.2.4.).

Mphatheleni sums up the relationship between Nature, spirituality and sustainable living in one word, "*mupo*" and demonstrates the relationship by clasping her hands together, her fingers intertwined.

5.4. Limitations of this study

Given that spirituality is a vast and deeply subjective matter and that the concepts of Nature and sustainable development are contested, it is impossible to cover all aspects in this research. Given that it is limited in scope, this thesis should therefore be considered as an introduction to the discourse on spirituality and sustainability in South Africa and a potential basis for future work.

As stated in Chapter One (1.3.) , my research is limited by my perspective as a white, middle-class, middle-aged woman who was educated in the western, scientific tradition in schools and universities which are predominantly of the Christian faith.

A high level of researcher bias is present in this work since I actively selected the change agents, several of whom I know, having worked with them on various projects. It is possible that I chose these individuals because I felt that they would potentially respond to my research question positively. In addition, the fact that this research is a personal exploration as much as an academic work inherently introduces bias.

Since the sample is small, I am not able to generalise my findings in any meaningful way. However, the selection of only six change agents allowed me to gather in-depth information from them.

In line with my argument that western science i.e. empirical qualitative research is often regarded as the only valid means of acquiring knowledge, I have presented a qualitative study using only one particular methodology. Perhaps a more integrated approach incorporating both qualitative *and* quantitative methods would have contributed to a more robust study, with various methodologies providing more thorough evidence to substantiate my argument. I could, therefore, have perhaps combined my original proposal of investigating whether there is a positive correlation between mindful meditation as a spiritual practice and size of ecological footprint as an indication of sustainable behaviour together with the perspectives of six change agents.

According to Djuraskovic and Arthur, heuristic methodology presents a number of limitations including: “little or no control or restraints placed on its procedures...; it places importance on the subjective experience of the phenomenon in question [and] As such, it increases the researcher’s bias”

(2010:1584). The validity of heuristic research cannot be checked against correlations and statistics but “Instead, when evaluating the validity of heuristic research, the researcher needs to be concerned with meaning” (Djuraskovic and Arthur, 2010:1584). They suggest that “the researcher must return to the collected data numerous times in order to check whether the accurate depictions of co-researchers’ stories were achieved” (Djuraskovic and Arthur, 2010:1584). Time constraints did not permit me to revert back to the change agents so that they could check the transcripts or review drafts of the narrative summaries in Chapter Four.

5.5. Conclusion

Given the foregoing discussion and irrespective of what sustainable development, Nature and spirituality mean to us or how they are defined, it seems that we need to be thinking about what *kind* of lives we want to live and what *kind* of lives future generations will be able to lead on a planet with a limited carrying capacity.

In this chapter I have highlighted the fact that perhaps we need to focus on creating sustainable lives, rather than sustainable development. With regards to the themes that emerged from my interviews with the change agents, it seems that sustainable living will require a number of shifts within ourselves, in our communities and within broader society. These shifts include:

- attaching greater value to ourselves, to our relationships with one another, and to being in service to all other living beings with less emphasis on material gain so that we can move towards a “heart-based economy”;
- acknowledging and valuing the wisdom of the elders in society and providing opportunities for mentorship and guidance of younger generations;
- actively participating in and directly experiencing indigenous cultures in order to integrate the wisdom and knowledge which they have to offer;
- acknowledging the relationship between the domination of women and the domination of Nature and overcoming the oppression and exploitation of both by assimilating the feminine principle in ourselves and in our societal structures;
- opening our hearts so that we can interact with all living beings with compassion and kindness so that healing can take place;

- reflecting deeply on the questions of who am I, what makes a worthwhile life, what makes a good society and what can I give towards enabling quality lives for all beings;
- opening up spaces in our lives for rituals to celebrate the seasons, to mark the passage of time, to observe transitions between various phases of life, and to create opportunities for people to connect with another by means of a shared focal point;
- and harnessing the positive power of religions and their available resources to inform and inspire people to act in ways which benefit all life on the planet.

As to whether a spiritual relationship with Nature could assist in the transformation to a more sustainable world, it seems that it is not so much a relationship, but a deep understanding and conscious awareness or knowing of the interconnectedness and interdependence between Nature, spirit and the essence of being human.

I will reflect further on this idea in my concluding chapter.

Chapter Six: Conclusion, Recommendations and Closing Reflections

All things in this creation exist within you and all things in you exist in creation. There is no border between you and the closest things and there is no distance between you and the furthest things.

In all things from the lowest to the loftiest, from the smallest to the greatest are within you as equal things. In one atom are found all the elements of the earth, in one motion of the mind are found the motions of all the laws of existence. In one drop of water are found the secrets of all the endless oceans. In one aspect of you are found all the aspects of existence

(Gibran, cited in Lincoln, 2000:227).

6.1. Introduction

In this thesis I have argued that humans are disconnected and alienated from Nature and proposed that we need to restore our spiritual relationship with Nature in order to overcome the current socioecological crises which are symptomatic of our disconnection and which threaten our survival as a species on the planet.

In response to my research question as to whether a spiritual relationship with Nature could assist in the transformation to a more sustainable world, I have examined the concepts of Nature and spirituality and the relationship between them, explored the spiritual practices and human-Nature connections experienced by six South African change agents, and presented their individual stories.

In this final chapter I contemplate my research question as to whether a spiritual relationship with Nature could assist in the transformation to a more sustainable world, draw some conclusions regarding the research objectives, and make some final remarks regarding the human-Nature relationship. I offer several recommendations based on the insights in Chapter Five, suggest possibilities for learning in sustainability and for future research and in closing, reflect on my personal experience of this research journey.

6.2. Could a spiritual relationship with Nature assist in the transformation to a more sustainable world?

The objectives of this research were to:

1. explore whether a spiritual relationship with Nature could assist in the transformation to a more sustainable world;
2. present individual stories which could be used as case studies in learning for sustainability, and
3. promote and encourage deeper conversations about what a more sustainable world might look like.

In an attempt to achieve these objectives, I conducted a comprehensive literature review (Chapter Two) to explore whether a spiritual relationship with Nature could assist in the transformation to a more sustainable world. I drew on heuristic inquiry, reflexivity, narrative and poetics in the methodology and design of the research (Chapter Three) so that I could present individual stories (Chapter Four) which could be used as case studies in learning for sustainability, and which would promote and encourage deeper conversations about what a more sustainable world might look like (Chapter Five). The individual stories and deep conversations further enabled me to explore the first objective.

6.2.1. Conclusions from the literature review

In this study I undertook to explore whether a spiritual relationship with Nature could assist in the transformation to a more sustainable world because I felt that something was missing in the mainstream sustainable development discourse. In an attempt to answer my research question (which is also one of my objectives) and using my sub-questions (1.6.1.) to guide me, I first explored the concepts of Nature, spirituality and sustainable development in a comprehensive literature review. In addition, the literature review set out to introduce and link the notion of spirituality within sustainable development discourse.

Nature is a contested concept because it means different things to different people. Some of the underlying reasons for the contestation include language, cultural interpretations and various environmental ethical positions. Nature in ancient times was revered and considered to be imbued with spirit and magic. In today's westernised world it is perceived as something to be dominated, exploited, managed and controlled.

Symptomatic evidence of our disconnection with Nature is highlighted by the current planetary polycrisis which comprises a complex interaction between several key socioecological issues, namely climate change, ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss, inequality and rising consumption, an urban majority living in slums, peak oil and food insecurity. These socioecological crises have largely been brought about as a result of the mindset that we are not part of Nature, but exist in a superior position from which we can dominate, conquer and exploit it to meet our own needs. This view has been perpetuated by western scientific thinking, supplanting of indigenous knowledge and beliefs, religion (specifically Judeo-Christianity), colonialism and our fixation with technology.

The notion of sustainable development arose in response to socioecological challenges. This concept, which was defined in 1997, as that which “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (cited in Pezzoli, 1997:549), remains ambiguous and controversial, and is based on the same worldviews, societal systems and values which provoked the planetary polycrisis in the first place. The lack of common understanding and the ease with which the concept of sustainable development is used has significantly reduced its capacity to bring about meaningful transformation. Mainstream sustainable development discourse remains anthropocentric in its approach, perpetuating economic growth and human consumption at the expense of Nature which is seen as having no right to exist beyond serving human needs. Economic growth in terms of GDP continues to be the predominant measure of sustainable development with the focus on meeting the needs of present and future *human* generations only. In light of this I proposed the following definition of sustainable development: Acknowledging that all living beings, including humans, animals and plants, are part of a complex system in which the ability to thrive individually is intrinsically linked to the ability of others to thrive, sustainable development recognises the rights of all present living beings, including humans, animals and plants, to live a quality life of sufficiency without compromising the ability of future generations of all living beings to also live quality lives of sufficiency while remaining within the carrying capacity of the earth.

At the heart of the planetary polycrisis and our disconnection from Nature is a spiritual crisis, particularly with respect to our relationship with Nature. As such our focus needs to shift from the external issues in the sustainable development discourse and debates and start looking inward. Spirituality could be added to the three traditional pillars of sustainable development (ecological, social and economic).

The literature review highlighted that, while there are similarities between spirituality and religion, they are not necessarily the one and the same. Religious people can be spiritual, but spiritual people are not necessarily religious. While I acknowledge that religion could have a role to play in the transformation to a more sustainable world, particularly if no one religion dominates or prescribes to others, if indigenous religions are recognised as equal, and if all beliefs find expression, it seems to me that spirituality more than religion is needed. Spirituality implies a heightened awareness or consciousness, the capacity for deep reflection and compassion, and a profound sense of what it means to part of the web of life – to be another living, breathing, sentient being in Nature without the hierarchies which are often dictated by religious forms of spirituality. We need a deeper and therefore a spiritual relationship with Nature to restore the human-Nature connection and instil a sense of oneness with Nature. The philosophy of deep ecology is particularly congruent with the notion of spirituality which I advocate in this thesis as it calls for a 'new morality' and set of ethics for sustainable living. Bioregionalism also has value in that it calls us to live poetically and spiritually in tune with the land around us.

A number of spiritual practices could help us reconnect with Nature and restore our sense of oneness with Nature. These practices, which include mindfulness, meditation, rituals, poetry, re-learning from indigenous knowledge and wisdom, and restoration, are based on simplicity and a genuine commitment to disengage from consumer culture. They require deep self-reflection, confrontation of our hypocrisies and deep questioning of our lifestyles and levels of consumption.

Transformation to a more sustainable world will only be possible if we let go of current consumption patterns, values and worldviews. Radical shifts in consciousness and a revolution in our thinking from a linear to a systemic paradigm are needed if we are to survive the planetary socioecological crises and to create a socially and environmentally just world. Besides the transformative examples alluded to in the literature review i.e. complexity theory and systems thinking and earth jurisprudence, another example is the concept of gross national happiness (GNH) which has been developed by Bhutan to replace gross national product (GNP). Given that earth jurisprudence and GNH have already been implemented by governments, we need to look for ways to encourage further adoption of these transformative models in other parts of the world. In so doing we have a better chance of acknowledging the intrinsic right of Nature to exist and restoring the human-Nature connection.

Based on the literature review it is thus highly possible that a spiritual relationship with Nature could promote greater awareness of the interconnectedness of life, assist people to see the connections and patterns in the planetary crises and hopefully encourage more sustainable lifestyles and behaviours.

6.2.2. Individual stories and deeper conversations

As mentioned in the introduction to this section I drew on heuristic inquiry, reflexivity, narrative and poetics in the methodology and design of the research (Chapter Three) so that I could present individual stories (Chapter Four) which could be used as case studies in learning for sustainability, and which would promote and encourage deeper conversations about what a more sustainable world might look like (Chapter Five).

Given that this thesis is a personal exploration within an academic context and tells my story as well as the stories of six change agents, heuristic inquiry, reflexivity, narrative and poetics are appropriate means of investigation. Following the seven stages of heuristic inquiry (initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication creative synthesis and validation) I was able to do immerse myself in the subject matter, to respond with my heart as well as my head, and to honour the contributions of the six change agents who acted as co-researchers in this endeavour.

I did not randomly select my six co-researchers, but consciously ‘hand-picked’ them based on an awareness or rather an intuitive sense that they work and act differently in the world and that their stories could act as case studies. Based on their work and on some of the material I had read either written by them or about them, I was interested to find out more from them, specifically with regards to their views on Nature and spirituality and whether they believe that a spiritual relationship with Nature could assist in the transformation to a more sustainable world. I conducted semi-structured interviews with each of them and then transcribed the recordings.

The interviews were then presented as narrative summaries (which include poetic transcriptions/re-presentations and images) in Chapter Four. Each summary is divided into the sections of work, Nature, spirituality and sustainable development. Sections of the interviews are presented as poems because they either spoke of deep emotion or deep experience, or because they were particularly evocative,

because they were heartfelt responses rather than intellectual ones, or because they restored a connection in some way, either to ourselves, to spirit or to Nature.

The interviews allowed me to promote and encourage deeper conversations about what a more sustainable world might look like with the change agents themselves. Three of the change agents confirmed this:

It's a fascinating study. I'd love to read what comes out of this in the end...It's worthwhile work (Lakhani interview).

It's quite a gift to spend the time thinking about it and talking about it (Friedman interview).

...they are nice questions. It makes [me] think a lot (Makaulule interview).

The insights gleaned from the interviews with the change agents enabled me to deepen the conversation on sustainable development. It seems the essence of the transformation to a more sustainable world is how we can ensure *sustainable lives* of quality rather than sustainable development. We need to be thinking about what *kind* of lives we want to live and what *kind* of lives future generations will be able to lead on a planet with a limited carrying capacity. The key aspects of sustainable lives include a shift in values, healing and deeper self-reflection; a “heart-based economy”; religion and ritual; inter-generational learning; learning from indigenous wisdom and knowledge, and the role of women and assimilation of the feminine principle.

As to whether a spiritual relationship with Nature could assist in the transformation to a more sustainable world, it seems that it is not so much a relationship, but a deep understanding and conscious awareness or knowing of the interconnectedness and interdependence between Nature, spirit and the essence of being human.

6.2.3. Final remarks: Are humans part of or separate from Nature or are they Nature?

With reference to my research question, I do not feel that it is possible to provide a definitive response or that it will be ever fully answered because I am not sure that we will ever be able to escape the

human-Nature dichotomy that exists because language, culture and our very human-ness always seem to get in the way!

At the crux of the matter therefore, is whether humans are *part of* or *separate from* Nature or whether they *are* Nature. This tension exists and pervades throughout this thesis, in the interviews with the change agents, and in the literature to which I have referred. As we talk about humans and Nature, we continually shift and blur the boundaries, flowing between being part of, separate from or as Nature. Perhaps as Adams points out, "...humankind and nature are two different yet inseparable 'sides' or participants in an intersubjective community, always presencing together—intertwining, inter-permeating, interbeing—and always already interrelating with one another in intimate conversation (cited in Ashwell, 2010:64). Alternatively, perhaps as Pyle argues, "Ultimately, reconnecting people with nature is a nonsense phrase, for people and nature are not different things and cannot be taken apart. The problem is, we haven't yet figured that out" (2003:213). While "we can incessantly discuss the nature, or possible nonexistence, of the psyche's relationship to the world while the world crumbles down before our very eyes" (Yunt, 2001:117), in the end, we need to "open ourselves to the world's own revealing (revelation) of its latent unity; to discover the "at-one-ment" of the world that transcends, yet inheres in, our own individual interests and concerns" (Yunt, 2001:117).

6.2.3.1. *Humans as separate from Nature*

However, if we accept that in one way humans *are* separate from Nature, as Nicola argues, then it is possible and indeed critical for humans to foster a relationship with Nature if we are to survive as a species. If we acknowledge our separateness (or perhaps distinctiveness is more appropriate), we then need to understand and know very deeply that we are, at the very least, connected to Nature since our lives depend on it and that we have a responsibility to ourselves and others, as well as future generations, not only of human beings, but also all other beings on earth. In order to reconnect and nurture a relationship with Nature, we need to get to know it intimately, respectfully and spiritually. Given that the majority of us now live in urban environments, this does not mean going 'out into the wild' or living 'wild lives', but starting to connect with Nature where we live. Heinberg cites Bittner who says: "If I were really sincere about knowing nature, I'd start right where I was living" (2007:98). This is substantiated by Snyder's point that "Nature is not a place to visit, it is home" (1990:7).

As I suggested in Chapter Two (2.5.1.), there are numerous ways of experiencing Nature and reconnecting with it: some are spiritual in their very nature, while others are more practical, but provide opportunities for spiritual connection. These range from poetry, mindfulness and meditation to participating in rituals, performing acts of restoration, and re-learning from indigenous knowledge and wisdom. However, perhaps the first steps to reconnecting with Nature are just simply being aware and conscious of it: feeling the sun on one's back on a winter's day, watching birds in flight, walking barefoot, listening to the rain or eating a vegetable or fruit straight from one's garden. By developing sensory awareness, it is possible to "develop compassion and responsiveness to all life" (Morrison, 2009:109).

6.2.3.2. *Humans are Nature*

If humans *are* Nature, then ultimately it is about having a relationship with and reconnecting with ourselves. As Muna suggests, if we are connected to ourselves, then we will be intrinsically connected with the rest of life because Nature is not something outside of us, but inside us. Nicola supports this in acknowledging that when she is deeply into her humanness and deeply inside herself, she finds Nature.

In order to reconnect with ourselves, we need to re-evaluate our lives by looking into our hearts and reflecting deeply about our identity, our 'beingness', and how we live as natural and spiritual beings. In this process we need to ask ourselves: "*Who am I? What makes a worthwhile life? What makes a good society?*" Further, as Harding proposes, "...we need to experience the Earth not as 'nature' out there, nor as an 'environment' that is distinct from us, but as a mysterious extension of our very own sensing bodies that nourishes us with an astonishing variety of intellectual and aesthetic experiences..." (2006:244).

While it might be difficult to contain the paradox that it seems equally true that we are *of Nature*, and therefore *not separate* from it, there is also indisputably a greater reality outside of the human world. The problem with not acknowledging this is that there is the danger of not recognising or respecting the independent existence and rights of Nature, of eliding Nature's difference into what is 'ours' and not recognising the natural world existing outside of our definitions, wants, needs and uses for it. This is what got us into trouble in the first place!

Water

*Why do you show me a reflection of myself when I look at you?
You possess some of my best qualities and more. You bring
joy, give life, cleanse, nurture, heal, earn respect and are powerful.
I see you in all that is alive.
Mysterious, multi-dimensional
substance that connects all Life.
Deserves respect and needs Love.
Is the way I treat you then a reflection of myself?⁵⁵*

With regards to Nature and spirituality, there appears a consensus in much of the literature, in many traditions and in what the change agents say that Nature is spirit and that having a relationship with Nature, either as Nature ‘out there’ or Nature ‘within’, is inherently a spiritual one. If we accept, as many indigenous cultures do, that “the natural world is...the realm of spirit and the sacred; the natural is the spiritual...”⁵⁶ [then what follows is] an attitude of respect, a desire to maintain a balanced relationship, and an instinctive understanding of the need to consider future generations and the future health of the ecosystem – in short, sustainability” (Metzner, 1995:67).

Regardless of whether humans are part of, separate from or are Nature and irrespective of the fact that we might be forever entangled in language and culture, perhaps the best we can do is to live with a heightened awareness or consciousness, cultivate a capacity for deep reflection and compassion, and a profound sense of what it means to part of the web of life – to be another living, breathing being in Nature. By acting with compassion and creativity and working in more collaborative ways (Ashoka Foundation Foundation, 2011), transformation to a more just and sustainable world is possible.

⁵⁵ Venter, M. (marguerite.venter@aquarium.co.za). 13 March 2011. Water quotes/poems. Email to H. Lockhart (helen.lockhart@aquarium.co.za).

⁵⁶ Emphasis in the original.

6.3. Recommendations

Considering the insights in 5.2.1. and 5.2.2. it seems that it is time to move beyond the mainstream understanding of sustainable development which is simply maintaining the status quo. The current state of the planet indicates that western thinking and the present economic system are no longer working in the interests of humanity or Nature. Radical shifts are required in our thinking and behaviour and contextualised approaches should be applied to address the needs of different communities. Human needs can no longer be satisfied at the expense of the biodiversity of the planet because Nature has the right to exist beyond merely serving human need. Other measures of human well-being, such as gross national happiness and the Happy Planet Index, need to replace the traditional economic and material measures.

I think it is important to reiterate the shifts raised in the conclusion of Chapter Five and recommend that we look for ways to bring them to the fore in the sustainability arena. The shifts are as follows:

- to attach greater value to ourselves, to our relationships with one another, and to being in service to all other living beings with less emphasis on material gain so that we can move towards a **“heart-based economy”**;
- to acknowledge and value the **wisdom of the elders** in society and provide opportunities for mentorship and guidance of younger generations;
- to actively participate in and directly experience **indigenous cultures** in order to integrate the wisdom and knowledge which they have to offer;
- to acknowledge the relationship between the domination of women and the domination of Nature and overcome the oppression and exploitation of both by **assimilating the feminine principle** in ourselves and in our societal structures;
- to open our hearts so that we can interact with all living beings with **compassion and kindness** so that healing can take place;
- to **reflect deeply** on the questions of who am I, what makes a worthwhile life, what makes a good society and what can I give towards enabling quality lives for all beings;
- to open up spaces in our lives for **rituals** to celebrate the seasons, to mark the passage of time, to observe transitions between various phases of life, and to create opportunities for people to connect with another by means of a shared focal point; and

- to **harness the positive power of religions** and their available resources to inform and inspire people to act in ways which benefit all life on the planet.

6.3.1. Individual stories and deeper conversations within sustainability learning programmes

We need to create opportunities in which we can have “meaningful exchanges on the nature of our challenge and the radical shifts required to address it” (Robins interview, 4.3.4.). It seems vital that we open up spaces, at all levels in society, for such discussions and that we continue to ask questions about Nature, spirituality and what a more sustainable world could look like.

On the basis of this thesis, I have been invited by the Sustainability Institute to submit a proposal for a potential elective module as part of the B/MPhil in Sustainable Development, Planning and Management accredited by the School of Public Leadership at the University of Stellenbosch.⁵⁷

It is premature at this stage to provide a complete and detailed proposal of what this module could entail, given that further discussion is required with the various faculty members of the School of Public Leadership. A broad outline of what could be included in the module programme as per a discussion with Eve Annecke in her capacity as Director of the Sustainability Institute is included in Appendix M. Should this initial proposal be accepted, a formal and detailed proposal will be compiled with the possibility of presenting this module as a pilot either later in 2011 or in 2012.

Drawing on literature (provided in my bibliography) in the fields of sustainable development, spirituality, ecopsychology, deep ecology, environmental ethics, complexity theory, poetry and indigenous knowledge and customs, the proposed module would explore the relationship between spirituality, Nature and sustainability.

Based on the arguments that the current economic system and mainstream sustainable development discourse are largely anthropocentric, that our disconnection from Nature is at the crux of the planetary polycrisis and that we face a crisis of spirituality with regards to our relationship with Nature, this module would explore the concept of Nature in depth, taking into consideration different cultural interpretations, environmental ethical positions and perspectives of Nature held in ancient times. Some

⁵⁷ The Sustainability Institute is located near Stellenbosch, Western Cape. <http://www.sustainabilityinstitute.net/>

of the key arguments as to why humans are disconnected from Nature (science, loss of indigenous knowledge, colonialism, capitalism, globalisation, religion and technology) would be explored as well as the implications of the human-Nature disconnection.

The module would also look at the role that spirituality and religion could play in moving us towards a deeper connection with Nature and sustainable lives and contemplate spirit-in-action and what this means for sustainable living. The individual stories as told by the six change agents which I presented as narrative summaries in Chapter Four could be used as case studies. Case studies are useful learning tools in that they provide opportunities for the application of theory to pragmatic and real-life situations and foster an appreciation of how theory relates to context (Pozzi, 2010). According to Dori and Herscovitz, “Cases are usually real stories, examples for us to study and appreciate if not emulate” (1999:414). They further argue that “when case studies are used as a supplement to lectures, they serve to deepen student knowledge in societal, environmental, and ethical issues, as well as foster student appreciation of the interdependence of these topics” (1999:415).

As per the structure of the current modules offered within the B/MPhil degree, the module would run over six days with community, classroom and group work on five of the days and the sixth day would be dedicated to group presentations. If time allows, a number of field trips could be included as well as an opportunity for participants to spend time alone in Nature.

Students would be required to produce and submit two written documents after attending the module: an academic assignment and a journal.

I would recommend that participants who enroll for this module do so in conjunction with the complexity theory and systems thinking module and/or the leadership and environmental ethics module.

6.3.2. *Ecopsychology: Understanding the dynamics of the human-Nature relationship*

It appears that the field of ecopsychology has much to offer in understanding and possibly restoring the human-Nature connection. While there is renewed interest in this field, “its sources are old enough to be called aboriginal. Once upon a time all psychology was ‘ecopsychology’” (Roszak, 1995:5).

Furthermore, “those who sought to heal the soul took it for granted that human nature is densely embedded in the world we share with animal, vegetable and mineral, and all the unseen powers of the cosmos” (Roszak, 1992:14). Ecopsychology “unfolds the *human* dynamics that are linked with the ecological crisis...”⁵⁸ it considers how consumerism may be rooted in our loss of soul, our culture’s loss of contact with the unified whole, so that when we try to fill our world with poor substitutes we become addicted rather than feel satisfied” (White, Clarke & Hills, 2010:86).

I propose that ecopsychology play a greater role within the sustainable development discourse and recommend that literature and research from this field be incorporated into learning for sustainability material. At the heart of sustainability is the need to better understand the human-Nature relationship and ecopsychology “...is a tool for better understanding the relationship, for diagnosing what is wrong with that relationship, and for suggesting paths to healing” (Greenway, 1995:122). According to Jordan, “the project of ecopsychology [is about]: coming into relationship with nature in ways that celebrate the complexities of our emotional worlds, acknowledging not only the destructive tendencies of the human race, but also its capacity for love and reparation, and directing this capacity toward the natural world” (2008:30).

It is worth noting that a brief survey of the websites of some the major universities in South Africa revealed that none of their psychology departments offer ecopsychology as a course.⁵⁹ It seems essential to me that at least one of our tertiary institutions introduce ecopsychology so that work can be done in this field within the South African context. In interests of transdisciplinarity perhaps it could be offered as a module in the Bachelor of Philosophy degree in sustainable development, management and planning offered through the University of Stellenbosch and the Sustainability Institute.

6.3.3. Future research

While I am aware that much has been written about and research has been done on connecting with Nature (e.g. Franz et al., 2005; Mayer & Franz, 2004), ongoing research is critical to continually provoke conversations about the human-Nature connection and the implications this has for sustainability. Zylstra (2011) is currently conducting research in South Africa and part of this research is asking people

⁵⁸ Emphasis in the original

⁵⁹ University of the Witwatersrand, University of Cape Town, University of Stellenbosch, University of the Western Cape, Rhodes University, University of Pretoria and University of KwaZulu-Natal.

to share their understanding of what reconnecting with Nature means.⁶⁰ This is exciting work and I hope that it will provide us with increased understanding and additional ideas of how we can create opportunities for connection to promote sustainable living.

My original proposal i.e. to conduct a study into whether there is a positive correlation between mindful meditation as a spiritual practice and size of ecological footprint as an indication of sustainable behaviour could provide scope for future research. According to Amel, Manning and Scott, “up to this point, few studies have directly addressed mindfulness and environmental behavior” (2009:17). Jacob, Jovic and Brinkerhoff substantiate this, stating that “the relationship between MM [mindfulness meditation] and ESB [ecologically sustainable behaviour] is at this stage hypothetical, waiting for empirical support” (2008:278). It appears, from a perusal of the literature and from briefly scanning the NEXUS database and other journals, that no research has been done to date in this arena in South Africa. A study of the relationship between mindfulness and sustainable behaviour may contribute to existing knowledge and may be of value in the South African context, particularly since it seems that there is a growing interest in the practice of mindfulness in this country.

6.3.4. *Integrated lives*

My final recommendation is that we need to find ways to somehow ‘join the dots’ so that people see and experience the connections between their behaviour and the socioecological crises on the planet. Perhaps aspiring to leading integrated lives is more appropriate than just sustainable lives. The word ‘integrate’ means to “make whole, combine or be combined to make a whole, bring or come into equal participation in an institution or social group” (Concise Oxford English Dictionary, 2004). The origin of ‘integrate’ is the Latin *integrātus* which is the past participle of *integrāre*, meaning ‘to renew or restore’.⁶¹ Integrated living acknowledges that we are part of a complex system and a greater whole. It suggests the integration of humans into Nature; the integration of different communities; the integration of all aspects of human life (physical, mental, spiritual, emotional and psychological) and the integration of body, mind, heart and spirit: In sum, it calls for a systemic approach to life.

⁶⁰ <http://eyes4earth.org/%e2%80%9creconnecting%e2%80%9d-%e2%80%93-what-does-she-look-like-tell-us-win/>

⁶¹ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/integrate>

The Thread

*Long before we see the swallows find their way back home
we sense their coming in our blood,
something unnameable, like the sound of the breathing
we come to recognise as our own,
or the strange shrieks of foxes on lake margins,
which remind us that it is, perhaps,
intangible geometries that tie all this together,
or how, sometimes at night, we think we hear
timber falling in a forest we cannot name,
a wooded col on the peak of our loves
and find ourselves blessed by the presence of birds,
trees – a calligraphy of light high in their branches –
and there, in a crack, we find the threads that link us;
the knowledge that all we have to do is change (Brown, 2011:247).*

6.4. Closing reflections

I believe in planet home.⁶² My mind can wander where it likes, and my spirit may fly, but in the words of Rachel Carson, I am part of ‘a web of life in which there are intimate and essential relations between plants and the earth, between plants and other plants, between plants and animals’. I am an animal with some intelligence, and a free spirit (McIntosh, 2003:28).

The process of reading through the literature, meeting and interviewing the change agents, and writing up this thesis has largely been a spiritual experience for me. It has heightened my awareness, provided me the space for deep reflection, and renewed my own connection with Nature (see Appendix N). I have also been confronted with my own hypocrisy in that I have been forced to look critically at my lifestyle, my levels of consumption and my concept of spirituality. It has not been an easy process!

⁶² Emphasis in the original.

I have realised that it is impossible to separate social and environmental issues. They are two sides of the same coin and we cannot deal with the one set without addressing the other. As pointed out by Kaza, “the Dalai Lama says, ‘When we talk about preservation of the environment, it is related to many other things. Ultimately, the decision must come from the human heart. The key point is to have a genuine sense of universal responsibility, based on love and compassion, and clear awareness” (2007).

I remember asking in the first module of the BPhil degree as to whether the change needed to deal with the global polycrisis was happening fast enough. My explorations have revealed so many people throughout the world who are working towards transformation. The time I spent with Muna, Nicola, Justin, Mphatheleni, Nirmala and Simon showed me that there are different ways of being in the world and that has given me hope that it is possible to reconnect with Nature, with spirit and with each other. Regardless of the ways in which people work towards transformation, be they political, social, environmental, artistic or traditional, the point seems to be *to act*, to be *spirit-in-action*. Hope and possibilities for sustainable lives seem to lie in such focused and intentional actions on the part of many individuals, everyone doing what they can and offering what they have.

While my own understanding of spirituality and Nature has deepened, as I said in Chapter Three, my research will not end with the submission of this thesis. Three personal challenges for the future include the possibility of discovering and interviewing other South African change agents and writing a book to share their experiences and beliefs with regards to spirituality and Nature, to further explore the field of ecopsychology, and to possibly share and advance my work through the proposed elective BPhil/MPhil module in Sustainable Development, Planning and Management. I have no doubt that this would further deepen my levels of engagement and understanding of spirituality and Nature, and it also offers an opportunity for spirit-in-action: in sharing my work with others, I will be able to make my own small contribution to the transformation for sustainable lives for all beings – a chance to ‘be the change I want to see’.

To celebrate the submission of my thesis and in honour of the people I acknowledged at the outset of this work, I intend to plant indigenous trees in the Platbos Forest to express my gratitude.

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Appendix A

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION & REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION

Sent by email to each participant

Dear....

I am currently doing a Masters thesis in sustainable development through the University of Stellenbosch in association with the Sustainability Institute.

My thesis aims to explore spirituality and Nature in the transformation to a more sustainable world. I am particularly interested in the perspectives of South African sustainability change agents with regards to this subject and in finding out about their spiritual practices and how these practices inform their work and their lives.

In order to do this research, I need to conduct interviews with a number of individuals. I would be honoured if you would consider participating in this research. Not only would I appreciate the opportunity to interview you, but I would also be grateful if you would be willing to share any 'artefacts' or 'evidence' – examples of your work be it writing, poetry, art, photographs, etc. – with me.

In terms of the interview I will require approximately two hours of your time. Should you prefer I will respect your anonymity and use a pseudonym for you instead. You will be free to withdraw your participation in this research at any time during the research process. I will make available a copy of my thesis to you once it has been accepted by the University.

Please let me know if you would be open to this process and I will then be in contact to make the necessary arrangements to set up an interview at a time convenient to you within the next month.

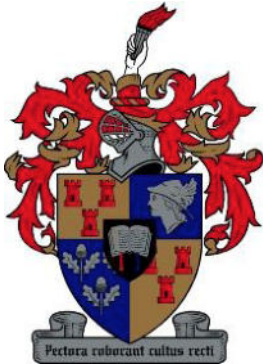
I look forward to hearing from you.

With sincere thanks

Helen Lockhart

Appendix B

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM



STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY: SCHOOL OF PUBLIC LEADERSHIP

**Master of Philosophy in Sustainable Development, Planning and Management at
the University of Stellenbosch**

RESEARCH PROJECT TITLE:

Spirituality and Nature in the Transformation to a More Sustainable World: Perspectives of South African Change Agents

NAME OF RESEARCHER:

Helen Lockhart

RESEARCHER'S CONTACT DETAILS:

Email: helen.lockhart@aquarium.co.za

NAME OF SUPERVISOR:

Eve Annecke, Director of the Sustainability Institute, Stellenbosch, Western Cape, South Africa

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: _____

NATURE OF THE RESEARCH:

My thesis aims to explore spirituality and Nature in the transformation to a more sustainable world. I am particularly interested in the perspectives of South African sustainability change agents with regards to this subject and in finding out about their spiritual practices and how these practices inform their work and their lives. In order to do this research, I need to conduct interviews with a number of individuals. I would be honoured if you would consider participating in this research. Not only would I appreciate the

opportunity to interview you, but I would also be grateful if you would be willing to share any ‘artefacts’ or ‘evidence’ – examples of your work be it writing, poetry, art, photographs, etc. – with me.

My research question is:

Will a spiritual relationship with Nature assist in the transformation to a more sustainable world?

PARTICIPANT’S INVOLVEMENT:

In terms of the interview I will require approximately two hours of your time. Should you prefer I will respect your anonymity and use a pseudonym for you instead. You will be free to withdraw your participation in this research at any time during the research process. I will make available a copy of my thesis to you once it has been accepted by the University.

Consent to Participate in the Research:

1. I agree to participate in this research project.
2. I have read this consent form and the information it contains and had the opportunity to ask questions.
3. I give permission for my name to be used so that I am personally identifiable. Y N
4. I would prefer to remain anonymous and for my personal details to be included in the research in such a way that I will not be personally identifiable. Y N
5. I understand that I am under no obligation to take part in this project.
6. I understand that I have the right to withdraw from this project at any stage.
7. I understand that I will receive no remuneration for participating in this project.

Signature of participant: _____

Name of participant: _____

Signature of researcher: _____

Name of researcher: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C

ETHICAL CLEARANCE FORM

**STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF ECONOMIC AND MANAGEMENT SCIENCES
ETHICAL CLEARANCE OF PROPOSED RESEARCH PROJECTS**

DEPARTMENT: SCHOOL OF PUBLIC MANAGEMENT & PLANNING
MPHIL IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

RESEARCH PROJECT (Proposed project attached):
SPIRITUALITY & NATURE IN THE TRANSFORMATION
TO A MORE SUSTAINABLE WORLD: PERSPECTIVES
OF SOUTH AFRICAN CHANGE AGENTS

NAME OF RESEARCHER/STUDENT: HELEN LOCKHART

NAME OF SUPERVISOR/PROMOTER: EVE ANNECKE

(Where applicable)

MARK (✓) ONE AT EACH OF THE FOLLOWING:

1	I am <i>au fait</i> with the University's Guidelines for Ethical Aspects of Scientific Research.	✓
2A	My proposed research is of such a nature that information will not be gathered from people or used.	
	OR	
2B	My proposed research is of such a nature that information will indeed be gathered from people or used but, in my opinion, the respondents will not deem the information that they give me as sensitive. The explanation attached hereto explains my reasons for this view, and also states how, during my research, I shall always ensure that people's right to privacy, confidentiality of personal information, informed approval and the minimizing of risks, to which they could be exposed during the research process, will be maintained. <i>See Annexure A</i>	✓
	OR	
2C	My proposed research is of such a nature that information from people will indeed be gathered or used, and the respondents will probably regard the information that they give me as sensitive. The completed faculty's form with full particulars for ethical clearance (attached hereto) states how, during my research, I shall ensure that people's right to privacy, confidentiality of personal information, informed approval and the minimizing of risks, to which they could be exposed during the research process, will be maintained.	
3A	My proposed research is of such a nature that none of the other ethical aspects that are stated in the University's Guidelines for Ethical Aspects of Scientific Research have any bearing thereto	
	OR	
3B	My proposed research is of such a nature that some of the other ethical aspects stated in the University's Guidelines for Ethical Aspects of Scientific Research, indeed have bearing thereto. The explanation attached hereto states how I shall ensure that these aspects will be dealt with in an ethically responsible way.	

4	In the execution of this research, I undertake to abide by any applicable national legislation, institutional guidelines, guidelines of professional councils and the standards of scientific character that apply within this field of research. It is my personal responsibility to ensure that my research is done in an ethically responsible manner. Ethical clearance does not divest me of this responsibility	✓
5	In doing this research, I undertake to uphold the procedures and protocols stated in the proposal. Should there be a substantive deviation from the existing proposal, I shall test anew the ethical responsibility of the research on the basis of the University's Guidelines for Ethical Aspects of Scientific Research.	✓

RESEARCHER/STUDENT:

Signature: H. Blockhart

Date: 22 February 2010

SUPERVISOR/PROMOTER:

(Where applicable)

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Annexure A: Explanation regarding proposed research

Having read the 'Ethical clearance of proposed research projects' form (Muller, 2009:58) and the chapter on research ethics in Mouton (2001:238–248), I am not aware of any ethical implications of the proposed research project at this stage. All information will be treated confidentially and with sensitivity. The identity of participants will not be revealed at any stage and their privacy will be respected at all times. If necessary, pseudonyms will be used to protect their identities.

Before agreeing to participate in the research, participants will be informed as to the nature and purpose of the research project and will be required to sign a consent form. They will have the right to refuse to answer any questions as well as the right to withdraw from the study at any stage. Copies of the final research report will be made available to interested participants.

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Appendix D

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Work

1. Tell me about the work you do.
2. How did you get into/find your way into your current field of work?
3. What global and local trends do you see currently impacting on your work?
4. Which of these trends give you hope for the future?

Nature

1. What early memories/experiences do you have of Nature?
2. Have you experienced times in Nature which you would consider as turning points in your life?
Please describe one such moment.
3. What do you understand by the concept of a person having a “relationship with Nature”?
4. Do you feel that you have a relationship with Nature?
5. How and why are people generally considered to be “disconnected from Nature”?
6. How does this disconnection manifest in our daily lives and what implications does it have for us?
7. How do you think we can restore connections with Nature?

Spirituality

1. What do you understand by the term/concept of spirituality?
2. What is/constitutes/characterises a spiritual relationship with Nature?
3. Do spiritual people necessarily behave in sustainable ways?
4. Do religions have a role to play in the transformation to a more sustainable world?
If so, what kind of role?
5. Do you participate in regular spiritual practices, rituals, etc.? Please explain.
6. Can one have a spiritual relationship with Nature and if so, what does this entail?

Sustainable development

1. What do you think the world needs if we are to overcome the global crises facing us?
2. Do you think consumption and materialism are problematic? If so, why?
3. How do you think we can overcome consumption and materialism?

4. What is your view on why there is suffering in the world?
5. In your view what is the world 'calling' for?
6. How do you think we should go about 'sustainable development' in South Africa?
7. Do you think there is a relationship between Nature, spirituality and sustainable living? Please describe this relationship.

Appendix E

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION: MUNA LAKHANI

Interview with Muna Lakhani, 2 April 2011 – 10h00 to 12h00 approx

Work

HL Tell me about the work you do.

ML I don't actually work. I don't have a job but I suppose I'm an advocate for environmental and social justice, so that's pretty much what I do. The vast majority of what I do is voluntary in nature so very little of the things I do are paid. I suppose the short answer is that I am busy living my passion so...one of my passions...

HL Ja, I can see there are other passions...

ML Yes, indeed there are.

HL Some of the campaigns, you mentioned lots of campaigns, but some of the campaigns that you are busy with at the moment?

ML At the moment there aren't that many. There's the stopping fracking in the Karoo. There's stopping the push for further nuclear power in our country. The two big ones at the moment. Um, and there's lots of little things going on. So, for example, Cape Town is planning to do landfill gas to electricity which is a highly toxic process, which we want to get them to either clean up the gas before they burn it or not do it at all. Um. Then there's various bits of policy that are happening. So the national waste management strategy in theory is complete, but we have yet to see it and we'll respond when we get to see that. We will probably be in the next month or so, um, be taking on Cape Nature Conservation and SAN Parks ..Cape Nature Conversation in particular around their euthanasia of baboons and stuff, so we also have a small soft spot for animal rights. Um ... and then the big body of work I am hoping to do this year is about transiting to a future economy. I think my sense certainly is that, um, I think you know everywhere you have a few enlightened individuals; you know everywhere in civil society, business, government and there are many people around who have some vague idea of what this future could look like, um, but people also understand that some things are entrenched in our system. So the systemic issues are what people are grappling with and saying, "Well, how do we get from this to that" and that's ah ... that's quite a challenge for most people. So I am busy with research and writing up stuff... I'll give you a copy of the last draft ... it's an old draft but... so how to transform ... how to move

from where we are to where we need to be. It is an old draft, so it's changed a fair amount. There you go....

HL What global and local trends do you see currently impacting on your work?

ML Um ... I suppose the sexiest global trend is climate change, which is actually quite worrying because we have this massive focus on a symptom, um, with relatively little or comparatively little being done about the root causes of those symptoms and the focus on mostly one particular part of that system, mainly carbon dioxide, is of deep concern to many of us. Um, so everything from carbon trading to REDDs, you know the forestation thing plantations and, um, carbon markets all of that is of deep concern because they're all not solutions when you unpack them and look at them with a sort of critical or jaundiced eye

HL Did you say non solutions?

ML Non solutions .. ja and the myth that you can somehow sink the carbon and fix the problem is a strange kind of global myopia because when you burn a fossil fuel you are releasing more than carbon dioxide. So what about the nitrous oxides, the sulphur dioxides, the benzenes, the toluene, you know the highly toxic elements of fossil combustion you can't get that sucked up by trees or whatever. So, no, very few processes are addressing root causes. I think that's pretty much the short answer to the whole climate situation. Um, the other systemic issue that we've, funny enough some of us predicted was the global economic meltdown, just like we predicted, the rapid rises in the oil prices. What was it five six years ago when oil was pretty stable at what \$26/27? And I predicted to a bunch of economists that they would hit \$50 before six months were out they laughed at me, then they were buying me beers after that. Then I predicted a high of \$180–200; it went up to \$147. Um, so those kinds of understandings I think are lacking, um, as far as economics is concerned. The kinds of economics we tend to practice is what I call autistic economics: it bears little resemblance or connection to the real world. So I think we need a new system of economics.

Other global trends, um – the so-called nuclear renaissance, um, one would have thought that South Africa would move away from nuclear, especially after Fukushima, but in our arrogance our government decided to approve of a 23% of new build being nuclear a week after Fukushima began. And we note that most countries in the world are taking a step back from nuclear, but we are not. So China is ramping down its future nuclear plans quite dramatically, for example. As you know Germany has called a moratorium, um, they were going to phase them out anyway. Even the Obamas of the world, you know complete puppets, accept that it needs to be relooked at even if they haven't taken a decision not to go

nuclear. So the disconnect between what we are propagating as a government and the realities in the world are very interesting to analyse and look at.

Other trends ... I think that the biggest, um, mm, I don't know about biggest ... Maybe I suppose the main trend and it's again a false solution, um, it is believed pretty much globally I think, certainly in the so-called First World, certainly in the North and the West that greening capitalism would fix the problem. So there's that disconnect from, you know, systems-based approach and then the other one, which I find probably around the world, but worryingly in South Africa is that the populace is being asked to carry the weight. We already ... the domestic user subsidises the huge-volume users of electricity like smelters and mines and what have you and yet we're the ones who are supposed to change our light bulbs and use less water and not use a heater and you know... So when all 50 million of us are using what 18% of electricity, one company that uses 10% pays below cost, um, creates .002 and .005% of our jobs in GDP aren't asked to do anything so it's a wholly unjust and imbalanced system. We don't actually have an electricity crisis in this country. It's a complete myth.

HL Any other local trends?

ML Any other local what?

HL Or any other local trends or do you think those are the main?

ML I think those are the key ones. Um, one of the reasons why I am doing this work that I am doing is that across the board, well pretty much, this notion of a green job economy or green economy is fatally flawed in the way people think about it. Um, government documents pretty much speak to recycling as a green job, which is scary when you consider the list of green jobs in that booklet. It's ... I don't know, it's about ten pages long or something and that's not even half of it. That's not like insanely good research, just cut and paste. Um, so there's very little understanding of what green jobs are. Um, the other one that is subsequently been added on is green jobs in terms of building wind turbines and solar power, which is great, um, but still is not the bulk of the work we could find in the green economy. So that's a quite sort of a radical under-understanding of the word green. Um, we still have the apartheid hangover where conservation is confused with environmentalism. The terms are used interchangeably, but they're not interchangeable at all. So there's still lobbyists, etc. pushing the notion that people concerned with the environment, um, are not progressive people and that they use progressive legislation to halt justifiable development, like low-cost housing or whatever, but it's generally the conservative middle class in our country who do that and one of the ways lobbyists attempt to limit the work we do is by saying, "Oh, you know, those people care more about animals and plants than they do

about people”, which might be true and mostly is true about conservationists, but it’s not true about environmentalists.

Um, another local trend that’s useful is that, I don’t know, what fifteen years ago, ten years ago, the progressive forces in our country thought as well that environment is an elite issue and not related to the poor or the working class in any way. I am glad to suggest that there is now groundshift, groundswell paradigm shift happening amongst progressive forces and they realise that pretty much every struggle of the working class and the poor are intimately related to issues of environmental justice. So that’s been relatively, I mean it’s a good thing. It needs more, you know, but the signs are there. I mean the rabid red, many of them are red green, so the work has worked, if you’ll pardon the alliteration or it’s working. Pretty much it...

HL Which of these trends give you hope for the future?

ML I suppose the take on it is that every problem is actually an opportunity if one can avoid being depressed and flattened by this myopia. Um, the fact is that when Earthlife set up the climate change partnership – what was it, a dozen years ago? – people thought we were mad and now climate change is a mainstream discourse. Um, when we spoke of a green economy fifteen years ago, we were labelled long-haired, hairy-legged, lentil-eating, hippy bongo drummers and now it’s in government discourse, its part of Treasury’s plan. So there’s a shift I think and I suppose that’s nice but quite frankly it’s ... ja, you know I think that in the end on a personal level anyway, organisations might be different, but on a personal level, what gives me hope is the ability of our people, particularly the poorest of the poor, to be resilient despite the odds and the average person and certainly amongst the poor and unemployed the ability to feel compassion despite their circumstances is one of the things that makes me get up every morning. Because those with the least are happiest, are happy to understand and engage and support things that the monied classes in theory know very well because they’re well educated, well resourced – they have email, radio, TV, you know – but the wealthier classes ... it’s a class thing ... the wealthier classes aren’t prepared to get off their butts, they think sitting on Facebook wins campaigns. You know you can’t win campaigns by sitting on your arse. That’s, well, one would think that’s a fairly blatant obvious truth but ... pardon my pollution – will this drive you nuts?

HL No, it’s okay.

ML Well, I think that’s it.

Nature

HL What early memories/experiences do you have of Nature?

ML I was born in a city, so the environment was ungreen; it was concrete jungle. Um, I think something my mother said was probably my first experience of nature. In our home there were a few things that you just didn't have to discuss, there were no ... it was ... it was a an automatic. I don't know ... what is the word? It was a given – that's the word, aah it was required of us without debate or discussion to respect all life, period, end of story, didn't matter what it was. It just wasn't a discussion; it was just literally that was like a rule, I suppose and I come from a long line of vegetarians, for example, so both sides of my family for fifteen, twenty generations have been vegetarians. So that was based partially on ... on ... on the culture that I ... that my ancestors come from, but it was predominantly driven by compassion. So I think that sort of philosophical understanding was what actually was the first connection that I can think of as a child. Um, in terms of, you know, um, childhood memory connections we used to go on holiday up the north coast – um, was ... today it's probably a 45-minute drive, but in those days it was much further than that. And it was a cottage owned by some religious organisation on a farm on top of a hill and the back of the hill was all sugar cane fields, but the rest of it was indigenous trees and plants and stuff and playing there probably was my first real intimate connection with nature, I think. So I would spend the whole day out in the bush – bush being a relative term of course .

HL Yes.

ML To a little boy, a grove of trees the size of this house would keep me occupied for a day.

HL Ja...

ML Then the ocean as well I suppose. We always went to the beach. I loved looking at the ocean. I can do it for hours, still can. Pretty much it.

HL Have you experienced times in Nature which you would consider as turning points in your life

Please describe one such moment.

ML Maybe one ... Um, I don't know about turning point ... that ... that's ... that's not ... that's no ... no ... um, an unusual experience, yes; turning point, no. I don't think there was ever a turning point based on nature, not that I can think of.

HL And in terms of your unusual experience?

ML I discovered I can see wind.

HL Okay. Tell me about that.

ML Oh, we'd gone on a picnic, a girlfriend at the time and it ... at the top end of the Valley of a Thousand Hills, and we'd been drinking champagne and wine, all relaxed and looking down this valley, you know, literally thousands ... you must know ... Do you know this environment at all?

HL Yes, it's beautiful ...

ML I'm a Durban boy.

HL Okay.

ML Sitting on this rocky outcrop, like on a cliff and I saw something far away, said, "What the heck?" at the bottom of the valley close to Durban. I said, "Ooh, I wonder what that is" and followed it all the way through and as my finger hit a tree ... I could do that ... I followed it all the way through exactly where it was going. I thought, "Wow, that's quite something. Jeez ...". Mmm, so we can do things we don't think we can do ... that's the quick answer. We have abilities beyond ourselves that we don't understand or ... or we are unaware of.

HL Okay.

HL What do you understand by the concept of a person having a "relationship with Nature"?

ML I think it's a ... or it should be, I suppose ... um, if one is genuinely human then you can't help but be connected with nature and obviously that's a huge issue nowadays because we for various reasons don't see ourselves as part of nature. We see ourselves apart, but humanity's history was different and until literally a couple of thousand years ago maximum, we were an automatic part of nature. That was understood. It was a given, but over time, for various reasons, which I suspect we'll unpack in your questions, we've become more and more disconnected from nature. So it's actually an unnatural state to be in, not to be connected to nature.

HL Do you feel that you have a relationship with Nature?

ML Indeed. One of the reasons I took this house is I can look out of any window and door and see something green. Even it's a flipping syringa tree. Never mind.

HL It's still a tree.

ML It's still a tree.

HL How and why are people generally considered to be "disconnected from Nature"?

This is a big question.

ML Ooh, that's a wide topic, um really. Need to contextualise my answer before I speak about it, um ... I don't have many skills, I don't think. I think most of the skills I've got are common to humanity or should be common to humanity. The one skill I've learned that I have is that I am a systems thinker...

HL Mmm.

ML And I like looking for systemic issues that might help me understand and answer this kind of question. And if I had to be honest, um, ja I think people might find this offensive, but quite frankly I don't care. I think mainstream religion underpins a lot of that. So, for example, I have had it thrown in my face ... For example, and again this is not against any one particular religion, um, um, had it thrown in my face that the Bible gives us dominion over nature so therefore it is there for us to use as we wish and therefore it is fine for us to mine or, you know, etc, etc, etc and as a sort of moral justification, if not anything else for nature being, um, something outside of us and something that is there for us to use and I would venture the word is actually a-buse.

Sorry I need another cup of coffee – the first one didn't really do it.

HL It's okay ... should shall I stop?

ML No, it's fine.

HL Shall I carry on?

ML Yes, unless the recording going to go wonky or something?

HL No, it's ... I'm taking notes, so it's okay.

ML It's fine, okay, um, I think that ... and I can very much find similar justification in inverted commas in all the mainstream religions. Um, the one that is least like ... like that is Buddhism, I've discovered. Um, but I find certainly the practice ... the application, may be a better word, of the empowerment that people claim from religion, um, enhances this sense of disconnectedness or the actual disconnectedness itself. So that's for me fundamental, if you'll pardon the pun ... Um, the other one is ... we've taken what like pretty much anybody in any culture, we've taken what is considered a sin in inverted commas and it's not necessary ... Just the Christian version, um, in any traditional culture greed is not considered a good thing if you look back and analyse how people lived and the kinds of politics we lived under, you know, in the form of ... for the majority of humanity's existence that we lived not only intimately connected with nature and respectful of *her* but that it was important that everybody's needs were satisfied. That's how society operated. So whether it was the migratory nomadic existence, um, even after the advent of fixed agriculture, the ... satisfying the needs of the village or whatever was fairly fairly important to those societies. Now we've taken greed and turned it into a virtue. So now the more greedy a person is the more successful, we think they are, which I think it is quite frightening. It shows a massive disconnect, um, not just from planet but from people as well. So exploitation became acceptable. Um, there's a beautiful, beautiful, beautiful cartoon by Zapiro – surprise, surprise – um, when Reverend ... God, what was his name? ... From the ACDP? He went on about, you know, being

homo ... One should be homophobic and, um, various other things and Jonathan, what ... which is Zapiro's real name ...

HL Yes ...

ML You probably know ... Jonathan went into this he obviously got riled by it, which is nice and he did a series of cartoons on a normal format, like ... that actually might even be ... No, no, I think ... No, that's Madam & Eve ... and he says, um, seeing as you made these statements, whatever statements this Reverend Moshua, I think his name is ... Moshwe? Anyway, he says, "Well, I just want to get some clarity from you" and he asks all these questions that come from like Leviticus or ... and he quotes various bits of the Bible in this case ... Um, and he says ... says, Well, you know it says something about slaves, so, um, you may take slaves from your neighbouring ... so does it mean I get Zimbabweans in or can I get slaves like from Pretoria or you know or um ... you can't enter the presence of the Lord if your sight is not good ... forget the exact words, but he says, Well I need glasses, so you know like does it let me into the church or not or ... And he asks this whole range of very clever things that are justifications for behaviour that is completely unacceptable in our country today and probably planet wide. Um, so it's scary to think that people still think that that should be their guidelines ... um and the reason I mention that is not to pick on Christians – I mean I have a Bible, a Qur'an, a Bhagavad Gita, Book of the Dead, you know all, of that in my library, but to show how, um, unskilled we have become in *how* to think. The what is actually easy, you know, what to think is easy, but how to think, we lost that skill and our history, our our history, ja even further back than recorded history, we all come from an us-we culture, you know. We go on about *ubuntu* in our country and various versions thereof globally but we've become an I-me culture. So in South Africa, for example, the American dream is the dream of our people. Understandably, so but still not unacceptable and the rampant capitalism has become an aspirational model.

Um, there's a very nice little booklet, which I have yet to read, but I was scanning it the other day. It's part of my research for this ... it's a paper called growth, um ... prosperity without growth... now I was just scanning it because I didn't have the time, but it made one very good point about why we are in this over-consumerist world and was speaking about *the* system's impact on us. So let's just call this system *they*, just for ease of use. They keep us in a state of constant anxiety and keep us happy by appealing to our sense of novelty and it's one of the most, um, concise ways I've come ever across of naming the paradigm. And the way it's done is actually very simple. Adbusters got it right some years ago when they said, It's very simple how this happens. So firstly they tell you you're not cool, so they attack your self esteem and say but if you want be cool you gotta have this pair of shades, except this pair of shades

costs a thousand bucks. So you work harder, more time, less time with your family and friends, people who love you and then you get these pair of shades but the action of reaching that stage means that your support structure has engaged less with you cos you're busier working. So your self esteem hasn't had a chance to revive, which sets you up perfectly for the next one and says, Aah, but you haven't got these takkies and you haven't got this t-shirt and you've haven't got this car and you haven't got this house. So it's a constant vicious downward spiral that we get sucked into and ... Okay, over the time that I've been doing this work, which is what, twenty odd years, if there's one gift I could give people if I was like god or goddess or genie or something, if I could give people a gift I would give everybody a high sense of self esteem. I suspect we'd solve, you know, the majority of our problems. So I think these have become the dominant drivers of our lives and lifestyles and we're prepared to put up with destruction of people and planet in our drive to achieve these, uh, successes in inverted commas. And that's my short answer, I'm afraid...

HL I am sure we could spend hours talking ...

ML I could....

HL Do you want to get your coffee?

ML It's fine, it's brewing.

HL It's brewing? Okay.

ML I don't do instant ...

HL Oh, okay...

ML I'd rather drink tea or beer or whisky rather than drink instant coffee...

HL Um, we've probably answered this question ... but there maybe something you want to add ... **How does this disconnection manifest in our daily lives and what implications does it have for us?**

ML Okay ... Um, I think it would be true to say that people are basically good in my opinion. There are very few people I have ever met who I think are just through and through rotten – you know, they really are an absolute ... absolute ... absolute minority, um, which is why in the work I do I find it impossible to hate someone. So I might disagree vehemently with someone who's pro nuclear or makes money from waste or you know makes toxic chemicals, but I find it very difficult to attack the person on a personal level. Um, you know, my question is simple: which life don't I want to respect and why? What would make me hate anything or any living thing person or plant? You know, I don't have an answer. So I don't ... so I try not to ... it's not that I don't lose my temper or can be scathing. It's ... so I'm not a saint, that's for sure, um, uh ... read me the question again...

HL How does this disconnection manifest in our daily lives and what implications does it have for us?

ML Ah, manifest was the word I have lost. Um, ja, given that I think people are good, if you ask anybody anywhere, pretty much and you say, do you think hunger is a good thing? No, no, no, it's a terrible thing, people shouldn't be hungry. Do you think war is a good thing? No, war is awful, we should never go to war. We should be going for peace or fighting for peace, which I find fascinating. Or, you know, what do you think of the idea that people are homeless? Oh no, that's terrible. You know, pretty much any human being on the planet I have ever spoken to would concur. Yet that same mind tells them, "Ooh, I've got to have a better cell phone" even though people are being impacted by mining and electromagnetic radiation and, you know ... or I need a bigger car or I need the latest DVD player or I need the newest fashion or ... consume, consume, consume. And there's a disconnect that those desires are the root causes of the things they don't like – like homelessness, like ill health, like hunger, etc and I think it's just a manifestation of so-called modern living. So-called civilization. I think Mahatma Gandhi said it very well ... I can't remember who it was ... I think it was the governor of India or Jan Smuts or I don't know who ... somebody asked himm "So what do you think of western civilization?" He says, "I think it would be a very good idea". I think that pretty much says it.

Um ... why does it manifest? I think one of the reasons also is that we are disconnected from ourselves. Um, had a neighbour round for drinks two nights ago and we were chatting and on ... during that day I had a sort of AhAh moment – I believe intent is very important in the way we live our lives. You know that, um, I am the kind of person that if you out of pure intent ... even if you are doing what I think is the wrong thing I would still assist and tend to support, guide whatever is needed and the other two in words that I came up with and I must turn this something cos I don't want to lose it - is intuition and Instinct. And I think we've lost the ability to listen to ourselves and we do things despite what our intuition and instincts tell us. So we've become, um, okay it's a pun, but we've become embodied in the physical way ... world only or mostly and to replace the other needs that we have as human beings the world has created, um, opiates that are supposed to satisfy those instincts and intuitions and those opiates include religion, sport, consumerism, popular culture and so on. Okay....

HL How do you think we can restore connections with Nature?

ML Mmm – I suppose the first question is would we want to and if so why? Or should we? I don't think those have been adequately addressed to date, just in my head even, I suppose. Um, I think what I responding is the word "nature" – it has a connotation from my upbringing and from our apartheid past and it's a little bit of a reflection on the status quo at the moment even, even with our progressive

legislation and Constitution ... is that under apartheid we were ... learned about nature, it was pretty much about plant a rhino and save a tree, you know, it had nothing to do with waste, pollution, toxics, etc, etc, etc. I guess mostly because at that time the impacts were falling almost wholly on black people and poor black people at that. The worrying part is that that is still true today. So that's the one thing. Um. I don't think people need to reconnect with nature. I think people need to reconnect with the environment. I think they are two different things. For me nature is a subset of the environment ... given the way we live, I mean, look at where we are – we are not sitting in a forest, we're not on Table Mountain, we're not sitting amongst fynbos. So we need to reconnect with all aspects of our lives including nature. I think one without the other would be a false response, would be an inappropriate response even. Because we have to reconnect not just with the beauty and wonder of nature, but to understand that all of this, everything around me right now is a part of nature cos it all came from nature somehow – that connection we don't have. In fact if we were connect with just the natural world I think we'd be ... not doing us any good ... I don't think it contributes necessarily to solving the problem. There's this mindset that says if we take kids into the bush they'll become environmentalists. I see no signs of that. We've been doing it for thirty, forty years – look at the mess we are in. So should we be doing it? Yes. Course. Kids don't get exposure to nature. Should they have exposure? Course. But the conservation movements tend not to make the full connection of the panoply of life – is that the right word? Panoply? I haven't used that word in donkeys' ...

HL I haven't heard of it ... glad you've got a dictionary...

ML Old dictionary ... Pretty certain it's the right word, just want to make sure ... if I could spell the bloody thing ... Panoply, oh, ah original meaning "complete set of armour" .. hence sense of completeness ... Ja, that was a pretty good word ...

HL Ja, it was...

ML I think what's lacking often is context, you know. So if I said to someone, um, every time you buy something ... if I had the information, I'm guessing ... I'm just ... every time you buy a new cell phone, six kids die in the mines or around the mines, you contribute 9 tonnes of waste or whatever it is or 75 kilograms of waste, um, you put into the air, you know, 27 toxic chemicals, of which 15 are cancer-causing and the energy that's used in getting the materials and manufacturing this cell phone throughout its lifecycle would run your house for a year and a half. If I had that – I wonder how much it would change people's behaviour. You know, it's like you tell people every McDonald's burger is nine to eleven square metres of rain forest ... Oh my God ... um ... okay ... an example of the disconnection ... the way the UNFCCC breaks down greenhouse gases is a complete con ... I met with Xavier [indistinct] in

Germany last year – he’s the chief negotiator from the UN technical department development corp unit. He’s ... had just come back from the Beijing talks ... landed up having a [indistinct] talk and then we had some time to have coffee together and I said to him, I said, “This pie chart of yours, so much transport, so much agriculture, so much waste, so much energy, it’s a complete con”. “What do you mean?” “Well, it doesn’t tell us what we’re using it for. So how much energy are we using for houses...”, how much, you know, so by thing rather than by group. And he got in a bit of a huff until I explained some examples. He said, “Well, we’ve got some people working on it”, but ... so I sent him some stuff and the two examples I’d like to share is I think so many of us are overwhelmed by this climate change thing ... become ... it’s massive and Copenhagen we predicted would be a complete disaster and people calling us complete pessimists and we turned out to be 100% correct and the reason why that process will fail and continue to fail is that it’s not addressing the causes. So in 2009 World Watch Institute put out a report and they practise conservative science, so it’s not even like radical thinking, like I might. The largest single contributor to green house gases (i.e. 51%) is global livestock production. I thought, Aah that’s interesting. And confirmed that 50% of all fish caught, i.e. that come to shore because we have 20–30% by-catch, so we catch 100 fish and we throw 30 back dead, so it’s already wasteful. And 50% of all food crops grown in the world get fed to animals. That’s quite scary. And they confirmed that one of the large causes, equally large causes of greenhouse gases and livestock production is deforestation. So they analysed global deforestation and found that 70% of deforestation occurs because of the production of meat.

HL 70%?

ML 70%. So my 9 metres per McDonalds burger has always held true. The other bit of research, funny enough in the same month, a colleague of mine from the Product Policy Institute, Bill Sheen and the EPA ... within a few days of each other released a report and they disagreed by I think 2 percentage points or something but pretty much in same ball park but about 40%, in this case USA, 40% of greenhouse gases in the USA come from products and packaging. Just taking those two statistics alone and sure, there’s some overlap, you know, you package meat and what not, but it pretty much showed that if we change our diets and bought less shit, we’d pretty much solve climate change. Rather than, you know, not showering or putting your geyser in your blanket. I’m not saying we mustn’t live consciously, I’m not saying that, but I’m saying that living consciously won’t solve climate change. So we can change all the flipping light bulbs we like, not use our geysers and drive less and what have you, but not eating one kilo of meat has the same water savings impact as not bathing every day for six months, but showering

instead ... you know that kind of understanding is not there because it doesn't suit the vested interests, of course.

HL No ...

ML So I think that should illustrate the point.

HL It does ... pretty well.

ML Good.

HL Can one have a spiritual relationship with Nature and if so, what does this entail?

Um – ok, the last one in this section is

ML Ah-ah the word spirit. Are we going to talk about the word itself first or later or ...

HL Ja, we can do that ... we can do that.

ML What is meant by spiritual?

HL Yes, let's ... let's address that first.

What do you understand by the term/concept of spirituality?

ML This is intensely personal, of course.

HL Yes, I know ...

ML Uh, I think the term is misunderstood mostly. It's conflated with religion mostly and I have realised that a lot of people have a fundamental problem with me around this issue. A lot of people, well a fair chunk, I suppose. People say, "So, what religion are you?" and I say, "Well, I don't do God" and that's quite a freaky thing to hear I'm sure. And they would either go down one of two roads, either say, "Well, why?" So I find the term paternalistic, sexist and objectionable. What about all the goddesses? Women make up the majority of the planet. Why are we focusing on the guy? You know if we had a universal something we pray to, it should be a woman because that's the majority on the planet. That sets off all kinds of interesting reactions, you can be perfectly sure of that ...Uh, so they go down that road or the other road is, "Oh, but you're spiritual aren't you?" So in other words they want me to have some sort of faith-based belief to make it okay for them somehow. It's got stuff all to do with me actually – it's more about their comfort zone and my response on that one as well sort often doesn't satisfy that need in them and I say, "Well, I don't know so much. I don't think I am a particularly spiritual person". "Oh, but you live so consciously and you spend so much of your time doing good work" and then get like, all like – what's the word – complimentary, you know. And I say, "Well, you know, I don't see anything of this being outside myself. I don't see anything outside myself. Nothing's outside of me. Everything's connected. So there's no cosmic hairy muffin in the sky that I should you know worship somehow

HL It's such a lovely description ...

ML Well, I don't know ... want to say ... if I say man, I find it offensive ... so ...

HL No, I love it ...

ML It could be anything. It could be a cheesecake. Um, okay maybe I want to unpack some of that, maybe. I had a very nice chat with a buddy of mine ... she and I are very, very, very, very, very close. She came to visit me once and we sat up talking till like four in the morning. It was last year and she was sharing how she got connected. I don't know what her moment was and the bottom line was that she realised that everything was connected and I thought, Boy that's a flipping good realisation. I think every human being should have that moment and she knew that it all came from a source. Like this ... a source. And I said, "Oops". She looked at me a little bit strangely, said, "What do you mean, oops?" I said, "Well, that's a disconnected statement". She said, "How come?" So I don't get it, so maybe she needs to explain it some more. I said, "If everything's connected, how can there be something outside called the source? How can it be? It's not possible. So it's either there's a source out there, in which case not everything's connected or everything's connected. Make up your mind."

You can imagine, that's another two hours. Um, I don't see a difference between connectedness and spirituality, you know, a sense of connectedness and spirituality and I've been told that I'm a better Christian than most Christians or whatever ... my way of life and all that ... which I take as a compliment, of course, but I believe I suppose in terms of a beliefs if I ever had one ... um, the only thing that I can come across that I think is common to me, it has to apply everywhere, right? There can't be exclusions. If there are exclusions then it's imperfect in belief. So the only thing I've come across in my lifetime that satisfies that that paradigm or that framework is energy, that everything has energy and energy exists at many levels. So there's the physical thing, the so-called, um, inanimate objects. I don't ... there is anything inanimate at all, but the so-called inanimate objects, then there's energy in the animate objects – people, plants, animals, microbes, ants, you know, all of that, but I am living proof that energy exists at many levels because some of the work I do is at the energetic level, which is not the physical and the closest modern Western, Northern science has come to understanding that is quantum physics and even that is sort of nibbling at the edges. Still it hasn't gotten anywhere near my understanding of it. Anyway, I'm no scientist, so I'm not claiming any higher knowledge, but so I do things that Western, Northern mainstream, peer-reviewed research can't explain, yet we do it all the time. They say it's scientifically impossible, so fuck we've just done it, so what's wrong? I am doing it ... isn't evidentiary ... isn't science supposed to be evident ... evidence based? So here's the proof. Your science can't explain it doesn't mean to say it's ... my practice is wrong. I've just done it, so your science must explain it. If it can't, then it must mean your science is flawed or incomplete at at best. I'll give you

an example. You know about flow forms, right? Or you must know about flow forms and you know the story in Switzerland, a beautiful little story ...

Uh, a friend of mine comes from Switzerland ... you might even know this bloke actually, but anyway, students came out from some varsity to take water samples at the top and bottom of this set of flow forms, which they duly did and went off and did their analyses and phoned him a while later and said, "Listen we gotta come and take more samples. We got them wrong the first time". It's not difficult to contaminate a sample so they came back and while they were doing it, he said, "So what made you pick up the fact that your samples were contaminated?" They said, "Well, at the top of the flow form there were that many pollutants and at the bottom of the flow form there were that many pollutants" or whatever, forget the number. So he said, "Ja". "So that's ... it's scientifically impossible so our samples must be contaminated". But the flow form did get rid of those pollutants ... it does ... it's one of the things it does. You can't explain it by the high aeration, for example. The flow forms do ... aeration alone will not remove ... it will remove some but not remove all the pollutants ... it does ... so they can't explain it, but he said, "Actually, it's the vortex". I understand vortex theory, field theory, etc, but that's scientifically impossible, you know. So spirituality sounds ... smacks of a practice. So I have an issue, a small issue with that. If we replace the word 'spirit' with 'energy' ... to me they're not two different things, they're the same in my head. Then it just reconfirms that we're connected to everything. It's only logical, emotional, instinctive, intuitional, um, sense one can make of it. I suppose I mean healing at a distance. That's a classic, you know ... modern Western medical science doesn't acknowledge it, but I do it and people I know do it very successfully because we do accept that everything's connected and if it is we do ... we can tug at one string here ... we can create a typhoon there, of course! Isn't there that old saying if a butterfly flaps its wings in Beijing then we can have a tornado in the USA? Perfectly correct. That doesn't answer your question I know, but still ...

HL It does, it does. Um, so if we leave that other question for now ...

What is/constitutes/characterises a spiritual relationship with Nature?

ML Okay, problem ... you see the way you've structured this implies nature is separate, which I don't think is the intent of your work ... Okay, ask the question again. I'll think about it again ...

HL What is/constitutes/characterises a spiritual relationship with Nature?

ML Mmm, I don't think that's possible. Nature's not a thing outside of us, so either we're connected with ourselves, in which case we're automatically connected to everything else or we're not. Right ... ja, I don't see nature as something outside of us, so I find it difficult to relate to the question. I mean I do ... I

go, Oh, isn't that rainbow's beautiful. God, yes, course I do, but I do equally go, at ... wow, what a nice drum at the same level of ...

HL Yes ...

ML Uh, as of course I do ... beautiful painting, nice piece of fabric, beautiful woman, you know? So for me everything's nature in that sense, so ...

HL So if everything is nature then is it possible to be spiritually in relation to or connected to?

ML I think you're either connected full stop ... or not or there's any gradations thereof, you know. I think people who attempt those gradations are fooling themselves. Um, either one has a sense, it's a sense ... it's not a physical thing, it's not an emotional thing, it's not an intellectual thing, it's not any of those things. It's a sense that everything is connected and you either have that sense or you don't or you see the glimmerings of it or, you know, you might be on that journey towards discovering it, rediscovering it, you know. Call it what you will, but I don't think they're separate things in the first place, so you know, ja ...

I mean I hate plastic with a passion. You won't see much plastic in this house. I don't use Tupperwares, you know. I'm really quite rabid. If the plastics federation would like to shoot somebody, it would probably be me. Um, so I really ... it's something I just don't want in our world right ... and I understand intimately how it's manufactured and to me it's a product of flawed thinking and a sense of disconnectedness that allows manufacture these things, for example. So that would be a physical manifestation of what you're asking. Um, I don't if this is related to other questions, but a while ago I did ... so I think a lot ...

HL That's a surprise!.

ML I like my own company, so some of that time is just used in reflection or whatever you want to call it and, um ...difficult to find the words ... I don't know if it's spirituality in relation to nature. I think it's respect ... ja the word spirituality is loaded with connotations, so I think it's respect that is lacking. If you respect then I think it's automatic, a natural byproduct. Shall we carry on? Maybe we'll come across more stuff ...

HL Okay. You've alluded to this but maybe there might be something else you want to say on it.

Do religions have a role to play in the transformation to a more sustainable world? If so, what kind of role?

ML Um, given the power of religion, there's a possibility, so could it be a transformative tool, yes. However the ... probably the largest single stumbling block in that being ... becoming a reality is probably the fact that the vast majority of religions, particularly mainstream religions, is that they're based on a

particular text, which is often taken literally for starters, which is problematic and all mainstream texts were written by men for starters and if you look into the history of who wrote the texts ... so if you go back to the roots of Hinduism, which is the Vedas, if you go back to the roots of Christianity, you'll find the groups that wrote it were either of a particular class or mindset, probably a better word, and had a particular agenda so that inherent bias makes it difficult to use religion as a transformative tool. Um, the glimmer in the darkness ... the glimmer in the darkness is that all the religions claim to be love and mercy based. Despite the wrath and the hell and the non-believers and the ... etc, etc, etc, you'll be reborn as cockroach ... You know, despite those manifestations ... because they claim to be ... I'm not saying they are ... because they claim to be love and mercy-based then if that is ... is the foundation for whatever transformation people might wish, then ja, it has potential. My belief system in that sense is very simple. I think we need just two things. I think we need passion and I think we need compassion and I believe that with compassion and passion anything's possible. So if that's supposed to be the root of religion, supposed to be, then if that's what people build on, then sure...

HL You've also commented on this ... **Do you participate in regular spiritual practices, rituals, etc.?**

Please explain.

ML Nope. Whatever practice there is, is a part of my life. It's what I do. So I suppose every time I eat something I feel a sense of wonder that I live on this generous planet that provides this amazing food. Or drink or whatever. Um, I'm really grateful for that ... Um, I think my practice is a sense of wonder. I don't know. I don't do particular ritual, I mean if I light candles it's because I want candlelight. I did do a ritual with my friends for my housewarming. I did it, I must be honest, um, more for them in a sense cos some of the people who came weren't necessarily close friends cos it was new moon. So I said "New moon, new house, new friends" so I invited a bunch of friends and said bring a friend along, somebody I don't know, whatever or hadn't properly met or spoken to and they did and they didn't know me from a bar of soap or knew me very little or whatever the word is. So I had candles all round the house cos I love candles, but I hadn't lit any of them other than the ones outside and at one time I said, "Oh, housewarming, so give me a minute. So you notice none of the candles are lit, so won't you each light a candle and do it with the intent of what you wish for my home and me". So they had a point of focus. So I did it for them actually cos if I just said to them, "I know you're here with pure intent for my house and myself, thank you", it wouldn't meant much to them, so it gave them a point of ritual focus which I don't find a need for. You know, I don't think it's difficult, that's ... that's the thing.

Um, some years ago I was trying to understand what motivates us you know. We make all our decisions by emotion, fact might inform it, but the final decision is made on emotion. There's lots of writings and

research, whatever to support that, but, um, I unpacked what I understood to be the range of human emotion and my sense is that all human emotion is based on either love or fear. I haven't found an exception yet and I thought, Well if that is true and it is for me, then I try to live my life in love. It's not that I don't ever feel fearful or angry or sad or any of that, but I try ... and if you're doing that then there's no need for ritual because every act should be embodied with meaning, you know or intent again, not meaning ... meaning is, ja, is a dangerous word that ... So I suppose intentional living ... I don't know. I don't get asked these things often so ...

HL So maybe we can see if you want to comment on the **Can one have a spiritual relationship with Nature and if so, what does this entail?**

ML I ... I ... ja, I don't know. It's a landmine that ... a minefield, I mean. Can one have a spiritual ... I think one should have ... it's the word nature I am reacting to. One should have a deep connection with our environment as opposed to nature as a subset thereof. Cos to me the way the questions are structured implies a continued disconnectedness – it comes from a paradigm of disconnection, so I don't support it, the word in its isolation. There you go, you're going to have to talk to your supervisor and rewrite your thesis! You've used the wrong bloody word! It's not wrong, but you know what I mean. You see, to me that's a reflection of the paradigm. Next. Smoking far too much.

Sustainable development

HL What do you think the world needs if we are to overcome the global crises facing us?

ML On what level were you thinking? On a personal level, cosmic level, global level?

HL Maybe answer it on a personal level.

ML I think we just need better self esteem. You know just to know that we're fine and loved and lovable and beautiful and amazing beings, you know, and that we are not vested outside of ourselves. That what's vested outside of ourselves is not a reflection of how beautiful we are. Our sense of self worth does not lie in things and I'm not speaking of needing things to live, that's different, but things, you know, over-consumerism is killing the planet, not overpopulation. I've got solid science to back that up. So speaking of obviously beyond survival there's a study done recently on people's happiness – fascinating study – and they did it in quite a few countries, which is interesting, and they found that in every country beyond a certain level of income the happiness didn't increase. And the relative portions of income varied as well, so relatively speaking, people in Latin America in just one country were happier with much less, relatively speaking, than a Canadian, for example. So we need to understand that if we want to be happy then besides certain basics I suppose and, you know, certain needs and wants ... both

are perfectly valid in the human condition ... beyond them there's no more happiness to be found because happiness does not lie outside ourselves. I'll be happy when I have a bigger house. I'll be happier when I have a bigger car. I'll be happy when my kitchen's done up. You know, whenever. It's not going to happen. It's a myth. What's wrong with being happy now? Why must it be deferred? It's what religion sells. Don't worry, you'll go to heaven if you do A,B, and C. Fuck heaven, what about alleviating my pain and sorrow now? What about me feeling good now? Why must I defer my happiness? Can't see any logic. Yes, you'll be starving hungry, cold, you ... miserable, all of that, yes I understand that and that's where we should be focusing our energies on – alleviating that but beyond that I mean, look at me. I live like a king. I probably have more possessions than the pharaohs of Egypt. Why wouldn't I be happy? What's stopping me from being happy? Nothing! I'm happy every day, maybe not joyously, blissfully happy every day, but I'm not discontented. Why would I be? What is there in my life that would be rooted in discontent? You know, do I like the idea that people want to build more nuclear power stations? No, but that's not me, you know, that doesn't stop me from feeling good about me and life. Here or how chatting about interesting shit, drinking good coffee, life's great, I have a wonderful life. You know, why can't we be like that all the time, all of us, or most of us? Is my life perfect? No, not all. I'm sure it's got a long way to go before it hits anything close to perfection, but it doesn't stop me from being happy. I want a copy of this recording please.

HL Sure.

ML Give it to a friend who's busy putting together radio programmes. So he might find sound bites.

HL Okay ... so it's not a problem at all.

ML Next ... if that was adequately addressed.

HL Yes. Um ... you've probably addressed these but I'm going to ask them together, um, but you have already answered them... **Do you think consumption and materialism are problematic? If so, why?**

And how do you think we can overcome consumption and materialism?

ML Pretty much said.

HL Pretty much answered those and probably this one too ... **What is your view on why there is suffering in the world?**

ML Ah. Okay, facts always help to understand and contextualise things. If we took current food production, global food production, made it total and took all six billion of us as a total and shared that food equally with everybody on the planet, it means that every man, woman, child and baby would get a kilo of grain, half a kilo of fresh and half a kilo of like dairy, eggs, blah, blah, blah, meat, whatever, every day. Now that's enough to make us fat, far less survive. Uh, another bit of research I did years ago and

my numbers are vague because I don't remember the actual numbers ... um, but this is pretty much what it covered. If you looked at housing, sanitation, potable water, pre and post healthcare, primary healthcare, you know, like the basics, one or two other things ... if we wanted to solve that we would need to take only one week of the money spent on the global arms trade to resolve that issue. So the problems on the planet are of a minor nature. We have more than adequate resources, you know, people say, "Ooh, you're living on two planets". Yes, my consumption is high, so whatever ... If everybody lived like that? Well, that's actually not the point. The point is no one should live like that, you know, there are more than adequate resources to care for everybody on this planet and through accidents of history, you know, like colonialism, apartheid, natural disaster, weather, whatever are some of the reasons why that isn't the case but the single most over-riding factor is overconsumption by the North and a lack of equity. So while the problem appears of immense nature that one feels helpless on the face of the numbers, you know, I can't ... I can't even imagine the number one billion, you know, that number overwhelms me but that's the number of hungry people on this planet. Just the number alone freaks me out. I can't conceptualise what a billion anything looks like, you know. I can't. It's beyond my capacity, yet to solve that problem takes a minor portion of the planet's resources. So we've replaced colonialism, apartheid with economic slavery, you know and the wrong aspiration model, of course, so ...

HL ... essentially it's the economic system and the aspiration model that creates suffering?

ML and politics ... which is all intimately linked to the issue of power ... something we haven't mentioned yet. It's been implied but I haven't actually mentioned yet. So I see religion as a means of gaining power over people, I see business as a means of gaining power over people. I am of the opinion ... I said this the other day ... the way we practise business, global trade is actually murder by proxy. I wrote a little article years ago describing a neighbour ... a neighbouring country and various other research since then has confirmed that business, industry, capitalism – give it whatever label you like – I suppose is actually psychopathic. If business were a person, we'd lock them up. So I said if there was a country like this, what would we do? And it described perfectly the average business on the planet today. So not anti-trade ... people also confuse that I'm not anti-trade. It's perfectly fine that, you know, that we in the Western Cape grow fruit and Gauteng doesn't. Does that mean they shouldn't have fruit? No. I just don't like our patterns of production and consumption. Production is unsustainable and the consumption is immensely imbalanced. I mean, we waste so much food, it's ridiculous and yet our laws, certainly in this country, I suspect in most places, are weighted against the poor. Whereas the whole idea of governance, uh, should be to hold us, you know, I mean, government should be a warm fuzzy,

something like a giant-size parent or something ... that's what government should be. Govern-ment, you know the American thing – for the people, by the people, of the people – that doesn't exist anywhere. I don't know of a single democracy ... I've been thinking for two years now ... I can't think of a single democracy on the planet that isn't fascist in nature. All democracies I can think of are fascist. There's a beautiful analysis by an African writer who came out here during apartheid. In those days we weren't allowed to travel in Africa and Africans, other Africans, weren't allowed to travel in here and he had some other passport so he got here and as we do, we ask people, "So what do you think of our country?" you know, of course, the National Party would get a third-class Polish weightlifter to take part in a weightlifting competition and call it an international competition and then do an exit interview with Cliff Saunders on SABC1 – there all of one channel then. :What do you think of our country?" "Oh, it's very beautiful." "Oh, I see." "Ja, South Africa rocks." But asking this person, he says, "Oh, your society is very simple." Of course, a few of us bridled at that. "C'mon, you've been here two weeks. All these people come here, they think they know." He put it extremely elegantly, "Simple – you've got socialism for whites and fascism for blacks." Absolutely perfect. What has happened since 1994? We have socialism for the wealthy and fascism for the poor. Bloody elegant as far as I am concerned. Anyway don't get me started ... politics is another whole world and I don't see enough of it in your paper. Everything is political. Everything. The food choices we make, the music we listen to, it's all political. And we have this hesitancy in our country – it's not a colour thing at all – we have a hesitancy to engage in politics and we have a hesitancy to engage on religion. People say it's not polite dinner conversation. Well, fuck what else we're gonna talk about? Oh, did you watch the bold and the restless, you know ... don't you love my TV, where's my TV ... anyway I'm being facetious ...

HL No, it's fine.

ML TV's an opiate like religion or sport. Anyway, ja, there's lots of opiates. I avoid most of them, except like the intensely personal ones like wine and cigarettes.

HL Um, you've probably also answered this one ... **In your view what is the world 'calling' for?**

ML What is the world calling for? Um ... that's a toughie. I mean, I don't have a mandate to save the planet. She certainly didn't vote for me, so I don't have a mandate to save the planet. Neither do I have a mandate to save humanity. Six billion people on the planet did not put me where I am, right? I'm not a chosen one of any kind. I'm just ploughing along in my own little furrow and having a good time doing it. I mean, for example, if you told me that tomorrow at noon all six billion of us would die, I wouldn't worry in the slightest. It wouldn't freak me out. All I'd just ... party call ... drink up all the wine, do all the things I never did, smoke more dope ... something ... I don't know ... whatever, so I wouldn't worry about

that at all. I think what worries me about the process of our extinction is that the poor and the innocent suffer through no fault of their own and that burns my bum. So what is the world calling for? It depends which world you're speaking of. If you had to speak to the heart of people, you know, if ... if like our government, like most people, if we stopped thinking with our pockets and egos and rather thought with our hearts, my sense is that all the good wonderful things would come to the fore, you know, end world hunger, global peace, you know, fix climate change. So part of me says the world's calling for rescue from ourselves, right? Which manifests in very strange ways, I've discovered. I've found a preponderance of them ... Cape Town ... I've only been here for less than two years, so it's a very judgmental and limited experience that I'm basing this on. I found a large number ... I think in my own mind, certainly in my experience, disproportionately large number of people who have this rescue mentality based on denial and I'll give you an example. Um, there's quite a large crowd of people who did this whole ascension thing. They're going to ascend ... some of them use the Mayan prophecy 2012, you know, one can give it all kinds of dates but all kinds of bases for it. It's interesting to hear the Mayan elders had to say about the prophecies about two weeks ago. It was fantastic ... hope it gave them a wake-up call, but there's this rescue mentality, victim mentality ... Um, a girlfriend of mine whom I lived with for quite a while came from a very English background, you know, tea in the garden at four, you know, quite proper, very wealthy. Her mum and dad had been divorced for like forever almost and it took him a while to warm to me, not as a person but because I wasn't going to have blond, blue-eyed children with her, so that worried him more than anything else, but anyway we became really good friends after a while and he met Elizabeth Klara. Don't know if you've heard about her ... Natal Midlands ... um, she ... her claim to fame was that she was visited by a guy called Acorn, I think was ... an alien ... she visits him regularly. She had a baby by him, the son lives with the dad, you know and she told my father-in-law, I suppose my girlfriend's dad, uh ... it was fascinating ... love science fiction, you know. Oh well, you know, she told him that the world is going to hell in a handbasket. It's the rapture stuff and all of that, but it's okay. How interesting, what did she say? Well, they going to come and rescue us – these alien ships will arrive and take us. So that's fucking astonishing, like wow ... that's really mind-blowing. I hadn't really thought about that. They must have a whole lot of huge ships to be able to get that right. He says, "No, it's so difficult, they're only going to take white people". So a lot of these people who are ascending types that I've met in Cape Town are generally comfortably off, very green, well educated, you know, understand all sorts of things, but they're in complete denial about their lifestyles even though they're living what they think is a green lifestyle and have forsworn anything negative in their lives. So if I speak about the nuclear industry, they say, "Oh, no, no, no, we don't want to hear

negatives". I think they are of the kind that say, "If we go OM enough the nuclear industry will vanish and all these wind turbines will sprout from cane fields" ... something like that, which I find very disconnected. I'm a positivist, I mean, I'm a complete optimist. I should think about ... if I wasn't an optimist I wouldn't be an activist. So if I didn't think that better world was possible I wouldn't be doing what I am doing. But this whole ascension thing, you know, we want to be rescued but I don't know who said it, probably some ancient elder or something, "We are the day we've been waiting for". "We're the day we've been waiting for", ja, that's right. You know, so to give life to what we are calling for lies in our hands and then the decision to act or not is in our hands and if we don't act then we have nobody but ourselves to blame. I'm not speaking of victims of this global situation. I'm speaking of the enablers of the victimhood. So I know a whole pile of conservationists who are perfectly aware of meat on the planet and then they would joke about it in a strategy planning meeting while braaing. Right. I know conservationists who would rather, and have said so in my presence, I'd rather cull people than animals. If that isn't profoundly disconnected, I don't know what is. I want to save the Kruger National Park but I'll take 4 by 4s from Mazda and they'll give me free fuel from Shell and I'm going to complain about climate change at the same time. That's profoundly disconnected, you know, so we have this ... I don't know what. We say one thing but we do another. We talk left and walk right like Thabo Mbeki. Don't get me started ...

HL This might get you started. **How do you think we should go about 'sustainable development' in South Africa?**

ML Sustainable development is as intelligent as military intelligence. It's ... it's ... it's a become an abused term. Let me contextualise that. The term sustainable development is usually explained by what Gro Harlem Brundtland said in the Brundtland Commission and I paraphrase because I can never remember her words exactly, but the part that is used to explain sustainable development is satisfying the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to satisfy their needs. That's not what she said. If you read the Brundtland Commission, she said sustainable development is the notion of discipline within which we are able satisfy the needs, blah, blah... I can send you the quote if you email me. And the discipline part is avoided because it doesn't suit the vested interests. Cos that means we have to be disciplined in what we buy and how we eat, how we travel or whatever, I don't know, all of the above, any of the above. So the notion of development requires unpacking. So in our country we say, "Well, people are doing a housing development; it's not its construction". Uh, what is sustainable development? Does it mean having LED light bulbs and solar water heaters? No, it's not. Sustainability in and of itself, um, must be disconnected from our ... understand ... oh no, the accepted

understanding of the word 'development'. So there's this myth that if we do everything in the green way we can all live like Americans, like, you know, wealthy people. It's a complete myth. Because if that myth were opened up and shown to be a lie we would stop consuming, which wouldn't help them at all, you know, so what we should be doing is saying we should have sustainable lives. Nothing to do with development. The problem of the world is overdevelopment. You know, so when I speak of the global North, I speak of the overdeveloped countries, not the developed world and the underdeveloped world. I say the overdeveloped world. And as I've explained before we have more than adequate resources for everyone to live well. You know, I am the last person to say that people mustn't live well. You know the definition of the word "well" has come to mean for many the practice of greed or the practice of greed and I'm not suggesting that for a moment obviously but everybody can live well where the basic needs and wants are taken care of and we can have a really good quality of life, which is after a certain point as I've explained disconnected from money and things and all the rest of it. I had some friends come from the township and they said, "Gee, you've got a big house". Okay, I work from home so I have a two-bedroom house. It's true. I do have a big house and yet compared to most houses I know, it's tiny. So it's intimately wrapped up with with what we consider to be adequate for a good quality of life. Of all the millionaires I've met, maybe twenty of them, only one who would vaguely qualify for the term happiness. The other nineteen were pissed off, angry, mean, uh, unloving, discompassionate, self-hating people, you know, yet that's our aspirational model. So the notion of sustainable development needs rewording, you know. Next.

HL This is the last one.

ML All right, cool.

HL Do you think there is a relationship between Nature, spirituality and sustainable living? Please describe this relationship.

ML Nature, spirituality and ... I think they're the one and the same. I don't think we're all part of the same. They're not the one and the same. Sorry I'll change that. They're all referring to one thing...

CELL PHONE RINGS AND HE ANSWERS.

ML Do I think there's a relationship?

HL Do you think there's a relationship and describe this relationship.

ML Sustainable development, spirituality...

HL Sustainable living ... Nature, spirituality and sustainable living ...

ML Uh, phew, I find it difficult to differentiate, um, again I'm battling with the words. The terms spirituality, nature and sustainable living. Okay, my understanding of the words, rather than the

normally accepted meanings of those terms, um, they're all part of the same mix. I don't think ... how one could live sustainably without being connected to everything. Um, whatever version of spirituality even people might believe or practise, um, is intimately ... to me they're three intimately connected things. That's ... that's the ... ja, the words I have issue with, but, um, they're actually not different things. Actually I mean if you're attempting to live sustainably in the accepted sense of the word then it's got to be done with intent, which is for me the version that passes for spirituality and if my intent is not to harm people and planet ... that's why the word nature is ... I have a disconnect with ... is that it appears like an attempt to divorce the natural world from humanity, um, but if living sustainably means not harming people and the planet or any life on the planet or as little as possible or whatever – one can get semantically involved – if one does it with intent then it's all linked, you know. I don't see how one can separate any of that. I wouldn't say Nature I would say planet. I wouldn't say spirituality I would say intent.

Sustainable living, um, ja, if you're talking about living within the carrying capacity of the planet then I think it's highly achievable. It's easy to do actually. The fact that we don't I think we've unpacked previously. So I think that's it.

HL That's it. Thank you very much.

ML Not at all.

HL I really appreciate it.

ML It's a fascinating study. I'd love to read what comes out of this in the end.

HL And you shall ...

ML Oh good ...

HL And you shall most definitely...

ML Condition ... And you're going to have a great time doing it.

HL Ja and I am. It's difficult, because I mean which terms to use ... challenging and interesting ...

ML Thank you for making the time. It's worthwhile work ...

HL I can keep this? I'll return it.

ML You don't need to return it. I've got copies...

Appendix F

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION: NICOLA ROBINS

Interview with Nicola Robins, 7 April 2011 – 15h30 to 16h45 approx

Work

HL Tell me about the work you do.

NR Okay. I have got a couple of focus areas, the one is, uuh, a consulting and advocacy group, its name is Incite Sustainability and ostensibly we focus on doing strategy, communications and In the field of corporate sustainability we do quite a lot of advocacy, but in effect it's primarily a sustainability consulting company. So that's the one area and I'm the co-director of that. And secondly I have a private practice and effectively it's ... I call it coaching but I use obviously a framework that's informed by traditional southern African teachings and I see personal clients primarily one on one. And then thirdly I have, um ... co-directing in a way the seed of organisation that's called Raindance Network ... that's with Niall Campbell. You'll also find it on the web and at this point its focusing primarily about working with communities that are interested in bringing together traditional African thinking, and using it to inform an approach to challenges raised today in relation to climate change, sustainability, sustainable living, conflict, anything really – that we as people working within a predominantly Western framework are struggling to get right. Those are my jobs.

HL Okay.

What global and local trends do you see currently impacting on your work?

NR What global trends? I guess everyone is impacted by what are three primary trends driving ... what makes life increasingly interesting and that is the decline in resources, increasing consumption and a growing gap or disparity in people's access to resources. So for me those fundamental drivers are giving rise to a whole lot of trends, one of which is an interest in sustainability and those sort of things, another is the interest in traditional knowledge because it seems that our Western knowledge is lacking in certain respects in providing us with adequate tools to address the level and nature of the complexity of the challenges facing us. There's a whole lot of trends. Globally probably the big one would be social networking, access to ways to put out messages and talk and engage very easily. Do you want to know what the local trends are? I don't know if they really affect me because I think I would be doing what I do anyway, but to an extent there is an interest following South Africa's democratic elections ... there is an interest in things African and in looking at ways to inform our policies and our programmes with the

kind of traditions that have been here a long time. So in other words, inform them with thinking and the consciousness that developed out of this soil. So I think that's kind of there. Perhaps it has an influence, but ja, the local influence ... really I have a strong sense that South Africa is a fascinating country where there is a huge amount of knowledge, huge amount of energy, huge amount of inspiration, enthusiasm, a lot of challenges for ... people who are prepared to work together in sometimes unexpected ways to address them.

HL Unexpected ways?

NR Ja.

HL Which of these trends give you hope for the future?

NR Well, the three fundamental drivers are pretty devastating because they signify that we can only be going into a period of significant disruption and a necessary period of transition and accelerated change so that ... Whether that is hopeful or not depends on how you look at a glass of water whether is half full or half empty. So I guess to an extent one can say it's hopeful because we know that change is inevitable, but it is also a future that I think is going to be a difficult one. In terms of South Africa I see a heck of lot of positive trends in people's openness to learn and in looking at new ways to approach difficult challenges. But at the same time I see a lot of closed minds as well ... a sense that people are only prepared to look in a very shallow way at the fundamental messages that are coming up from different approaches. I still see people lack ... or humans in a comfort zone that they are really not prepared to deeply interrogate so ... but I guess that's there's always cause for hope. I can take any human trend and find a hope in it and likewise I can probably find a potential doom in the same trend. So you wear braces and you wear belts, huh? You write down and ...

HL Ja, I just get a little nervous that ... that ... not going to...

NR I understand that. I do too.

Nature

HL What early memories/experiences do you have of Nature?

NR Ah, do you mean the outside world or do you include my sense of myself and do you include memories that I've accessed through process of trance or do you mean just ordinary memories? I guess you don't mind how I answer it? I guess I dare to say, to be honest, it's quite hard to answer that question. I've got sort of recall as a child of experiencing two things. The one was an awe and at the same time as quite a young child a disconnectedness. My experience as a young child was disconnected from quite early on. My earliest memory that has come to me which is not a conscious memory but was

brought through an unconscious one was of being born and my grandfather being there in spirit form and through an extent coaxing me into the world by showing me how exquisite trees and leaves and flowers were. In other words he took me out while I was being born. He took me out in spirit form and walked me through the garden and in that process coaxed me into embodiment and I accepted that from him, but asked that in return if should I need him at any time that he would come back and walk with me in my life. So I guess you could say the earliest experience that I have of nature was being introduced personally to its depth and beauty by my grandfather who was dead.

HL I just ... can I pick up this ... where you said as a young child of being disconnected...

NR Mmm.

HL Could you explain that or ...?

NR Not really, it's just something I knew. I knew that as a young child when I used to sit in the garden ... I would spend a lot of time in the river that ran or the stream that ran beside our house ... that there was a connection that was meant to be, but that I was not experiencing it. There was something missing from my earliest experience of self-reflective consciousness and I would trace that to about five years old or six years old. I can probably talk around about that a lot ... I would say, "Oh my goodness, something's missing. I don't know what it is, but it's a feeling and I don't have it" and I experienced it because of its lack. I only knew it in its absence. But I guess one might say that there was something innate in me that knew what it would feel like, but it seemed that that was unconscious or had certainly not been experienced in my conscious state. Perhaps I'd experienced it in dreams, perhaps I'd experienced it in other ways but not as a conscious self-reflective human being.

HL Have you experienced times in Nature which you would consider as turning points in your life?

Please describe one such moment.

NR It's very ... hey you mean like Aldo Leopold? He spoke about that – transformative moments, times in nature? I've experienced lots of turning points in my life. To say that they were in nature again is quite difficult because my experience of profound turning points ... is that what you asked? My experience of profound turning points is that the time in which I feel it where I am is absolutely immaterial. I've had experiences that are equally profound in a house or in nature so I don't feel like I've profound experiences in nature beyond what I can experience out of nature. I guess that would be one way to answer it. I don't have this kind of strong differentiation between whether I am in nature or not. I mean I think quite a lot of my experiences have been in a homestead in Botswana and while that is to some extent in a more natural setting than the urban Cape average household, it's still a place of humans. My most profound experiences have been in that kind of setting, which is in effect on the edge between a

classic Western urban context and wild nature. My experiences in wild nature ... this is quite hard to say, but anyway, let me say it, are quite difficult to reflect on as transformative because it's as if when they happen, I'm completely part of nature. So I can't say I was in nature because I was part of it at the time. I wouldn't say that being in nature is a requirement to have transformative experiences in my experience. I haven't found that. However I can say that if I disconnect from nature or if I find myself not staying connected to nature those experiences simply disappear. It does sound like I'm being slightly contradictory and I'm not intending to be ... I find it quite hard to answer the question.

HL It's bit difficult also to be suddenly thrown into this kind of thought process at this time of the day.

NR Ja...

HL So wild nature or nature isn't necessarily necessary for transformative experiences, but you are aware that if you weren't connected to nature that transformative experiences wouldn't be possible.

NR Ja, they would certainly be limited and ja, I think that's right and certainly if I wanted to induce an experience nature's a useful context to do it, but I don't spend a lot of time consciously going out on vision quests and that sort of thing. Literally I can go for a walk and experience the kind of connectedness I need to align my life with what transformation wants to happen. But I would also say though that if I spend more than five days in wild nature in a continuous period something would inevitably happen. So it's definitely ... it's a switch, but it's not a switch that's absolutely necessary. There's other ways to find that switch. And also those kinds of experiences, if you want to give me a practical example, for me they're not usually heavy spiritual processes. They can literally be hiking.

HL Yes ...

NR I mean, a lot of the time I'm much more interested in walking and being and experiencing wild nature. I don't set out on spiritual quests.

HL What do you understand by the concept of a person having a "relationship with Nature"?

NR I think for me, like any relationship, it requires mutual respect – that's already assuming that nature has consciousness. I believe there is a degree of consciousness in nature, I just don't believe its human consciousness, but mutual respect in relation to allowing – just allowing who I am, to experience, to be there, who I am to be there. So there's a ... so that helps in relationships and also there's a ... I don't think humans and nature are the same thing. I think there's an element of wild nature inside us, but I think that humans are quite distinct from nature in many ways and that we've made that choice relatively consciously as a species. I don't believe that to be bad. I believe it is simply to be how it is. I don't believe that we're bad for nature because of that split, but I think that we are *absolutely* required to live in accordance with nature. In other words, nature is the big story, we're the small story. And if we

don't live in accordance with nature that we'll be destroyed. So on some level I say, well, yes there's mutual respect but on another level, it's really I need to be able to respect nature. I feel that nature makes provision for me to exist/assist/subsist and perhaps as a human I like to imagine that it's mutually respectful, but I don't think that's really the case – I don't think nature's got my consciousness. And again like all relationships I think it takes work because the split has set us apart and I don't believe the work is to end the split. I think the work is to engage with it creatively because I think the split has value and the fundamental requirement of working with it skillfully is to recognise that we must live in accordance with nature and not the other way around. For me that means there's a hierarchy and as individual or a human or even as a group of humans we are dependent. Working skillfully is recognising that and perhaps as a society developing tools and processes to enable us to make that relationship more possible and more celebrated.

HL Do you feel that you have a relationship with Nature?

NR Yes. I breathe the air ... that's, for myself ... that's a very, very obvious centre of relating, so that's a ... every breath I take in, every breath I take out, I feel that there's an exchange and I feel that ... obviously it's not conscious all the time, but there's certainly an awareness that can come to you very fast if you stop breathing. I feel that very strongly if I am in nature and again I can feel that in my home as much as when I'm walking in the mountains or in the sea but it's more visceral and tangible if I am swimming in the sea – I can feel held, I can feel cold, I can feel repelled, I can feel every single human emotion in relation to nature. So that's it ... So I can feel fear, I can feel all sorts of things and that's really useful. It's a multi-faceted relationship, it's certainly not a romantic one. My experience of nature is in many respects one of being uncomfortable physically and so for that reason when I go into nature I will often take human things with me to make it easier. So I don't go into nature in a natural form. I will wear clothes to protect me from the sun, I will take hats, I will take sunscreen, I will take shoes with thick soles, I will take a car with an air-conditioner sometimes, I will take water. So what I am saying is that the relationship is always, is usually mitigated with objects from the human world. Going into nature in a natural form might be very difficult – so what was the question again – do I have a relationship? So yeah, that's the relationship – it's, um, in many respects it needs to be mediated by things from the human world because wild nature is in many respects challenging and uncomfortable. And again, it's not bad, it's about what it is.

HL How and why are people generally considered to be “disconnected from Nature”?

NR How and why? I think people feel something, they feel it as a disconnect. How they feel it, mmm. I guess there many ways people experience that and I can't say for everyone what that feels like but I do

think people know it when they feel it. If I take it back to my own experience, it was just a knowing that things weren't right, that things weren't connected, um ... how do they know they're disconnected? Ja, again, I can't really answer that more. Why do they know disconnected, um ...

HL Not so much that they know but generally why are people disconnected?

NR Why are people disconnected? Oh , because we don't spend a lot of time in nature, because we live in houses, we go from houses to air-conditioned cars, we go from air-conditioned cars into shopping malls and into movies, cinemas where we can watch nature on a screen but not experience it. So we have a entirely mediated existence and we actually spend very, very, very few hours in wild nature in a wild state. When we do, we do it for moments at a time, I'm talking very generally and I'm talking generally about Western urban people. I'm not talking about people who live in close proximity to nature. I'm talking about Western post-industrial society and I think that that disconnection, that disassociation from nature has increased over the last 10,000 years as we've moved from hunter-gatherers through agro-pastoralists into an industrial age and into our postmodern information age. I also think that the disconnection, the disconnect from nature has been experienced from the earliest time of humans and that it's simply grown more, not that it's an entirely new thing. I think that humans have always been aware of the disconnect and if you read interviews that with people have done with hunter-gatherer people they will always talk about the time before when humans and animals shared the same language, they would talk about the time before when we were animals and I think to an extent that an awareness, a conscious awareness of disconnect is part of what characterises what it is to be human. Again I don't see it as bad, I see as something that we have as an option to work skillfully and with ... awareness in whatever context we find ourselves. I do believe that some cultures have and continue to work more skillfully than Western industrial culture with this split. That there's been more work, more skillful work done to use this split in creative ways than what we've come to in our own society, which is part of the reason why Raindance Network explores methodologies from indigenous southern African cultures in this regard. I believe that we've, as Western industrial people have convinced ourselves that we don't need nature and that's delusional. I could carry on talking, so more that rounds it off...

HL How does this disconnection manifest in our daily lives and what implications does it have for us?

NR I think for a lot of people it manifests as an ongoing low-level depression and that can give rise to all sorts of emotional states. I think it also manifests as sadness, which I think is very different to depression. I think that it also can manifest in psychological conditions of splitness to various degrees and I think that might be on one hand a sort of light disassociation, not quite being in your body, not

quite being who you are to a very extreme form of potentially psychotic experience. So I guess my answer is that I think it manifests in psychological conditions which I would describe as unhealthy. In other words, you don't feel whole – the manifestation of which could take place in many forms in a given context, but I think that split makes us sick, to put it very simply. I also believe incidentally that psychological conditions can have physical conditions, that it can be somaticised in the body, that we can break out in a host of physical symptoms that might be experienced as paralysis, that maybe experienced as lesions on the body, that maybe experienced as stiffness, gaining a huge amount of weight or losing a huge amount of weight, radical increases or decreases in energy, radical imbalance in immune system function and so on. So for me the emotional, the chemical, the physical are all intertwined and sickness is just a useful word to describe it. Again, traditional African medicine has a way of characterising this quite nicely.

HL Is this what you've just spoken about now, is this what you deal with in your on a one to one work?

NR Pretty often, ja. Not only, but I think this condition is pervasive in our society and quite often working on the split is fundamental to the person feeling more whole. However in the work that I do and the way that I approach it is rare that I will work initially with the split that somebody feels with nature. I would initially work with the split they feel in their family and primarily with their parents.

HL With their parents?

NR Ja. So in our tradition, as in most southern African traditions, you don't heal your split from nature, or from God, or from the universe, you heal your split from your parents. Which, believe me, is a tough call for most of us who grew up in Western families, which is why a lot of people don't like to work in African traditions. They find it extremely challenging. But that is unequivocal in southern African traditions. There's no fast track to connectedness with nature and God, you go through your parents and your grandparents and your great grandparents. You go through your lineage. It's unequivocal and it's non-negotiable.

HL I could ask a lot more about that.

NR Most Western people could, but they'd prefer not to. Oh dear.

HL Maybe I'll ask you another time...

NR Yeah, maybe I'll charge you!

HL Moving on to spirituality...

NR Oh my goodness, I thought we were talking about spirituality. I'm joking!

HL No, no, it's fine. I split it up.

What do you understand by the term/concept of spirituality?

NR Mmm ... spirituality for me is ... a wholeness that comes from being who I am in the world. There's no specific form other than I recognise it when I'm experiencing it. It exists purely in the experience of who I am in my relationship to that experience at any given moment of time. So it's a state of being, it's not a particular act, not a cultural icon. And it's not religion, by the way.

HL What is/constitutes/characterises a spiritual relationship with Nature?

NR Mmm. Again – and it really follows from my earlier response given to the question before – a spiritual response to nature lies in being absolutely aware and accepting the experience I have in nature and with nature at any given point. So if I'm in nature and I'm getting burnt by the sun and cut by stones and blown by the wind, sort of stinging sand, the level to which I am aware and accepting and allowing myself to be part of that experience defines in some respects how spiritual my relationship with nature is. But in general I don't like to characterise something as spiritual or not spiritual – I haven't found that useful for me because I find the term spiritual to be rather loaded in our culture and I'm talking about Western, urban North Atlantic culture. I find the word almost to refer to something either ethereal, transcendent or set apart from and – not set apart not from nature, but set apart sort of from ordinary human experience. So I don't really like using the word as a way to characterise relationship. I think there's relationship which is experienced in fullness and awareness, no matter what that relationship is, could be spiritual. So in some respects it is in the eye of the beholder as to how I allow myself to experience what it is I am doing or where I am. And that really goes for nature and anything else. Also I would say that when I am very deeply into my humanness, very deeply inside myself, I find nature. I think many people ... if we were open to these experiences ... can find it in sexuality, in a moment of orgasm, when one feels incredibly connected and in love with another person and for me that's as spiritual as any experience that I might have in nature, as spiritual and as connected to nature, but it's obviously profoundly human at the same time.

HL Do spiritual people necessarily behave in sustainable ways?

NR No, Absolutely not. I mean I assume that we agree on what sustainable ways are, so in terms of what spiritual people are, I think we might have a long conversation about what that actually means. But let me take my definition – people who are conscious about who they are ...uh, you know, I think there are degrees of consciousness and I think that it is quite difficult. Whether we are conscious or not of our experience in society, it is quite difficult to be entirely sustainable. We are bought into all sorts of systems that make it very challenging to disengage from what is basically an unsustainable society. We live de facto in an unsustainable society. Most of us who are inclined to work and relate and be part of conventional human society are required to engage with many elements of an unsustainable society and

that might simply be living in a house where you paint the walls and drive a car and that sort of thing, so you ... it's a matter of degree. I think perhaps spiritual people, quote unquote, spiritual people who attempt to become more conscious of their connection to the world perhaps do more to reduce their negative impact and enhance their positive impact on society or on nature or otherwise just invest it with a whole bunch of guilt that others don't and sometimes that's ... in that way, it's not necessarily useful for the society. So I guess yes and no. I shouldn't be saying this to most of your questions but probably on the balance and again I'm talking about people in this Western, post-industrial context, you know, I think people ... hunter-gatherer societies and agricultural societies were a hell of a lot less heavy in terms of their footprint, which is not ... I'm not actually saying we should go back to being hunter-gatherers, I simply pointing that out for the fact.

HL Do religions have a role to play in the transformation to a more sustainable world?

If so, what kind of role?

NR I think religions can play a role, in that they provide a form of social capital of human-coming-togetherness and I think in any culture where you have ... where you have common beliefs you can create a shared story that can inspire people and I think that can be useful. I don't see religions necessarily as an opiate in Marxist terms and I also don't see them as being particularly spiritual necessarily but I think they can provide a very useful conduit for human energy to come together. Where they are filled with too much dogma, at times religions can undermine a movement to that personal consciousness and personal awareness, but I certainly think for the most part, less ... do that. Did you ask me what role they can play? It's really in inspiring people to common action – I think that can really be useful. And if you look at religions, there was some really good work done by the churches, by the mosques in the struggle against apartheid and I think the same goes for the struggle for a sustainable society. Anything that can inspire humans to act courageously could be useful. And by courageously, I mean from the heart.

HL Do you participate in regular spiritual practices, rituals, etc.? Please explain.

NR Mmm, I do. I'm a trained and initiated *sangoma* and that requires me to follow the law of *nyanga* or the law of lineage, n-y-a-n-g-a.

HL N-y-a-n-g-a, that's the law of lineage?

NR *Nyanga* means a traditional doctor and that law is ... the law in effect, the law of lineage. Specific rituals we – you want detailed rituals – we do processes where we speak to our ancestors, we give offerings, we tell them what we do, explain what's going on in our lives, we ask them for to stand with us and help us, to clear the way when we have problems, simply make that relationship with people in

the past conscious. Similarly we may speak to people in the future who are not yet born and we also speak to other nations of ancestors, which ultimately will include the spirits of nature, the spirits of lakes, caves, of hills. So the first practice we do is speaking exchange. Southern African traditions all have a word for it, which will be like *patla* or *passa*. That is a ritual that will happen, depending, twice a day if you're in training, perhaps not as often, but certainly all traditions of southern African people will practise that ritual.

HL Southern African? Not South African?

NR Southern African. Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Zambia – they're similar. They're not the same, but similar. They have an understanding that in order to make relationship flow, you've got to exchange, you've gotta tell, you've gotta talk, you've gotta engage and that is that ritual. There are many many others, you know. The other one's we dance, so we have a process in the tradition that I follow – it's a form of possession trance – not all of them are possession trance – but we'll get together every month or every two months and we'll dance as a group. If there is a particular ceremony that is taking place for people associated with our lodge, the people that we trained with, we'll go up and we'll dance with them, we will celebrate with them, we will contribute to that ritual, contribute to that process. So there are very many, can list them, but they're all in the nature of engaging and processing ceremony and certainly if I'm wanting to further my own personal development there's an infinite number of rituals that can be done both in nature and in the homestead to enable that transition to take place in a skillful and positive way, constructive way. These are all rituals that have been around for a number of years, so they've been tried and tested by communities and found to be useful in mediating that relationship between ourselves as individuals and the community, ourselves, our family, the community, nature and God. And all the spirits which is how those things manifest, can manifest.

HL Can I ask you because you've referred to God a couple of times ... It's not one of my questions here, but I just want to know what your understanding is of God or what your view, if you have one...

NR Ja, I guess it's ... um, I certainly don't have a traditional Christian understanding of an old man with a white beard. In African traditions, it's *mkulukulu*, it's the great one, um, quite far away from who we are. For me it's just and this is not a traditional interpretation, but for me it points to the primal one-ness in all of the universe. Something I'm a part of, something that's a part of me. That just is. When we *patla*, when we do these rituals, they are not in relation to God directly, they're in relation to those things that are part of our community – whether they are no longer living, not yet living, but they're the things that are close and around us. So the best I can do to describe my understanding of it is a concept of one-

ness, but not a personified being with whom I have a personal relationship. So it's very much not the Christian experience of God. I'm also not saying this is necessarily the African, southern African ...

HL This is your ...

NR This is how I experience it, which is to an extent influenced by southern African traditions. God is not particularly interested in what we do. But as everything that we do goes back to God, it's useful to have a sense of alignment with God anyway. It's also not very new-age, i.e. the universe actually doesn't really care.

HL Any more rituals?

NR I can like tell you a hundred rituals – we could be here all day – some of which you probably wouldn't want to hear about. I mean, one other thing ... I mean to mark transition at any stage of the human passing, so from coming into birth, giving birth as a woman, coming to puberty, going into elderhood, becoming a doctor, somebody in society who can work with that fundamental shift that we experience, all of those things have particular rituals associated with them and that is pretty much across all southern African traditions. Those rituals will be different but from what we can see. The intent and the purpose of those rituals is very, very similar. So those are the most important ones – the one that keeps you in alignment and the other one that marks, you know, radical transitions in a way that enables us to integrate them successfully. That's why rituals are useful – they give us the ability to integrate and come to call us through. Otherwise what tends to happen is the spirit will attempt to do that process on its own and the result can often be that our sickness, our imbalance, our split is actually heightened. While that may be not a bad thing and a lot of people experience it, it's certainly not necessarily a pleasant way to go through transition in life. It's what many spiritual traditions would refer to as spiritual emergency rather than emergence and we will always pick emergence because it's a lot more comfortable.

HL Can one have a spiritual relationship with Nature and if so, what does this entail?

NR For me really, I mean building up on what I've said previously, I think the spiritual relationship that we have with nature is about a level of awareness of who we are and about our experience of our feelings and what is happening for us at any given moment, whether we're in nature or not. I think that to the extent that we develop that awareness and work with it skillfully in our lives is the extent to which our relationship with nature is spiritual. And I ... I wouldn't ... again I wouldn't differentiate between a spiritual relationship with nature and a spiritual relationship with my parents, my husband, my children, my community, my place of work, the experience...

HL Sorry, so it's not different?

NR It's not different. The experience of spirituality is based on my ability to stay in the field of experience, to become conscious, to become aware of who I am, what I am and what I experience in any given time. So it's nature like anything else we have a spiritual relationship to that. I don't believe it's really possible to have a spiritual relationship with nature in the absence of a spiritual relationship with everything else.

Sustainable development

HL What do you think the world needs if we are to overcome the global crises facing us?

NR It needs radical co-operation, it needs radical innovation and a profound understanding of what it means to live within ecological limits. It's very simple.

HL Do you think consumption and materialism are problematic? If so, why?

NR No. I don't. I think overconsumption is problematic and I think materialism is problematic if it causes you to operate beyond ecological limits. So in and of themselves I don't have a problem. We have a requirement to consume because we need energy to survive so we consume energy in the form of food, in the form of heat, etc. So in and of itself it's a requirement for human survival. I think materialism can be a beautiful expression of who we are but I think in excess or practised without an understanding of limits in our given society, it is a problem. The reason why it is a problem in our given society is that there are too many of us. There isn't space for us all to practise consumption and materialism in an unconscious way.

HL Um, maybe this isn't appropriate but...how do you think we can overcome consumption and materialism?

NR We can't. We can only overcome it by dying. I presume your question is excessive consumption and excessive materialism relative to our size on the planet. I believe that people will have desire. I don't believe desire in and of itself is a bad thing. I believe desire without an appreciation of context can lead to the death of a species. In as much as we have a problem with that, we should look to ways to become conscious of consumption and materialism and to really understand the limits within which it can operate safely and that will require skills and innovations that at the moment we have in its infancy, but I think that that needs to grow up.

HL What is your view on why there is suffering in the world?

NR That's a very deep spiritual question. I believe that to some extent suffering is about the relationship that we have to pain. I think suffering is something we can work with, but I think pain is part of the

human condition and will be part of what we experience if we are fully human. I don't believe any human being will ever live a life free of pain. Can you remind me of the question again?

HL What is your view on why there is suffering in the world?

NR On why there is suffering in the world? So I'm just saying that there is a relationship between suffering and pain. I think suffering is less necessary than pain but it is also probably to an extent part of every human's experience. Um, why do I think there's suffering in the world? From what I can see in human society there has always been a degree of suffering and perhaps if I think about the question that you asked earlier, the extent to which we are disconnected from who we are, from our power and also from nature, we are more likely to experience pain in a way that includes suffering. It's quite a hard question to answer. I mean we could talk about all trends and how human life is, but if you want a fundamental answer it would be something like that.

HL In your view what is the world 'calling' for?

NR Calling for? People or the world? What is the world calling for? I don't know what the world's calling for, but if I listen to the people that I engage with and speak to and dance with and pray with, I would say that the world is calling for an opportunity to be happy. The world is calling for happiness.

HL How do you think we should go about 'sustainable development' in South Africa?

NR How do you think we should go about 'sustainable development' in South Africa? I think the primary task is to enable people to do two things: the one would be to dialogue, to converse, to have conversations, to really speak to each other, meaningful exchange on the nature of our challenge and the radical shifts required to address it. I think we're talking about a revolution in consciousness. I think that we're unlikely to get to the depth of discussion required, to the depth of dialogue required unless people are also encouraged to focus and drop into their own personal experience of what it means to be human in the world today. If you like, that second one refers to people's opportunity to move to greater wholeness in some form of healing. In South Africa there is a lot of pain and that pain is experienced by a lot of people as suffering. I think that we have a lot of bitterness from the experience of apartheid, the experience of racism, the experience of disparity, the experience of cruelty, and the experience of violence. I think that to move to the level of dialogue that we need in the country we need to have an exchange and experiences that enable us to get to the depth of pain that people have felt in this country and I think to do that we would be wise to draw on many methodologies available in our traditions. This may include the opportunity for people to do art, write stories, the opportunity for people to dance. They may include traditional rituals such as *femba*, that's f-e-m-b-a – which is why people bring out the spirits of the past that are possessing them with negative consequence. They may involve just more

space for simple shared experience – conversation, meals and activities and I think that if everyone in South Africa decided to make that space, to make it possible, we would see some quite magical openings and quite astounding dialogues emerging in our society. I also think that there is no limit to the way that process of healing can take place and there is certainly no one right way for the opportunities to be set up. It can happen in a World Cup and it can happen to an individual walking on the beach. Or it can happen when you lift up a sick child. So I don't know how this is going to happen, but I do know that there are a lot of people in this country who have the desire to connect and at some point you asked me what gives me hope. So I'd say that gives me hope because there are so many people in this country that are prepared to express a desire to connect despite the level of pain and suffering that has been part of their life and experience over the last few generations. And it's that which I think is at the heart of sustainable development will be built on in this country. To be honest I don't think it will be built on anything else.

HL So it's basically healing?

NR Mmm. And a profound level of our past, not just personal healing, but a collective healing of the pain that has been part of our history of the last few generations – not just since apartheid in 1960 – it's a lot older than that.

HL Ja ...

NR But obviously 1960 is a good starting point. I have to go in about five minutes.

HL Two minutes. This is the last one.

Do you think there is a relationship between Nature, spirituality and sustainable living? Please describe this relationship.

NR Ja, superfluous ... nature, spirituality and sustainable living? I guess there is and the theme, the thread that would wind between all of them is a greater consciousness or awareness of what it means to be me, what it means to be human, what it means to be part of society and what it means to be part of the world of nature and spirits. Ja, I mean, I guess they must be, it's logical, right?

HL Okay, we're finished.

NR We're finished? Good timing.

Appendix G

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION: JUSTIN FRIEDMAN

Interview with Justin Friedman, 14 April 2011 – 17h00 to 18h45 approx

Work

HL Tell me about the work you do.

JF Okay so I'd say to people that I am in the business of raising awareness or cultivating awareness and for me work is an opportunity to create social and environmental change in the world. If you're not doing that in your work, then I'm not really sure what you're doing – well, that's what I ask myself. So for me it's been an evolution of seeing work as an opportunity to do that and then for factoring it in and using my skill set to do that. So how that translates into current business is twofold – the first one is I have a business called Greenhouse, which has a tag line 'cultivating ideas into reality' and it creates ... it's strategic work ... it's consulting and idea-generation and facilitation work on green and social ideas. So existing ideas, new ideas for large corporates, for small businesses, for individuals and it helps really to ask five key questions broken out into a one-day workshop framework – why, what, who, where and how – and it really is about aligning your heart with the work that you do and with the ideas that you have because I believe that if your heart aligns, truly aligns, with the work that you do the chances of success are so much greater and also sustainability wise to stay with the work is much greater so we have that as a business it's a strategic business.

And the second part of the work that I do is we have an NGO or public benefit organisation, which is also called Greenhouse actually, but the first one's now Greenhouse Thinks – strategic work. Greenhouse, the not-for-profit, is the tag line 'cultivating awareness' and that is using various media platforms, branding, design, events in order to create awareness and the focus of that NGO and how that came into being is around a concept called FLOW. I can send you writing on FLOW. FLOW, in essence FLOW – For Love of Water – which is about creating awareness and inspiring action in order to create a deeper understanding and respect for water. And so based on the fact that we are all made up of over 70% water and so is the surface of the planet what we feel is by communicating this message and asking people the question Are you for Love of Water? Are you FLOW? And get them to start becoming aware of how water is systemic in our day-to-day lives and how it's involved in everything that we do from transport, energy-creation to agriculture to urban development to product manufacture, that people start to grasp this idea of embedded water-use and how much and how water is so critical to our

economic and social way of being. And of course in addition to that our biological ... our lives without it ... most people, three days without water would not survive. So FLOW uses these platforms to raise that awareness in order to create the collective behaviour change that I and those involved believe is required in order to create a sustainable future for future generations and to preserve our environment, actually to regenerate our environment because we are destroying it. So it's using the current consumer-based platforms to raise awareness on what we feel is an important issue and it actually goes even deeper than just water because of the nature that we're all made up of water it becomes a way to connect and it becomes a way to unify and level because water is the ultimate leveler. It affects us all in the same way – industry, corporate, business, governments, NGOs, public, media, etc. – it affects us all and it crosses political boundaries as well. So really for me it's about unity and it's about bringing everybody together. And that's in essence what my work is overall about – it's about reminding us of unity that is already ... and how ever I can do that, I will. And the other piece of work that's cropped up recently in what I do is creating content, so film, a song, so FLOW has kind of inspired me to see how we can approach people from a heart base and therefore look at the platforms that are heart-based platforms that allow people to feel. Because only if you feel it will you actually create the behaviour change (I'm going to write that down).

And I believe actually that work is not separate from life so the work that I do is how I am in service to those around me and that's what I define as work. I've never been money-driven. I've been blessed that I've been paid for the work that I've done, but for me the money is like the ... it's society's way of rewarding ... in many ways it becomes that ... for the work that you do.

HL What global and local trends do you see currently impacting on your work?

JF Well, I think speaking on water it's a very local and global issue. There's a supply and demand gap locally in South Africa and globally so naturally people's attention to this issue is growing and people's protection of this issue is growing as far as insularity and the potential for conflict on the issue of this fundamental resource. So as a global issue the use of water and the treatment of water and the future supply of freshwater obviously impacts the work that I do because I need to stay abreast of what's happening and try and contribute in the way that I can to the local and global issue but focusing on this awareness. So perhaps bringing awareness to the different aspects would be the result of this global and local issue. The second part of the global trend is that more and more people are starting to ... well especially in the more ... I should say in the developed world where people perhaps have more time to consider what work they're passionate about doing and not just working for a pay cheque and actually a lot of people are leaving big businesses starting up on their own and wanting to really love what they do

because everybody has to spend so much time working to maintain a certain quality of life it seems. So that of course impacts my strategic work because more and more people want to ask themselves the question, why am I doing this what are the values in my heart and how can I do the work that I love and still support my priorities? So those two things – water obviously and then people wanting to work more in alignment with their passion. And then I think the other global issue actually is this economic meltdown, which we've seen and how there's no real stability that can be assured by as previously working for big businesses, etc and that things can come crashing down at any time regardless of size. So what's happening is that people are realising they need to be more adaptable, they need to be more independent. So again looking at how they can operate in their own sphere and adjust. So that also impacts my strategic work quite a lot I notice. And then of course the overall global trend is I guess closing the loop for me is everybody's – well not everybody – many, many people starting to relook the environmental issues and climate change and the impending issues that we get bombarded with and most of them are very true is that it is forcing people to work together, I feel and it's actually a stepping stone ... the environmental issues at hand and people's focus on green issues now is a beautiful opportunity because its forcing people to work together. It's like finding a common enemy in a way. It's a common task that affects us all environmental issues and so it's a stepping stone for me, what I call a heart-based economy...

HL So a stepping stone to a heart-based economy?

JF Yes, it's a stepping stone to ... because when people are forced to work together on an environmental issue and get along I think what it will do is it will open us up to be more socially aware and open us up to be ... to work ... to see beyond the previous issues of other people that would isolate us from each other. So people would be more willing to engage and realise, actually, hold on, we're not so different, we have the same priorities and we need to ... we must work together. So what I think we're in the midst of now, this focus on climate change and green issues and having to work together is perhaps going to cause create like a heart-based revolution where people suddenly start opening up to each other, to treating each other with respect because we all have a common thing we need to work ... Ja, I've said it enough times.

And I haven't totally written it out on ... I foresee it but I'm very actually positive about the trend towards this. We need a crisis to bring us together as humans it seems, but the yield of that crisis is a more heart-based way of living and social investment is already happening and money isn't the only goal. So that of course affects my work because more workshops, more people interested in exploring that. And of course from an NGO point of view awareness ... it's driving more and more awareness. So it

actually positively impacts my work and I didn't know it was ... that I could see ... that this was happening ... a feeling...

HL Which of these trends give you hope for the future?

JF Well, the one thing that gives me hope for the future is people's realisation that we're all actually fricking the same and that we all need the same things to survive and we all want many of the same ways of living and being. That our priorities are very similar. So it's this idea of moving towards a heart-based economy that keeps me going actually. The thing that inspires me is watching people to stop separating themselves and to really start unifying in the same way a tribe works together for the benefit of the tribe. I'm seeing more and more that ethic started to be ... in ... calculated more and integrated more and community becoming a focus. And more and more people realising they can't do it on their own and I think that ... So the trend if I just may link it back ... So the green trend that's bringing us together, which I think is a stepping stone to the heart-based economy is the trend which inspires me to show that people actually deep down do want to do want the same for themselves, for their families, for their communities. They want clean water, they want fresh food, they want sunshine, they want a safe environment, they want safety. My sense anyway. And the other thing that's cool for me is that this growing trend, which is the green trend, but I also link it back to buying ... they call them the culture creators, buying conscious products, needing to know where your products come from, that no one was hurt in the making of the products, and organic food, wanting healthy food, healthier lifestyles, self-help books and people focusing on personal development, regardless of your income sphere. Guys in India reading *The Power of Now* for fifteen rupees on the street – that trend also inspires me because it shows that we're in a stage of real reflection and more and more people, regardless of their income bracket, are actually reflecting on what are they doing here, what is their purpose, why and what is it all about, and the more people that ask themselves that question, the more I think we get to the root and that leads into a spirit-based living, where we start aligning our head and our hearts and we start being honest with ourselves. And we start listening to that true voice, which I say that is like the divine voice if I can just get rid of the clutter so that I can hear more clearly. All I need to do is listen. So that my goal in life is to listen and be able to hear. Since I was young, which voice is it? Which one do I listen to, which one do I listen to? And there so many voices. And really just being able to be still, to hear and feel that guide and if we listen to that guide I feel we can't go wrong for lack of a better word. So I think that might have come a roundabout way, but ja, does that make sense?

Nature

HL What early memories/experiences do you have of Nature?

JF My early experience ... my early memories of Nature are when I was very ... I was young. We lived in a neighbourhood that had a park nearby – it was called The Common, the Rondebosch Common and also there was another park called The Canal and my dad used to take me to The Common to walk around it and down to The Canal, actually by the Liesbeck River. That was grassland. There weren't really ... there were some trees, but there wasn't much trees, it was mostly grass and we used to go just down there as young kids and then also the beach, definitely. I remember Muizenberg beach was a weekend affair for my family from very young. Sundays I think. So I definitely remember the ocean and the water and the Indian Ocean and then that was my earliest memory and then as I got older my parents took me on hikes and two or three or five day hikes and then as I even got older they took me to game parks and reserves and we would drive ... Ja, that was my earliest memory.

HL Have you experienced times in Nature which you would consider as turning points in your life?

Please describe one such moment.

JF Definitely, definitely. One such moment actually was in Germany and I had recently separated from the woman I was married to and I had this kind of like deep desire to go and be in my darkness, face the fear of the darkness and so I bought a bicycle and I rode around the forests of Germany and I came to ... there lots of forests with trees and lakes there ... lots of big lakes. So I rode to this big lake ... this like huge, huge largest freshwater lake ... something in the northern hemisphere and I rode there and I set up my tent in the trees and there was no moon that night and I made a fire ... not sure if all the detail's relevant. Okay, so I made a fire and I set myself up like a little camp and then there were these sounds of Nature that I was afraid of, like dogs or like wild boar or I didn't know what was there. I just heard these sounds. I thought some of them were gun shots. I didn't know if there were people, there were wild animals. I just heard stories of different animals so I put out the fire and then I actually sat in the darkness in nature and I realised that I'd put myself in a spot just by a broken tree ... I've actually got other ... there were other times as well – I don't know why this one's come up. Can I say one other? So I sat there and there was an experience in the evening in the night time that I could meditate in the darkness and basically ask for light and how nature would look after me and everything would be fine and I went down to the lake and I swam in the lake and then when I came back I tried to go sleep, but I couldn't sleep, but then finally I fell asleep and I had these very, very intense dreams ... dream-states where I woke up and I felt as though somebody had been into my tent, like an entity of some sort had actually come into the tent and turned me over cos I was out of my sleeping bag and like I was ruffled

and I didn't know where I was and I was so fearful for my life, like I've never been. I cannot remember a time in my life that I've ever been this fearful, this like incredible fear and I jumped out of the tent and I'd made a circle around my tent as like a protection circle and I said okay and I looked outside and it was pitch black. There was nothing. I couldn't see two feet in front of me, no stars. I couldn't even see the stars. There was clouds in the sky. It was pitch black and I was about to run into the darkness and then it was like a voice in nature that said to me, "It's okay, Justin, you don't have to, you don't have to". Darkness is there to teach us something, it's there for a reason. It requires respect and that's the integration that you need for your life and this was like this big message coming through and so I just sat there and I sat in stillness in my circle and I didn't run into the darkness because my whole thing was I want to go into the dark and feel what it's like to be in the darkness. So that for me is a very powerful experience.

And then two other times being in the redwoods in northern California in Humboldt County and playing ... just walking along the redwoods. I just became totally, ja, in awe of my place and the incredible healing power of these trees. Besides their size, but how long they've been around ... they just seem to give off this incredible life force and almost to the point where ... I'm going to talk a little bit about Gaia. I couldn't speak. There was no reason to speak. I didn't want to speak. I actually ... I didn't have anything to do. It felt like there was nothing for me to do anymore. I just had to be here and I felt really at home. So the other time is the redwoods.

Then the ocean – there's various experiences, but for me I think those two stand out around trees specifically – one time when I was very depressed after my divorce, I said to a healer in Germany, I said ... she said, "Who do you love? What do you love?" I said, "I love being alone and I love trees" and for a long time trees were my only ... they were like my connection between above and below. The roots represented being in the earth and the branches represented going up to the sky and so in a way I kinda tried to say, how can I be in my life like a tree – connected to above but very grounded on the earth? So trees I saw as my teachers. Perhaps that's why I sought them out for those experiences, to guide me in those experiences. So I often feel safe when I am with trees, big trees ... Okay, now I am going to have some honey. It's wild from Tanzania.

HL What do you understand by the concept of a person having a "relationship with Nature"?

JF Well, I think while eating the honey it's appropriate. Having a relationship implies if it's about feeling connected to it, it's about being aware of her needs and understanding a bit about Nature and how she operates and how things work. And then of course having a relationship – for me it's very much about gratitude and it's very much about acknowledging the role that nature plays in my life and how

important it is and so it thus demands a type of respect and love really because recognising its role in my life and how it is responsible for so much – I mean across from survival mechanisms to beauty to inspiration to all of it. It's like a constant feeling of connection – that's in a summary. My relationship with nature at its best when I am constantly feeling connected to it. Ja ... can I just add to that in my work, what I've written about in the past is that ... like I wrote the Greenhouse vision is for business, brands and consumers and government to work together with the natural world in order to create a sustainable and profitable future for all. So that is how I extend the concept of the relationship to nature is what I would hope would develop, not just within me, but within all ... and the indigenous people are those who have that relationship and they're the ones I look to for inspiration and teachings as how to be with nature and it's very much ... it seems a gratitude and a blessing, an acknowledgement and a listening and a learning ... but doesn't everybody know that?

HL Do you feel that you have a relationship with Nature?

JF Ja, I definitely feel I have a relationship with Nature. I feel like it's kind of like my relationship with God, it ... it has its moments when I don't feel connected and I relate ... actually the two very much along the same lines ... my relationship with nature and my relationship with the divine mirror each other. So when when I'm in nature and I've been in nature for a while it's easy for me to see God and it's easy for me feel connected to the divine. So when I'm not and I don't feel connected to nature then I usually don't feel connected to my faith or to spirit as much. And so my relationship with nature is such that it's always there, if I remember, but my mind ... I often create reasons to separate from it. Ja ... she ... I think she has an unconditional love for me, but I go through my own dramas so I almost feel in many ways ... I guess that Mother Nature idea is quite appropriate because that insolent son who comes only to her when he needs something and then runs off to do his own thing, turns his back on it or does something that contradicts – it's quite appropriate. Does that make sense?

HL How and why are people generally considered to be “disconnected from Nature”?

JF Well, I can only tell you how I feel disconnected, surely? I mean, I can speculate that I'm pretty much the same as other people, so which I alluded to a bit earlier for me, disconnection – just wait, the question is how do people become disconnected?

HL How and why are people generally considered to be “disconnected from Nature”?

JF Okay, why people are considered to be disconnected is when they treat nature badly in simple terms so when they disregard it, when they abuse it, when they take it for granted, that's for me often how they disconnect. No wait ... how is that why they're disconnected? I don't know. You'll have to figure out which one's why or how ... not sure ... they're kind of blurring into one right now ...

Why do people disconnect from Nature? Okay I think people disconnect from Nature because their mind tells them that there's something more and there is a craving for something else that perhaps isn't as instantaneous – I think a lot of it has to do with instantaneous gratification and that Nature has her own pace and ... okay ... and nature can't be controlled. So I think a lot of the time why people disconnect from nature is where they seek to control their lives and seek to control who they are, what they do, where they are, etc, etc. So if nature gets in the way, for example, somebody wants to fly somewhere and there's a storm and they can't fly then they get to a point where they get very frustrated ... they get very frustrated ... ja, they feel like a loss of control and I think that pisses people off, you know, suddenly they can't control things anymore and they almost see nature as getting in their way. They see that nature caused this problem and the weather has created this issue and this and this and this and I didn't get what I want. So it's very much about what disconnects people. Then is what they want is more primary and if nature's not supporting them in the way they want then why should I be connected to nature? So that's then on one level and that's why.

I think how people get disconnected from nature is that they forget they forget about their context in the world and they forget that it's not all about them and that there's something much greater out there operating that they are subject to the laws of ... Mmm I think the other way that people get disconnected from nature is when they get disconnected from themselves and they don't ... they stop being aware of who they are, what they're doing and why they're doing it and get caught up in some other fantasy, some other movie. So they create a picture ... the mind creates a movie of life and how it should be and how it could be and so we become so absorbed in that, that becomes our reality ... that we lose touch with what it is really what is here, what's real and I mean, if you, ja, if you... the other way people become disconnected from nature obviously is our lifestyle, you know. Most people in the world now live in urban environments and most urban environments aren't really designed with nature in mind, so the way that man has created urban environments is usually by destroying natural environments to make way for ... it's our idea of progress. Progress. And so there's a lot of cement obviously where there's a lot of cement there's not a lot of nature and so that's how we become disconnected – is we move into cities, we isolate ourselves, we live in non-green environments, we're just not around nature. Nature's actually been pushed down because again – it's back to this thing of control and I want to create this set-up and this environment. I don't care who's there or what's there or what nature's got there ... we're gonna what do the Chinese do – they reverse the flow of the Yangtze River ... that you can reverse the entire flow of something or you know in the past ... and we still do it kind of destroy whole ecosystems, cut down huge forests to make way for our idea of what we want. So

again it's this self-absorption, it's this idea that nature is just here to satisfy us and we're going to extract what we want. So it's just about me, me, me, me, me, me. It's like what do I want without considering environment and the natural environment and I think that's how we become disconnected is when we are caught in the self, in what I say, the little 'I'. But I want to get more concrete about it. It's ... so I've said we disconnect how ... by urban environments. The other way I think is like by just not walking on nature, by not being barefoot, by not touching nature. People are also afraid of nature, they're ... people are afraid to be in a forest, a lot of the time, alone, they feel like there are ghosts or something that's there that's going to harm them, you know and I think we've become so used to the urban environment and stimulated with so much media that nature almost seems like it's too calm, it doesn't have enough constant stimulation for us. And what I think nature does is that it calms us down to such a point that we really need to face our stuff and it becomes ... more aware of who we are and I think a lot of people are scared of that, so they don't want to go into nature cos they're worried that they might actually see who they really are and it might be a bit of a mirror. So I think nature provides a bit of a mirror, an opportunity for reflection and a lot of people are not happy with who they are or what they do so they don't want that reflection, they don't want actually that time, so they deliberately move away from nature. So I think it's also a fear then of knowing who you really are because nature provides that mirror and it makes us remember. Most people who spend enough time out in nature usually have some type of epiphany or spiritual rebirth of some sort. It often happens that people go out into nature for long periods of time and they come back and they've gone through this transformation. So how does that happen? There many ways, but for me one of the chief ways and one of my experiences is that provides a time when I can observe the natural way of how things are and realise my part in it and it gives a stillness and quiet to such an extent that I grasp again who I really am and I come out of that like knowing who I really am again. So we disconnect from it perhaps because we don't want to know. We actually, you know, it's like in *The Matrix* – the guy talks about eating a steak – he doesn't want to know that it's a computer-generated programme that's making it taste that way and actually there's no taste in it, it's all created for him. It's that ... we don't actually – I think people are inherently petrified to feel in some form. I don't know why exactly but we've numbed ourselves into another sleep whereby we don't want to be very awake ... most of us, we like being asleep, we like not feeling, we like creating the movie and watching the movie and not being fully in our lives for some reason and I think feeling is ... it's too much it's ... whooh ... it's too intense and most of us can't cope. So nature brings us back to our sense of feeling and if you don't want to feel, i.e. don't go be in nature because you'll probably start to

feel and then it brings up grief and it brings up all the emotions most of us are too scared to experience. I like that actually. I like that... thanks Helen...

Because if nature, this is interesting, if nature ... spending more time in it ... the theory is we will start to feel more and connect more with ourselves, then it makes sense that the next revolution will be this heart-based experience cos the more time we're around nature, the more we'll connect with ourselves, the more we'll connect with our hearts and what we really want. The more we'll connect with spirit actually because we're giving space for that. It will naturally then lead to a more spirit-based living. So... and I think that's the next evolution. So, it's ... ja, does that answer? I think that's cool.

HL I'll give you a recording of this.

JF Okay. Thanks ... is it working? Have you checked it?

HL I hope so ... don't touch it!

JF Ja, ja, record levels ...

HL You've kind of answered this, but **How does this disconnection manifest in our daily lives and what implications does it have for us?**

JF Yes, pretty much ...

HL **How do you think we can restore connections with Nature?**

JF Well, it's not my idea, but the first step ... Satish Kumar says, plant a garden. If everybody had to become a gardener, there'd be no wars in this world. So I think the first step is ... for me before planting gardens is walk barefoot and feel what it's like in your body cos being in nature helps one to become be in your body or be in my body. That's the first step: start walking on it. The next step, I think in terms of restoring our connection is start to observe it and see it as a classroom and see it as our greatest teacher. That's why I'm such a fan of biomimicry in concept because it's really about learning. You know the moment we can step out of the space of the human ego of "we know" and step into a space of "nature knows" and become the student and almost be awed and wowed by how it works, how ants can carry a hundred times their body weight and how things can happen, which are in disbelief, it engenders this type of respect and humans seem to ... we like to respect, we revere certain people based on what they've achieved and do, we look up. So if we can start to see nature as this awe-inspiring, incredible living organism, well, beyond organism, it's just life and learn from it. I mean, I just looked at an example that is *Planet Earth Series*. Simply observing nature and showing how it works and how it operates and of course the beauty of it because a lot of people are driven by beauty and art. Showing the beauty, it helps to engender that respect and interest and wonderment and show us that it's never ending, you can keep exploring. So the thing that keeps humans alive is our quench for knowledge and to learn and

our desire to evolve and learn. And learn and learn and learn. And the moment we stop learning, we start dying really. Or it kind of speeds it up. Thinking we know... then learning from it will definitely help to reconnect us to it, so making it our friend as well. I mean the next step is making it our friend, not being afraid of it and recognising it for how it helps us and being grateful to it so that ... how do we make friends? It's like recognising that friends are there to help us and once we recognise that perhaps that also engenders a type of respect for it because it's an appreciation. It engenders appreciation actually and through appreciating it we'll welcome it into our lives, we'll treat it like a friend, we'll interact with it and of course that will push our relationship to it. I mean it will support a way of relating to it. And then I think another way ... so I've said like walking barefoot, learning from it. Another way of course is that gardening aspect, which is planting a garden and watching it grow. And seeing how we can be involved so directly in it so simply and you know it's like ... tell me and I forget, teach me and I remember, involve me and I learn, but also involve me in something and I feel it more. So the more my hands are in it, the more I'm working with it all the time, the more I will feel it and the more I'll feel connected to it, quite simply. So I'll feel more connected to it by working with it, working with hands because it is amazing that nature works energetically when we touch it it does something to us. It reconnects us I think to the greatest the greater whole. So working with it, touching it, planting food, seeing how it benefits us and how it can yield so many beautiful things and good things that we want and we crave and we need and realise that so many of our desires can be satisfied in the natural world. And I think when we really realise that and appreciate that ... well, then it's back to the whole ego trip because it's like actually nature's satisfying me. In some bizarre way before it gets to the spiritual connection it might just be a simple case of, wow, it gives me what I need, which is good water, good food. I feel good with it, you know, drinking the spring water, I feel good, eating this organic stuff that's grown in my garden, I feel good. So I have energy, so I feel good in my life. I feel good, so, oh it must be a good thing because I feel good after interacting with it and people want to feel good. So that's kind of a base thing. If you want to feel good, connect with nature and you will feel good. It takes a particular kind of person, they've got to be pretty locked in their mind if they're in nature for a long period of time and they don't start to feel better about their lives. Is that enough ways to reconnect? And of course allow it to ... I think the main thing from a development point of view is allow it to be more present, you know, just have more green spaces ... just let it be more dominant, so focus less on big structures and more and more on nature and smaller structures so that we're more we're around it more and by the nature of just osmosis and being around it, we don't have to consciously do anything. We can just wander through our day to days even in cities and things will be different. I mean, it's just crazy, swimming in the ocean has a phenomenal

impact, you know, just dunking in once has a radical, radical impact. For whatever reason, negative ions or not, for whatever reason it works. So I'm always a believer of, you find something that works for you then engage with it. Ja, that's cool. Good questions – did you write them? Very good, Helen.

HL So this section is on spirituality, so **What do you understand by the term/concept of spirituality?**

JF The concept of spirituality to me means feeling connected to spirit. So spirit being that life force which exists in all of us, which connects us all, which is the energy that is present in everything. The grace, the perfection of the way that life is perfect balance. That to me in a few words is the description of spirit. So spirituality is being more aware of it, being connected to it, having a relationship. Did you ask me about having a relationship with spirituality?

HL What does spirituality mean?

JF It means having a relationship with spirit and an exploration of that relationship.

HL Exploration?

JF I mean, I can go beyond it ... I don't know what's coming next, but to me like I've always been inspired by the Sufis and how they have this relationship with spirituality or Rumi or Hafiz where spirit is almost like a lover – it's a ... it's like going home to your lover ... that you are yearning ... your heart is yearning, yearning, yearning, to see, no matter what's going on in the day, it's like all I want ... to be ... it ... everything else is just a means to get back to the lover, but the lover is not this physical love, it's this all-encompassing, humbling or inspiring or beautiful experience. Ja, it's like this love, it's whooh, it's like waves, it's moment by moment, it's bliss, you know, for lack of a better word and for me ... I mean that's what my spiritual path is about. It's very much that kind of ... I've been through times when I've had affairs with spirit, you know, it is the love of my life and there isn't space for somebody else and in many ways human beings and relationships ... I don't know again if you to come to this ... human beings for me are actually a vehicle to connect with spirit and it's about ... it's about spirit's reuniting with itself, it's like humans connecting with each other are a way to bring us back from the separation because I believe that a lot of our pain and suffering comes from this concept of separation that we are not home, we're separate in this physical form, we're separate in some way from our true nature and our true nature is the land of spirit and other people have a part of that. So I love the term that we are all flames, like little sparks of this big flame and that's what spirit is, it's the huge flame and we're all these little sparks, we made exactly of the same stuff, we're just a smaller part and when we meet, when we get together with somebody else, it's like we form a little bit of a bigger spark and when we get together with more people and suddenly we're forming a bigger part of this flame, we feel more connected to

the overall flame. And so spirituality is very much about, it's that burning, it's that relationship, that feeling of connection to our true nature and what I believe is the same in everybody. And that actually I'll talk about the gem a little bit... does that answer? I don't know if I answer the questions sometimes.

HL I'll tell you ... I'll ask if you've sort of gone...

What is/constitutes/characterises a spiritual relationship with Nature?

JF Spiritual relationship with nature for me, well, I've said, uh ... jeez, you see the two to me, it's difficult to separate them out actually because more and more I see my relationship with nature as my spiritual relationship or as my way of exploring spirit and the more I tap into nature the more I tap into spirit. So to say a spiritual relationship with nature, it's almost like to me a relationship with nature is a spiritual relationship. Now the terms of that relationship: my relationship with Nature is that it simply gives me what I want and I cut it down for when I need ... that's a type of relationship. That doesn't mean it's a spiritual relationship because there isn't a consciousness and an awareness, you know. I think a spiritual relationship, the ... would mean almost like feeling that whatever's happening to nature is happening to me and feeling that we're the same and that I look at nature in the same way I look at myself and I look after it the same way I look after myself and I learn from it – all the things I think I said earlier – and I learn from it and I am grateful for it and I'm inspired by it and I ... ja, it's my friend and it's my lover and it's ... I see God in it. A spiritual relationship is I see the divine in nature. Ja, I guess that's the simple term, when you see God in nature, that's having a spiritual relationship with nature.

HL This isn't one of the questions but you've spoken about God and you've spoken about the divine a couple of times, so what does that mean for you... what ... what ... what is your God, what is your divine?

JF I think I did allude to it a little bit earlier when I said spirituality is ... okay, what is the divine for me?

Did I not say spirit is that which connects us all, the perfect balance ...

HL You did ...

JF I think that for me is a definition of God or the divine. The only part that I would add is ... it is like the deep knowing. The divine to me – is the grace, it's the mercy, it's the unconditional love, it's the ... the divine is totally accepting and it's constant actually. You know in the morning when I pray I do a few things. I say ... I first put my hands on the earth and I thank the earth for all she gives and then I put my hands in the sky and I thank the sun for the energy, the light and the warmth and then I hug myself and I say ... I thank people for the inspiration and then I thank my teachers who are alive and who are not and I kind of touch my forehead and my heart and then I put my hands on my knees and I thank the divine at the end for constant, for the divine's constant way, it's like always there, never changing really and what I mean by never changing is the grace, the divine's grace is never changing, the perfection is always

there and the love is always there. So for me, it's like divinity equals love but in a deep way ... not this way that love's been thrown about. It's like a deep connection to self, it's a deep connection to everybody else and to everything else. It's like this ... wow, the divine is here. I'm feeling the divine. It means I'm feeling connected to everything and everyone but it's almost like every second, every moment is life, it's like a rebirth. I think the divine is like ... I think that people who are aware constantly of the divine are being reborn every second. It's like something new, every second every moment is something new because it's the divine presence, it's constantly giving birth over and over and over again.

HL Do spiritual people necessarily behave in sustainable ways?

JF Well, it depends who's labelling them spiritual. You know, I think self-defined spiritual people define their ideas of what spirituality is, so we all use spirituality to often satisfy ourselves and therefore, you know, a lot of people claim they are spiritual ... it's under their terms and conditions and to me that is an awareness of spirituality perhaps, but perhaps they're getting their wires crossed so... I think truly spiritual people, yes. People who are truly connected to spirit and feel it and are aware of it and have done the work and aware of what they do affects everything else and everything else affects us and are aware of ... I think, yes, those people are sustainable because they're aware of their place. I think people who are playing spiritual and trying it out and trying to control it for themselves, they often actually are not sustainable because there could be this kind of attitude of, Oh well, whatever I do, spirit will take care of it, so it doesn't matter what I do. If I destroy this tree, spirit will look after everything and I think that is a little bit of like blind faith where you ... it's a judgement to it but you put the responsibility in somebody's else's hands and you don't take any action on anything and I think that is dangerous actually. And I think that kind of spirituality can have a very negative impact. However, I think most people who feel connected to spirit must feel ... I mean for me ... You see, now you're getting into the realms of what spirituality in terms of ... what the Christian spirituality and then all these traditional religions ... and I don't define religion and spirituality as the same thing so I think it's important to state that. That there are many religious orders that don't necessarily align from a spiritual point of view. However if we do look at the texts of most of the prophets, there is this awareness of looking after nature and I think as humans, as the church, as an example, has been turned into a way to control people. So nature was used in the same way but I think the original teachers and the original ideas ... well firstly most of them came from pagan ideas anyways ... for me as I understand it ... therefore the pagans are the ones who are the most – as I in my limited knowledge – are aware of, are wanting to live with nature and learn from nature and follow their true natures and their true natures are not to

destroy the environment because no species, I mean, which species is going to destroy its own entire environment? It's going to kill itself. In fact that's what we seem to be doing but we're one of the few I think. Oh viruses maybe – they seem to not care, they just multiply, populate and destroy everything. I mean they've got nothing to feed on, they're got nothing to infect. Everything's gone, there's nothing left to infect, how does that help the virus? Ja, so food, I don't know how viruses need food ... something along those lines. Does that answer?

HL Do religions have a role to play in the transformation to a more sustainable world?

If so, what kind of role?

JF Ja, I think religions have a huge role to play and I actually think if we had the major religions in this world push environmental issues above everything else, we would have radical transformation pretty quickly actually. And I think it does exist in the scriptures, in all scriptures, this kind of reverence for nature, but it's been forgotten or lost or ignored and so not only do religions have a role, they actually have a responsibility. It's the same thing I say about business or brands – you have a responsibility because you have such influence. That if you're not inspiring, if you're not influencing people with some positive way of living that's going to support a sustainable way of living, then what the frick are you doing? You're not actually benefiting your members, you're not doing what's best for your subscribers. And so I think if religions had to go back and really look at their original scriptures, of what their teachers created, wherever it came from and acknowledge them, I feel that you'll find that most of it talks about really working with nature. I mean the few I know like Judaism talks about in the seventh year you allow your fields to lie fallow so you don't plant anything to give it time to regenerate – there is this awareness. I think Muslims, the halaal meat, I think the way its killed or there's no hormones, there's no chemicals allowed in halaal meat, I think. Baha'i have an incredible teaching when it comes to being farmers and working with nature, so it's there – people chose to focus on it or not. Again religion's not the problem actually in my mind – it's people who use the religion and distort it. I think religion in its purest form most of the time is actually trying to create a spiritual existence. If you look at the mystical side of all religions it's a pretty spiritual way of being. It's humans who have adapted religion to satisfy their own cravings, their own desire for control. There's nothing wrong with religion, I mean, I know that's a hectic statement for a lot of people. If I say there's nothing wrong with religion cos religion's been the reason for a lot of war and destruction – and it has – but it's actually I don't think most of that is truly religion anyways, it's just some set of ideas and rules that a couple of people over the years have created and then changed and adapted to suit themselves. That's what religion has *become*, but I don't think that was what it was intended for. But then it's back to ... I would use the word spirituality, not

religion. I don't think that's what spirituality was intended for and maybe when it became religion it was and that's maybe the differentiation. Religion – what does it mean? Religion ... I must learn more about religion before I make statements like that.

HL Do you participate in regular spiritual practices, rituals, etc.? Please explain.

JF Um, I feel I do ... I mean most mornings I have some type of practice. Well, it's been the same. Then I also ... I just came from a sweat lodge, a Native American traditional purification ceremony. I do that twice a year. I will occasionally go to a local synagogue, which is ... I was born into the Jewish faith and to connect and I do feel connected there. Dance for me is a very spiritual experience – it's very much a form of prayer, so every time I dance I feel like I am connecting with spirit. Chanting I do – in fact if I can go tonight I will - devotional chanting, I love and that for me is very much a connection. Actually song and dance are – music – are for me some of the most powerful ways to connect with spirit. Now, add the element of nature in there and song and dance in nature, well it doesn't get better than that. For me ... I think that's what we were born to do – sing and dance in nature. Then any other spiritual practices ... I do yoga and naturally there's certain meditations in yoga. For me I'm not so much conscious of spirit, yoga's become a more of physical practice actually and it is my physical practice, but it's based in a spiritual place so I feel that I don't have to be conscious of spirit ... just by doing it, by being in that physical, there is a spiritual thing that happens. And then my work, you know, is actually a fairly spiritual experience because it's constant learning and I'm working in the realm of people's hearts and listening and water and the stuff that affects us and so my work is actually it feels often like a quite spiritual experience. I use the word love – I mean the fricking work is called For Love of ... and I say to hundreds of people 'I am for love of you'. You know it's quite a ... that's big thing to say and the only way I can say that is if I feel spiritually connected. So for that, I mean ... Ja it's a spiritual experience definitely. When I remind myself that that's what it is. You know being of service is the greatest form of spirituality in many ways. How can I be of service? How can I be a channel for the divine? But still keep my own sense of self – this is a beautiful art. You know there's this point where I'm always curious as to when I get from this place and what I want to, what I need are exactly the same thing and I don't have to think about it. It is one and the same and I think that implies a connection to spirit.

HL So what I want and what I need...

JF Are exactly the same...

HL Exactly the same... I get that.

JF Even if you get it, it's just having an awareness of that. There's something moving through me that's guiding me, that's a connection to spirit. That's a bit of a tangent from what we were talking about, but...

Then spiritual practice, I mean, shit – you know day-to-day life could become a spiritual practice. The way we interact with people, I don't know it's ... I was going to talk about the gem, but I don't have to, we'll see if it comes up. Okay, so ... wait, no, let me add this because it is actually quite cool. That actually every interaction with another person could be considered a spiritual experience if we want it to be, without consciously doing it. There's the idea that I've been thinking about called the gem, which is where you see the gem in somebody else. So every time we interact with somebody, there's an opportunity to see a gem in them or not. You can see the back, the dark side, the non-side, you may not see them at all, but if you see a gem in them, this like jewel that they are and that they have, that is the essence of who they are and we connect with that, then that interaction is a spiritual experience because we're helping spirit to reconnect with itself and I think it's an opportunity to bring the gem out in somebody and to help them too by seeing that. So the more we see it, the more we bring it out, then of course the more we see ourselves, the more we see the gem in ourselves, the more we can bring it out, the better we feel about ourselves, and there's this like spiral of ... So why ... ja, in essence there are spiritual practices which are within certain ceremony which I love, they're definitely are some of my favourite times of my life and then those inspire us in a big way to then take it back into our day-to-day basis. What is it, like what Thich Naht Hahn says, make having a cup of tea a spiritual experience and that's where just being present can become a spiritual experience. Being present allows us to feel the connection and so one day ... I'm sure these enlightened guys walk around constantly in the state of bliss, in a state of spirituality because they're constantly connected to spirit. So they would say it's a spiritual experience when I cut the wood, it's a spiritual experience when I bath. It's ... you know ... so we have the potential for that. Where everything just flows.

Sustainable development

HL What do you think the world needs if we are to overcome the global crises facing us?

JF It needs awareness and action in order to ... ja, in order to ... and it needs us to take responsibility for our part. Not beat ourselves up about it, I don't think that's the answer, but I think it needs radical unification, it needs radical assessment, it needs radical measurement as well, it needs like radical alignment of head and heart from all people and it needs a genuine, genuine desire to do that within a certain time frame, set goals and achieve them and don't waiver and it must be priority. To solve global crisis it needs to become the number-one priority and when I say that number-one priority, I don't just mean cleaning up the environment, I mean social issues also must become priority. Things that are breaking down, social structures must become also priority and I think the two for me are ... are ... they're not mutually exclusive, they affect each other. When you have harmony in nature with humans, you generally have harmony with humans vice versa. I think if there's harmony between people, there's most likely going to be harmony with nature as well, so to solve the crisis ... We need the crises, we need to see it as an opportunity actually. We must see it as a gift in a way, like, wow, we have something to focus on and I think we can do it. I really do believe ... I really believe that with enough people there's a tipping point that happens and there's a collective behaviour change that happens and there's a place we'll get to where we will live in total harmony with nature. Now there might be some cleansing on the way, which is already happening, but I think we can get there actually, but we must break down this isolation. As long as we work separately and separate ourselves out, I mean I might ... we could maybe operate independently and come to it independently, but I think we're going to need each other more than ever before. So it's an opportunity to unify. And I think it's also its important to recognise our role in what we've done and also in what we can do and we need to feel empowered so another solution is we must empower ourselves and feel empowered and showcase that all individuals can also can have an impact and plant that seed of ... with people that they can all have an impact. So if I had to summarise it would be create that, learn, feel it, recognise that you're part of it, it's your issue, it's everybody's, learn to respect it, develop an appreciation, then learn, arm yourself with knowledge about what's happening, what's real, measurements etc, then be in action, do what you can do at your place wherever it might be, whether you're an individual, whether you're an organisation, corporation etc and then share it, tell us so that ... Share it so that it inspires others, ja ...

HL Do you think consumption and materialism are problematic? If so, why?

JF Well I think that materialism is problematic because it it can get out of hand, it can create an imbalance whereas ... I understand materialism, it's kind of like a love for material things. Material

things become important to me, they become a priority, I kind of ignore other things and it can run away with itself. Consumption on the other hand I have a slightly different opinion because naturally too much consumption ... consumption must be in balance, ja I mean, but we have to consume. I mean you ... you need to eat and you need to drink and you need to have structures in order to do that. We need to consume in some form. Now the type of consumption to me can be different – the more conscious consumption, you know and consumption that has a closed loop whereby there's zero waste – this type of consumption balances itself out. So I think the consumption we've had definitely has a negative effect, but I think consumption, you know, when your waste can be used or there is no waste then, you know, I think there's an opportunity one day where consumption can be seen as a positive thing. You know, it's there ... certain creatures in the world and their waste is used to feed others and to build. I mean how do bees work? Right. they consume and they make honey. I don't know, it's like I think there's a natural balance that we need to learn. I don't know enough about it and I think the consumption just needs to be in balance. So it's the attitude towards consumption, it's not what we can get but it becomes we consume so that we can give and bringing a consciousness and an awareness to our consumption. In a very crass way it's like, do we really need it, before we do it and what is it that's why today when I talk to corporates, you know, I kind of make the statement quite blandly if you are not producing a product that's having a social and environmental benefit or is a waste then you're just being boring. Really, I mean what are you actually doing – providing something that you've created some need for. It's just boring and unfortunately most of it is boring.

HL How do you think we can overcome consumption and materialism?

JF I think that's where you get conscious about your consumerism, look at zero waste, look at the materials, look at your sourcing, I mean just evaluate your entire chain and really ... ja, look at biomimicry, ask the question how does nature do it, how does nature make it, how does nature get rid of it and utilise that as the teaching. As far as materialism goes, um, just one more point on consumption I think what people more and more realise is that they vote with their consumption so where you spend your money is today where you vote and to recognise that your power actually lies nowadays often in your consumption and see that as an empowering thing. So when you want to vote for something put it in the place of consumption somehow. As far as materialism goes, it's uh ...

HL how to overcome it?

JF How to overcome materialism? Shit, materialism – spend more time in nature, get out of the self, get out of the me. I know I say that a bit, but get out of the me and get out of satisfying just the little me and step into the what's best for we. I think that will eliminate materialism except when there's a group of

people who want something big, maybe then you're still in mass materialism. Ja, I think just reconnect to self, reconnect to spirit, reconnect to nature, reconnect on a ... you know I believe that people when given healthy choices, they'll make a healthy decision when they're given it enough. I think most of the time our materialism and consumption is influenced and it's not honest and I think if people are given the space and the healthy options then and the space and time to really feel what's right for them then they'll choose ... they'll choose that which is beneficial to all. Does this thing pick from here? That sensitive?

HL Ja, hopefully...

JF Hopefully, ai ai ai, Helen!

HL What is your view on why there is suffering in the world?

JF Why is there suffering? You know I spent six months in India and I almost felt like it's not my place to judge why there is suffering. Like I don't want to not answer it, but like in a way my initial response would be because there is and I don't actually understand it. I don't understand why some people suffer more than others. I actually believe that everybody is suffering in some form, I really do, regardless of your situation, I think you're suffering. Some are suffering on a much more intense level. I think that humans are born with a sense of suffering in some form and without getting too esoteric about it ... like if we get to the root of suffering it comes from a feeling of disconnection and for me it comes from a feeling of disconnection to spirit and if we're disconnected from spirit, we are suffering, it ... like we're not at our home, we're not home, like I said in the beginning. As far as how it manifests in the physical world and why there are people who are sick, and why there are people who don't have access to water and why there's that type of suffering – I think a lot of it has to do with power and I think a lot of it has to do with people not sharing and a lot of it has to do with people wanting to control and not wanting people to be equal and not wanting and wanting to hold ... that I think, for me, um, I do blame a little bit. I blame a lot actually – this idea of not filtering out wealth and hoarding it and keeping it and trying to control it and cos there's enough food we know, there's enough of everything to go around, it's just proportionally not distributed. So I think the other root of suffering is control and then ... ja, I think some people in a bizarre way like to suffer, but you're talking about like the bigger suffering like people not having food and being sick – that's your definition of suffering, is that right?

HL Well, ja either, just how you interpret the question.

JF Okay cos I ... ja, I think those are my thoughts on suffering. But I'm not saying it's a choice to suffer...

HL Ja

JF I don't believe necessarily that ... I think circumstance a lot and, um, a lot of the time it is, but when it's in these dire situations ... it's not ... it's just ... it's the way it is because there are so many people and what India taught me is that there are so many people who in my perception could be seen to be suffering but actually are pretty satisfied individuals, you know and pretty happy and they ... they ... in their mind they're not suffering, they believe in karma and they believe in the next life and things will be different, but they don't have that sense of suffering ... they don't have that ... you know maybe another root of suffering is that sense of separation, which I spoke of, but almost I am alone and this is it, poor me and when we dwell on that, then it's difficult to bring ourselves out. 'Suffer I do,' (sings, sighs).

HL In your view what is the world 'calling' for?

JF Phew, the world ... 'the world is calling' (sings) the world's calling out for love and acceptance. I mean these are ... what does that mean? You know, I would go into what does that mean ... I think the world ... okay now there's the world as in people and then there's the world as in our environment and all that which is not people. So if I had to I group them into one. When I say the world it is the living system and the relationships between all of us, between people, between our environment, between the different species. So what the world for me is calling for is again this idea of unity and this being aware of each other, balance, it's calling for harmony, it's calling for awareness, it's calling for action, it's calling for sensitivity, it's calling for honesty, it's calling for ...what do I feel when I listen? You know what I think it's also calling for us to as people to take on the whole idea of custodian and kind of to be in service. I think the world is calling for humans and that means that humans are calling for humans. So just be in service and to see our role as that. How can we serve ourselves too? What is best for us? So it is kind of calling to a return to a spiritual way, a deeply spiritual way. It's a return to a consciousness of that unity that already exists we don't have to create it and I think that the world is very much calling to people ... for me to ask the question who am I? and answer ... I am ... and figure it out or just the question. Make the call. Make the enquiry. I think the world is asking for that. Take a look, I mean be ... a look at the mirror, you know the world is a fricking mirror so if you walk into your own bedroom and you see how it's laid out and it might be a mess and things might be broken, well that's just a mirror of our own lives, so look in the mirror, what do you really see? The world is a mirror, hey it's totally a mirror and I often wonder, do we create it outside of ourselves and that creates our internal world or does our internal world create the outside or is the outside influences us or is it all happening all at the same time? It's something I can't figure out. But it's cool ...it's ... oh my gosh and our song. You've heard our song and it's like, "We're standing here, we're open wide, we're calling " (sings). No, maybe it's not. "Calling out" (sings)

HL How do you think we should go about 'sustainable development' in South Africa?

JF Okay, one I would start with the indigenous people of this country. I would start with going to learn from them, like the Khoi San and learning how they have existed for so many thousands of years, the way that they've done it, from everything, from their food creation to their structure, development, I would start with that. So I believe, go to the ancients, start with them, then the second thing I would look at is – it all has to happen simultaneously of course – but we have to have a strategy, you know, we can't ... there are certain things we can just start doing like reduce our consumption and save this and conserve that and do that, but the main thing is become aware first. Start to learn, become aware. Then we need to make a commitment, we need to make a commitment that sustainable development is our priority first and you might have to explore why. People need to go through that exercise. Once we've made that commitment and everyone's on board then we need to see how it filters into everyday life things, that kind of low cost, no cost and invest to save options, and start to integrate it. I mean it fricking needs to be the basis of our economy actually. It need to be like social and sustainable development needs to be the root of our currency value and we need to actually start to value our economic world based on that and I think that is the way that it can be truly sustainable. So what have I said we've learned, ja it ... actually I think before you can get to anything even going to learn from anyone, if I back up, it needs to be the basis of how you value your life, how we value our lives here and when we can do that, then it becomes our exchange, it becomes our way of relating and it becomes a way of ... it becomes like an index of how we judge how good our lives are and it becomes something we aspire to. So sustainable development must be aspirational, it must be cool, it must be phased and I feel that all industry needs to prioritise it in fact . You see to me sustainable development and social development are one and the same and I think it just needs to be those are the two that hold things up and then of course it needs to be financially sustainable but for me the finance must be based on economic and social development and we need to find a way to make money on social and environmental development and if we can do that, if we can get to the heart of it that people still like money and there's this ... some people ... I think currency creates like relationship, it's become a way of relating ... it's, you know ... so if we can find a way to make money that ... that currency, I mean to make sustainable and social development that currency then we can truly have a sustainable future.

DANIEL ARRIVES WITH WATER...

JF You see this is an example, which is we are sitting here ... a man has prioritised ... okay in his day delivering five litres of water that came from a spa, a spring in the Karoo. Now he could have chosen with his fifteen minutes to do something totally different and he almost did ... which is fine and he

would've been for ... it would've been fine cos we don't have water here and I'm sick and this is good water, but he chose to do that, which means he valued his time on being spent bringing that water to service to give to all of us. Now that means that his value system is different and that's the crux of the sustainable development ... is actually social ... that your value system needs to change and that's kind of what I alluded to when money is based on social ... but if our values change or we reconnect with our original values then that is the route of sustainable development. And it's an example of what we experienced just now. Thank you Daniel ...

HL Do you think there is a relationship between Nature, spirituality and sustainable living? Please describe this relationship.

JF Nature, spirituality and sustainable living, I mean yes, the answer is definitely there is a relationship where, wow imagine if those three had to become the pillars: nature, sustainability spirituality, which means we judge everything we do based on those three. How does it ... how does it adhere to those ... how does it incorporate? So my answer is that the relationship is such ... describe the relationship. Okay, sustainability, sustainable development is the result ... Okay, that's the goal, we want sustainable development in every shape and form. How do we get there? We need to learn from nature, okay, but before we can even learn from nature, it kind of happens at the same time, so it's not a linear thing. Nature will teach us to be more spiritual, being more spiritual will lead us back to nature. It happens kind of ... it's actually cyclical, it runs in circular form, you know, so it's not linear form but they feed each other, so you become ... you learn more about spirituality, you feel connected to nature, you feel more connected to nature, you start going into sustainable development, you start going into sustainable development, you start feeling more connected to nature and become more spiritual. So it's actually like a triangle that one constantly needs to move through and evolve each time you do the loop. Each time you do the lap – learn, change, adapt, evolve and so we must always see them as one. Really it's like the new trinity, maybe the new holy trinity, it can be those three – nature, spirituality and sustainable development. Because without without them, because without the other two, there's no sustainable development and without sustainable development there's nobody here to appreciate the nature and from a spiritual point of view how does that slot in? When we are in tune with nature and we are in sustainable development that is the ultimate form of spirituality for me. So sustainable development could be become the spiritual expression of the modern era because it will mean living in harmony with yourself, it will mean living in harmony with others, it will mean living in harmony with nature. So it becomes a spiritual experience and that way I think the relationship is such that it does become that, becomes a spiritual experience and we ... and ... and ... and the more we tap into our

spirituality and the more we recognise that yearning to connect with spirit, the more we integrate that into our day-to-day lives, the more we see what spirit really wants, which is to be in perfect balance, to be like nature, to live in harmony with nature and in turn the result will be sustainable development. Ja, I might need to think about that one more, how it relates ... I'd like to draw it, it almost feels like, you know it's not a ... it's kind of three dimensional ... it's ... they all ... the relationship is actually ... also when you ... when one is affected so are the other two. You know when your spirituality shifts, your relationship to nature shifts, sustainable development shifts. When you start getting into sustainable development, your relationship to nature shifts and of course your spirituality, your relationship to spirituality shifts, so they all impact each other. When we engage with one of them, the other one is impacted. The other two are by ... therefore they can never actually be separated. It's a true example of an ecosystem. What I do to one affects the other two. Is that alive? Has anyone else said that?

HL I can't really remember ...

JF Nature, spirituality and sustainable development. Thanks Daniel ... (Exchange with Daniel....)

You know what in many ways what I'm starting to feel when I feel into it is that like spirituality is like the mind, nature is the heart and ... sustainable development is the base chakra and they're all important. The one is for survival, the one is for longevity. Nature brings us to our heart and spirituality clears the mind and brings us into alignment and is kind of the guide. The inspiration comes from nature, spirituality is the mind, it's the how we integrate it, how we integrate nature into our lives and then sustainability, sustainable development is what we do, our action and that's actually how I see it as ... well, spirituality on top, nature in my heart and sustainable development is this. That's pretty cool actually.

HL Ja, it is.

JF Draw it as a picture, please

HL Like this?

JF There's that way, yes, but draw it as a person, I think. No, no, no, more as a person. So if you draw a person's head and then a stick line and then his legs and then all you do is ... here is ... if there's a circle there, that's spirituality there and the heart is the nature and the base chakra, which is your kind of creativity and your production and that which keeps your species going is sustainable development because you need this to keep going, this is what inspires and links the two, you see, it's also the gateway between spirituality and sustainable development. Without nature you can't have spirituality to ... Sustainable development comes through a learning from nature cos the only way you get sustainable is if you connect with nature, you learn from nature. Nature is the only thing that's

sustainable that we have to learn from and in the same way this is ... the inspiration comes from nature to ... for all of it and spirituality is maybe our connection to above and is our guide, it's kind of ... I think spirituality must become our rational guide, actually it must be the driver. We must all be driven by spirit I feel and nature for me inspires the heart, allows us to feel and sustainable development is how we integrate it all into a base where we can keep going, keep producing, whether it's our own seed or ... next door ... ja, creation. That's cool, hey, that can be used, that can be used. Thanks ... I hadn't thought of it like that.

HL Great, that's it...

JF That's it!

HL Unless you want to say anything else?

JF No, thanks very much. It's quite a gift to spend the time thinking about it and talking about it. Did it make sense, most of it?

Appendix H

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION: MPHATHELENI MAKAULULE

Interview with Mphatheleni Makaulule, 25 April 2011 – approx 11h30 to 16h00

Work

HL Tell me about the work you do.

MM The work which I do is focused on the role of mupo. I do the mupo work. The role of mupo when people have to remember to see the value of mupo. Which I can say we are through the dialogues we are reviving the value of mupo with the people because when we look today people have completely disconnected to the mupo value . They only see mupo as a way which mupo has to provide the food, which mupo has to provide the shelter for them and which mupo should provide the resources for human needs only and this is the disconnection from mupo values.

HL Just explain to me a little bit - mupo

MM Mupo

HL Explain to me what that is

MM Mupo is a Venda word which describe all the natural creations of the universe. Everything which is here is naturally originate or created by the creator. It fall under mupo. Like if we see the soil, its mupo. When we look at nature at the whole – the trees, the animals, rivers, everything which is in nature is mupo. If you look up there at the star, the stars, the moon, that light we say its mupo light because it's a natural light. When you are in the river, listening to the sound of the river, the water when it is flowing it's the sound of mupo. When you are in the forest, when you hear the many sounds of insects, trees, when air is blowing, you can feel the sound, its mupo.

HL so it's everything that's natural?

MM Ja, everything which is natural is mupo

HL so

MM Mupo means natural, not man- made thing.

HL not man-made. So a house is not mupo

MM this house is not mupo. This one concrete one is not mupo

HL No ... okay.

MM Mupo is also a way of life.

HL Okay

MM aa. According to the nature. according to natural. Ja, it's a way of life. As I was indicating that we want to think people to remember the values of mupo because we become healthy because mupo is healthy. But if mupo is not healthy, we can't be healthy. That's why the elders said without mupo there's no life. Mupo is life. If you go to the seed, when you look at the seed, if you carry the seed which the elders women select and you put it in the ground and it germinates on its own without any addition of chemicals or you forced it to grow, its mupo which is making that seed to grow. But if you put the other things to make this seed to grow, it's no longer the mupo way. Mupo way is the natural– it's the creator who created everything.

HL so maybe just tell me a little bit then more about the work cos we were talking now a lot about mupo and I'm sure we'll get more to mupo

MM then the work which I am doing as I say I am reviving the values of mupo. I have the ...we have established an organisation called Mupo Foundation. Mupo Foundation is looking at the following programmes. We have the programme for the intergenerational learning which we call it cultural biodiversity. This is the programme which bring the space for the younger generation to learn from the elders. We are working with the schools. Yes. We have the programme for seed. Seed work. The programme for seed we are looking for reviving and protecting the indigenous local seed. This seed work look at everything not only the seed of the kernel, the seed word, what is seed?

HL okay so not just the kernel, not the seed?

MM No, when we look at the seed we look at the soil, we look at the water, we look at the trees, we look at the role of women and the end result is not that we are looking for seed as provision of food only. We look seed as sacred because this programmes are based on our customs. It is a broader programme of seed. Then the other programme is the sacred sites.

HL the sacred sites?

MM yes. Sacred sites is the key role of our organisation. It has a committee sacred site called Dzomo la mupo.

HL can you spell that for me?

MM Dzomo la mupo

MM and there is a space Dzomo la mupo. This is a key programme of our our work. We are looking for all the ways to protect sacred sites, to remain as sacred sites, not to be changed their role of mupo or their original role. And through protection of sacred sites programme, this is where we see protection of rivers, protection of animals, protection of all wildlife, protection of trees, not only in the sacred sites,

the whole wildlife, the whole nature, falls under Dzomo la mupo. And the fourth programme, we produce it this year, is eco-mapping.

HL eco-mapping?

MM Yes

HL okay, yes, I saw a little bit on the internet, yes.

MM after we did the eco-mapping of the sacred sites, then we produce another established another programme which is eco-mapping. This eco-mapping is a way of transferring knowledge and storing the memory from the elders before they die.

HL storing the memory?

MM Yes. Eco-mapping and then the eco-calendar. Ecological calendar. We're using these two tools.

HL the eco-calendar.

MM That's our four programmes. Then the key role of all these programmes they are the knowledgeable elders.

HL okay

MM And from this knowledgeable elders we have the key key knowledgeable elders who are makhadzis. The women.

HL the women?

MM Yes

HL Okay, so the key knowledgeable people are the women?

MM Yes. Not just women. Women who are called makhadzis.

HL Okay. So it's the women. You need to spell that for me.

MM M-a-k-h-a-d-z-i.

HL and explain to me what their role is. why why just looking after the or trying to get the knowledge from the makhadzis?

MM we say that through experience and also through the dialogues which we are having all the knowledge of mupo are in the memories of makhadzis because makhadzi they are the experiential people of this ...on mupo

HL so they have all the experience and knowledge?

MM yes, because makhadzi, they are chosen, they don't choose themselves. They are chosen by the ancestors to be the mediator between the creator and people. Creator for us we call him Nwali.

HL call him?

MM Nwali. N-w-a-l-i. God creator. According to our culture you cannot go straight to Nwali, to God without makhadzi. Makhadzi is the one who say prays for you to go to God.

HL okay.

MM that's why this people are chosen and ... chosen by the ancestors. They have knowledge which developed and they also experience because they are the ones who has knowledge about the seed as sacred. Because you we also use seed for our prayers. They also know the family – there is no family without makhadzi. Because she has to be there to be mediator. We have sacred site – there is no sacred site which does not have makhadzi.

HL so together mupo and makhadzi are together?

MM yes

HL you can't have one without the other?

MM there's no makhadzi who cannot have knowledge of mupo.

HL okay no mupo without makhadzi?

MM there should be makhadzi because we also have the spiritual way of life and it's not there if mupo embraces everything but if we don't makhadzi, we cannot, Vendas cannot have a spiritual connection unless they go to another spiritual religion, but if they follow their original spiritual, makhadzi is the mediator there. Every family, every clan, they have selected makhadzi who is not selected by people, by ancestor.

HL Okay

MM including the chief. He cannot rule without makhadzi, a chief can't be a chief without makhadzi.

HL does makhadzi choose the chief?

MM ja, they the one who chose the chief.

HL they chose the chief?

MM yes, they don't just the chief is born, but the makhadzi take care of this child before they install him and even when they install, they the one who install the chief. I was indicating about the our makhadzi...

HL yes, sorry

MM I was saying that all the programmes of Mupo Foundation are on with the knowledgeable elders and the key knowledgeable elders they are the makhadzi. Even though the men elders are also key, play key roles

HL Yes

MM but they do that together with makhadzi, even though makhadzi has a space

HL yes okay

MM they are the people who help the chiefs, there are knowledgeable chiefs of sacred sites. Because they are the leaders of the sacred sites the custodians these chiefs

HL so they are the leaders of the, they are the sacred site custodians

MM yes, in different sacred site. This is how our programmes works.

HL okay, so do you have lots of meetings and talking to the people to get the information? How do you, how do you work in those programmes?

MM we to develop this programme, I sit with the elders, different elders. We have dialogues, talking about way of life, challenges, do they see the problems of today which were not there in during their times.. and they say yes, they said the thing which is contributing to this problem is ignorance of mupo. Then we have dialogues every time, they were talking about the youth, that the youth are no longer behaving well, because they don't know the nature, they don't go to the initiation schools, they don't have any guidance. The school is also contributing and also the government because they are no longer giving the children the rules of behaviour. they say a child cannot be beaten, on the other hand in the family, the social structure in the family is broken, like there's no makhadzi, there's no longer initiation school, there's no longer respect, the children to the parents, no respect at school. The government is contributing by coming in the family, saying we will solve everything. then the elders sit in this dialogues and said this is because of ignorance of mupo, because we live mupo, its life. Then from there they came to the problem of food. That The food we are eating is not the food we were eating. People today are no longer healthy, there are many sicknesses, there are many food which we eat, we no longer feel healthy because people have forsaken their ancestral food, people have forsaken the local food which comes from soil. Through dialogue this is where they see that thing. The chickens which we are eating is six week chicken – it does not really know the experience of the mother hen. This chicken is not healthy. The eggs they see themselves the elders that children who are eating those eggs they are no longer healthy. They are starting to menstruate at early early age.

HL sorry say again, they starting to?

MM menstruate

HL menstruate

MM mm

HL at very early age.

MM Then they look the food which they buy from the shop they compare that it's not healthy, it's no longer the food, this is where the seed programme started to come out. That we have challenge of food

and we are losing the seed. Then through this dialogues when we given it... the elders start to talk about sacred site, there is no mupo without sacred site. They started to show us that sacred site has to be respected because it's the place for rituals. Nowadays the people are just coming into the sacred site, young people go there with condoms in sacred site because they no longer have manners. People go there to sacred site as place for entertainment. Littering in sacred site, disrespecting of the rituals. Then the programme of sacred site was born through this dialogue. We went to retreat wilderness called workshops with the custodians of sacred site. Why sacred sites are getting destroyed? They say because makhadzi have forsaken their roles. They no longer plant millet, millet has to be there for rituals. They no longer plant tobacco, tobacco has to be there for rituals. Then Everybody is moving her own direction. We have to revive the role of makhadzi. This is how makhadzi word started to be the word of mupo. After we have a dialogue about what is makhadzi and then they said millet is not touched by anyone, it's for makhadzi to touch. When we do ritual even the tobacco, makhadzi will plant tobacco and prepare it.

HL and nobody else can do that?

MM no, its makhadzi's work. Especially millet, millet is touched by makhadzis. It has many restrictions. It is very very sacred. Then this is how our dialogue work developed. We have meetings with the makhadzi of this sacred site, makhadzis of sacred sites. Many elders of this sacred sites, the chief and we combine also this people in general meetings. They were talking one issue, one concern. That's how the programme were started. But the stronghold of all this mupo programmes

HL Mupo.

MM is the elders dialogue. Because we sit many times with the elders, like myself I go and visit the elder and spend two days there

MM in the evening, it's not matter of saying that now we're doing the meetings. I follow them with the food. Where they are cooking at the kitchen in the evening, when they're talking, this is how we learn. Then I invite them that we are going to have a special dialogue with different people. But when you are still there. I did this because this is the way I grew up. My father was very old, my grandmothers, my makhadzis were old and I followed them wherever they are doing everything. I grew up in mupo life and in the traditional way. That's how it become a passion to me, this work.

HL okay. So would you say, are you then considered a makhadzi? Do the people think you are makhadzi?

MM mm but at my father's clan I am makhadzi.

HL at your father's clan?

MM mm

HL but only at your father's clan?

MM you become makhadzi to your clan but when you are makhadzi, you are makhadzi everywhere.

HL everywhere, oh I see. Okay, to your clan, but then to everybody, to the bigger community.

MM but I am makhadzi to my clan, its only I'm called makhadzi

HL yes, okay

MM to the clan I do the duties of makhadzi

HL okay.

MM you know what makes makhadzi? Makhadzi is not the thing which you are trained, even though when you grow up there are advices which the elders will take you somewhere, you didn't know that they are teaching you. like my father used to, my father was a traditional healer, my father called me and sent me to his hut where he works, this hut which is like a chemist. My father will call me Mpathe, go and take this something on the corner where we, I will go there, but because I was young, I will go back and say I don't see anything ... but now I see that my father was training me. and I have worked through many things at home which my father was sending me to do it, some of the things, he do something which is for the clan to me but I didn't know that he was training me. that's why to makhadzi, you just develop the knowledge and passion. But the sign of makhadzi, you are born in the family maybe five girls, like at my father I have twelve sisters

HL twelve sisters

MM then you are born in the clan, including me, we are thirteen girls

HL thirteen

MM including me, but my sisters will be twelve. We are thirteen girls and eleven boys

HL eleven boys

MM its twenty four children. We are born many in my father's clan. Even here in Venda there will be any girls. Out of this many girls you develop a knowledge, even though this others have knowledge, you develop the passion for the clan, more than others. what comes naturally, which I have started to notice and after I asked all the other makhadzis and I also saw from my ma, the ancestors, yes, you can see that the ancestors chose because out of all this, the whole clan loves you and the whole clan depends on you. if there's a funeral you just arrive, everybody want you. if there is something in the clan, the people will try to do everything until they say lets and go and call ... that thing just happen and we have shrine at home. We don't chose who will (blow) the millet, the clan just folds arms and said it for you. you go to this one, it doesn't have knowledge and not want to do it. Then you yourself the whole clan will say its Mpathe who will do that. Mm. it's just a natural thing which just happen to be makhadzi. And there will

be no-one who will jealous to you. you know to be makhadzi its ... just something which automatically happen

HL as you grow, you grow into makhadzi

MM yes, you will dream, you will have strength, the clan will not be talking to each other, some members of the clan, but when you are there, those people to like this (clasp hands)

HL okay

MM and that thing makhadzi, there's no makhadzi who do not have snuff, you use snuff in ritual as makhadzi, because this is our tool to communicate, this is our tool for the prayers. This is when a child is sick, they will go to the doctors everywhere and try all specialists. That child cannot get healed and makhadzi until you take that child to that makhadzi . when you arrive there, makhadzi will not do anything, just only snuff and say the name of that baby and call the names of ancestors and said bring this take this message to the creator to Nwali. The child will just woke up and no longer be ill. The hands of makhadzi, the hands of makhadzi, is very very power it is healing it has healing power. Makhadzi makhadzi carry a much responsibility because you hold the clan, the people of the clan are basically being not good in the clan, they go there sideways, but they come back because you are the healing to the clan and this is why you carry responsibility. You cannot get angry, even someone can hurt you, but when you are wanted, you are wanted. You cannot argue. That's makhadzi, that's a lot about makhadzi. I was just describing how its makhadzi.

HL okay.

MM and its water, its tobacco, millet and water

HL water

MM water from the river, not water from the tap

HL so water from the river

MM springs actually

HL millet and tobacco

MM these are the tools for makhadzi. And its water, millet, tobacco. Makhadzi hands makhadzi voice. Is just a healing.

HL and that's it? all you need

MM no medication, no herbs. You can use the herbs for the sickness but makhadzi hands, voice, can heal even the clan, harmony will come to the clan. There's a lot about makhadzi, makhadzi hold the clan, family hold the clan like in you cannot go to get marry without makhadzi. Makhadzi's the one who's holding a stronghold its like she blesses. It's like the other makhadzi they were saying to us that even the

pastor can go and bless you without makhadzi saying yes, go ahead, the pastor is just wasting time. When you have a baby, when the baby is born, you will see even the Christian going to hunt makhadzi. Just the baby born, just for the hand of makhadzi to hold the baby and the voice of makhadzi. We see it nowadays, the people go to Joburg and say they know everything but when they buy the car they say oh, I can't drive, I have to first show makhadzi the car

HL really?

MM Ja, they do that. A family without makhadzi, that's how you because we are talking about makhadzi, that's how people because they have repented and go to other religions and the people who didn't repent they just ignore makhadzi, they end up, there is a saying that makhadzi is a witch, because makhadzi is just, you anger makhadzi and though you are not disconnected, things can't go well with you, but the day you go to makhadzi, makhadzi just put snuff and say they your ancestors, it's like an open door, then that's why people they misinterpret that makhadzi's that the one who bewitched me because it's the one whom I go everything is open. Because they are they are like they are the one who open the door. And they don't have to do anything, it's just their hand and their voice. For you they are things to go through. there's the thing which happens always when you give birth, a child will ..., a child will start crying, crying, crying. After you go to all doctors, you do everything, even to all traditional healers. Sunset when the sun this child will be crying crying crying when the sun rises in the morning then the baby will cry and sleep. After this thing the whole night, during the day the child is playing, no sickness, when the sun (shows go down) cry the whole night, when the sun (shows going up), playing. Then you just take the baby and you go to makhadzi. When you open the gate, makhadzi will be saying are you here? then makhadzi will not do a thing, will just take the baby and ewo ewo (throw baby in the air) and call you the baby by the totem the clan name and then makhadzi put this baby say this baby's name is this one and give a new name and that name will be the other ancestor who died long ago. The mother will just hold the baby and go home. No crying, nothing and makhadzi will not even do the any medicine or herb. Makhadzi will only do snuff when you are gone. That's why people say makhadzi's a witch because they make my baby to cry the whole night but he just touched my baby and baby be better. It's not only in one family. All over Venda you can go and see what is the urumadzima, who healed the urumadzima. That's how makhadzi works. She's more than a priest makhadzi and makhadzi has to hold herself to - she's given strength. She meet many challenges, but she has the powerful strength. A young man can come to makhadzi and shout and her wife shout to makhadzi. Tomorrow in the morning they'll be there at the gate and say makhadzi we are back and makhadzi doesn't have the strength to get angry. Just welcome because she must go to the shrine. I wished you could interview the

makhadzi from the elders. it's very powerful and the amazing strength they don't know where this strength come from.

HL they just have it.

MM they just have it. I am sitting here. my brother will drive from Johannesburg coming here and say Mpathe we just want you to put snuff. To drive from Johannesburg and he say yes. My sister came here, she was not delivering. Pregnant. More than nine month. She just phone me and come here. I said why – it's very far where she come from. She says you know what to do. I say what. She say you know. this is the last born from my father. Then I just put snuff and let her go. and when she go there, I told her go to the shrine there, sit there also put snuff because I'm also sister, I'm not your makhadzi. She just did that and then the labour started. But I was not knowing, here she just phoned and said she's coming. Many people just come. I was also doing that to my makhadzi. I go to my makhadzi, my makhadzi just put snuff, or just talk with me, or just hold me, then I see that there is something is changing. Makhadzi is very powerful, very powerful. If you want to see people, when the baby is born, there cannot be no makhadzi, when the baby grow up, when baby's menstruate, they have to inform makhadzi. When the baby go to marry they inform makhadzi, when they have children, when boys go to initiation, makhadzi knows. When you are sick, makhadzi's there to come and sit next to you and you'll just get off from the blanket. Even when we die, makhadzi play a role. Makhadzi shower the seed on the top of the grave. Makhadzi not ignored... only now when the structure is disconnected but they are still catching catching makhadzi. Things are not going well – oh wake up makhadzi

HL I must go to makhadzi.

MM mm. mm. we can't live without makhadzi. That's why no mupo no life. No makhadzi, no mupo. No sacred site, no mupo. No family without makhadzi. Makhadzi's always there. That's why we say makhadzi the key key holders of these programmes. Like we even describe mupo our work we are doing here in our programmes. Our programmes yes it's an organisation but we our vision is to try to find ways of bringing back order. Bringing back order because of the challenges we face because of the new governance system. And also looking at the future generations to come. Ja. That's the reason why we are fighting for sacred sites and the challenges which are happening in sacred site. We are not fighting for sacred site for battle that we will win the case, that we will win back the sacred site. We are fighting for the order in sacred sites, that's why we say we want sacred site to remain sacred site. Not to be change their role. Because of this new governance system which ignore mupo value and also for the future generation to come. Because the future generation to come they also have to benefit the mupo. For us like other elders they say mupo is what you breathe and they mean the air which we breathe is

not created by anybody or any machine. It comes from mupo but if you cut all the trees and we destroy the mupo, where does this children get this air to breathe? This is what we talk about in our dialogue, that our ancestors have lived and left us with this opportunity and this benefits. Clean rivers, trees, all wildlife there – order was there. But we are the generation in the edge which want to destroy this, what about the future generation of our children? That's the main thing why we are doing this work. We want to bring order.

HL order

MM order.

HL very...

MM you want to go to another question.

HL yes. Okay. Maybe you might think that you've already answered this but the question is **how did you get or find your way into your your current field of work?**

MM I don't call it work. I call it life. Because it's not an employment which I am doing.

HL yes.

MM I find myself in this field because I grew up that way. My father was a traditional healer, a traditional farmer and a traditional leader and he was very old when I was born. Seventy-four years old when I was born. In this family he had twenty-four children, I am the eleventh child.

HL the eleventh child.

MM he had four wives. My mother also comes from a big family of traditional leader. The father of my mother was regarded as the king of Venda. If we use that name king. but he was regarded as the leader of all the chiefs of Venda

HL so that's the father of your mother?

MM Yes. This two people become friends before my mother maybe was born. And then he ended up marrying my mother and this is how I was born in this two families. My mother's mother was also coming from a big family. She was a special makhadzi to the where she was born. I can't go back back back, but

HL no, I mean but your ancestor, your ancestors are very important to you.

MM very important because this mother of my mother is coming from my father's clan. Her mother also was makhadzi to my father clan

HL so your mother's mother

MM ee, mother's mother mother.

HL mother's mother

MM my mother, my grandmother, herself

HL was makhadzi to your father's clan

MM yes. There I grew among these people and they were old, old people. They were not young. When my father passed away, I struggled a lot even though I struggled a lot before my father passed away. I struggled a lot because life was dominated by the modern way, that you have to live the modern way in everything, you eat the modern food, you stay in modern family which do not regard tradition's values. On top of it you have to get the modern religion, which you have to disconnect with your ancestors.

HL when you say modern religion, Christianity?

MM yes. (Talks to son).

Ja, then this people, this modern need, for me it was, it was a pain, because the modern way was telling me that my father is a demon.

HL yes

MM yes, the Christianity they tell that I have to confess that my father is a demon. That life, that hard life, make me to seek to make the elders to be my friends. And that's how when these all people passed away, only my mother was there. This my grandmother, my father, my grandfather all have passed away. Then I look for home, that I will be happy if I am at the home with the elders and then from there this is where I started to have meetings, going to visit elders. The one person who was still alive was my makhadzi, but she end up passing away in '95. Also. Very old. This is how I came up and here, in Venda, I become friends to many old people. And that's how we started to, even though I got connection from outside now, I make the organisation now, that we have to work this as a team, as a group. Ja, that's how I came to the current field, but if I go back now, after my grandmother my father passed away I struggled a lot. I ended up staying in the forest, at the sacred mountain of my clan. I wanted to build a home, a traditional home, like my father's home where there is a traditional kitchen. The set-up of the traditional homestead, with the community there, elders there and the young people as a place where we can go and talk about culture. We find ourselves establishing a homestead in the forest. Then this traditional homestead, the tourists when they see it, when the tour operators see it, they started to bring people there

HL to your homestead?

MM I was like a storyteller

HL Okay... so the tour operators started coming?

MM mm because they saw what we are doing. This is how I started to make friends but that friendship was only for tourists to come and listen to me because I was telling what I was telling you about way of life is the order which was there when I grew up. I was telling people about the story of where did I grew up and how I see the disorder caused by the new governance system. Mm. Through that's how I established friendship. Mm. Then through this friendship this is when I meet people from the world
HL all over the world.

MM Until I find people who have the same passion with me. I met so many people from different parts of the world. This is when I got the opportunity to go to Ethiopia, where I met the people from Gaia Foundation, the people from ABN, and Melca, its Melca, Ethiopia. I meet people from South Africa, the Seed Trust, Grain

HL Grain

MM Grain

HL oh yes,

MM that's how I met Elf

HL yes, that's right how I got your details from Elf yes

MM and through this organisation then I was telling them my passion and that's how I established now Mupo Foundation because before that I was doing this things through my own personal thing

HL yes, just you

MM and that time when I went to the forest it was after I graduated from the university because I was having very hard life because of the Christianity versus our tradition. I said Christianity versus our original spiritual connection. Ja from just graduated from university I went to stay there

HL into the forest?

MM Ja I was staying in the farm which was in the forest . Nobody was staying there I was just on my own. And that's how I find myself now in this current work. From meeting this people I put out the organisation and now do the established dialogue and we started to have a structure here in Venda. That's why I don't say it's an employment for me, its life because I started looking for life which was getting dominated by other new thing then I found that I have to connect, to go, not to connect, to go back to find the elders because there were no longer elders in my at home, then I want elders to be my people. I call them my home, my library. Then after when I was doing that with my elders that's how I was recognised by other people. Then the other elders told me that because you still want to live in that way, find somewhere and build those huts we will help you because this is what you want. This is how I started that homestead in the bush. Ja. On this way there were so many breakdown about my health - I

even nearly died. Sometimes I remember I wanted to commit suicide because I thought much about my father and my makhadzi. Especially when my makhadzi passed away I see that life is no more. I got stress so much because of the contradiction between Christianity and our own way. Because my uncles who are the brothers to my mother, they completely changed. Like my mother didn't divorce my father, my uncle go come take my mother before my father died because they changed to become Christians. Then they said this old man is a traditional healer. This contradiction Ja this thing affected me. Even myself I was taken away for eight years no longer connecting with my father. I struggle a lot because I have these dreams my father my uncles has to pray for me because I don't have to allow these dreams to me but I don't know how I can to stop these dreams. I mean on this way journey I had many personal health problem which affects me up to going to hospitals. But I got strength because I stay I said my life was to go the whole Venda weekend with an elder, weekend in the family where there is an elder, when elder go to the forest I am there, when elder is in the field, I am there - like replacing my father and my makhadzi. Mm. I got a lot of support from my mother. Its only my mother was turned by my uncle until burning even the books of my father. My father wrote the books to my mother about traditional healing things. Then the uncle burn away and said its demon. But all this hardships strengthened me.

HL and gave you and strengthen you for today

MM Mm. Mm that's the answer. That how I can see why I

HL that's why you doing what you do today.

MM Mm. I see that's why I said its to bring back order. Because of the challenges we are having in the governance system which is modern way. Not meaning the government only. Everything which is governance system. Like the way Christianity is doing, it is bringing lots of disorder. We want to try to bring order and also for future generation that they see that there are two lives – you can choose your original or the imposed thing as I can call it because this thing for me was imposed. I didn't grow up from my childhood – I am forty two now – I didn't grow up from my childhood seeing this thing, they just impose this thing. I didn't see my father struggle, all the elders who came when I grew up they didn't have this problems. If my father was having this problem, maybe I would be knowing that. My father had this problem and solve it in this. Christian was there when I was growing – 1969 I was born. There was Christianity but not now when it is very hard that you are doing demon things, your father is a demon. Mm Ja that hardship it's too much.

HL And then the next question is what global and local trends do you see currently impacting on your work?

MM Global trends... what's trends?

HL So I suppose I mean it could be a bit about what you've already spoken about in terms of Christianity, the governance systems, the sort of the modern life, those are obviously the negative ones, so its ...trends, how do you explain trends, I suppose it's things that are ... patterns that are having an impact on your work I mean I use the work cos I understand it's how you live

MM like they interfere? Globally, its globalisation of life, the way I see it. Globally, people see money as the way of life. Money can solve everything. Economic I don't know how to describe it. They say economic... economic is economic development is global. That if you want to develop its only economic development. this is the major major global thing which I will stick on that because all the others trends globally they are coming because of economic development. They're domesticating the whole nature for human need, for money, up to depriving all the wildlife to to to to live mupo benefits. Globally economic development seeing nature as the resource for human need only. When they see the river, they think of human need that a man will get thirsty and do not have water to cook and to bath with and we have to block this river for.... They don't care about that this river has to flow, feed all the things which has mupo created. For me I don't understand that... honestly.

HL I don't either

MM I honestly - why do I have to block this river? What about all the species which are after that dam which you have blocked? Mm. that is the problem of economic global economic development. when they see the dense forest, they want to mine it. they don't see the effects of mining, after they removed that mineral, one mineral which they want, there is wildlife everything for resource of making money. Money to fill the human need. When they see the forest, they just think of debushing it and making their plantations and plan their macadamia. I'm thinking here in Venda

HL we were wondering what the what all the plantations were. Is it macadamia?

MM Mm they are the reason

HL and the bananas

MM macadamia plantation, banana plantation, blue gum plantations

HL all the forests are gone

MM up to their idea which they make to the people that they want to debush the whole indigenous forest with the big trees to make the maize plantation

HL Wow.

HL that maize they don't want to use the local seed. They want to make big plantation to sell this maize. Not to feed their stomach. Mm. When they see happy animals migrating, grazing, they just want to

fence them , that they must no longer come out of this fence and drink the water. if the water is finished where they are. because the animal is not to be fenced, they have to migrate and go - there are the calendar they are the seasons. Cold season and warm season, dry season where the water is not there. The water is down there in the pool, here the river is dry, but they fence them that they must not come out. Today the local the global economic development is even interfered in sacred sites which have resisted all the wind which want to draw to to to to to to destroy them. They remained resistant but because of global economic development they say this sacred site indigenous place we want to fence it and build the hotel inside and bring the electricity there. For what? Other sacred sites they see they put the signage tourists come and this is the place for entertainment in the sacred site even the local people they are the local tourists also because it is open that's why you'll find the young people coming inside with condoms, beer bottles, cars, music in sacred site. Ja, this is global economic development. They see sacred site, they see money. They don't see the ecosystem which will bring rain, they don't see the safe habitat place after destruction of whole nature that all the other things, they see the sacred site as their safe home. Mm. Why do we come that far? mm. why? Mm. we have a lot of place, even our home here, you can build your hotel, but you just see there some safe home, the last last home of the safe place for all these things when they do the plantation they want to put electricity inside. You have to go away because you don't have anything. You don't have right to live. You insect you don't have right to live, you soil you don't have right to live, not mentioning the big animals. Our ancestors never know that sacred site is a place of visit just go to sacred site to visit like visiting somebody's home it has never been that, not for that. Do you drink rooibos?

HL Yes, yes thank you

MM Ja they were just left. But now we just go there - we don't care about it because human need fulfillment because that human is bored. For me I don't understand that we have to domesticate everything for ours.

God didn't plan didn't create one planet of the world, many planets. I don't know whether this people say God planted mother earth only. Because he created all the planets and everything has to live according to the rights of existence. Then we have only one planet which is composed of human beings and this human beings they are depriving the rights of everything which is created. That's why for us we say our thing is origin because we have this word mupo which means originally creations of universe. We don't mean the world. mupo is not the world, that's why mupo is all the planets. It's not the star another planet or the moon another planet, for us the moon is mupo. Mupo we don't protect only the world where people live and we don't only care for the human. Mupo we care for every creation of the

universe, that has to live accordingly. Mm. that's why we understand that everything has right to exist. We don't see that we have to domesticate everything for global economic development. and that is if we care for the sustainable life, not sustainable development. sustainable life, that there is a life after us. There is the future generations not children of women only, children of the whole planets.

HL so not just human children.

MM no, no.

HL Children of the plants and the animals as well

MM yes. Yes. Insects. Economic development globally – they see the wildlife it has to be gone to zoos, it has to be fenced. This children of earth, or children of human they have to see the animal in the zoo and in the game farm only. For us these animals are our totems. We have the wild pigs, the warthogs, they are our totems and they must not stay in the Kruger Park or game fence game. They are our life, they are part of our lives and our custom is that you respect this animal. they walk around here. Yes. Our way is original. we understand that we live with animals, not animals belong somewhere. We live with animals, they are not dangerous. I grew up in that way. I stayed in that forest when I was sick. There are many wild pigs there, they never hurt me, they don't hurt me, it's my animal, it's my totem.

HL the warthog?

MM yes. We have people here in Venda they have warthogs of lions they see lions as their friends. But they no longer there, they fenced them. We have people here in Venda the elephant my baby is an elephant. The people...

HL Thama?

MM yes. The people when they come here during 1900, 1800, 1900 they want to hunt the animals and remove their horns because they want to domesticate them but for us our great great grandparents were living well with these things – elephants. These Soutpansberg mountains was full of elephant, staying with people and then somebody just came and say hey I want to fence this, I want to hunt this. that's why the law, the war of Makado started because they want to kill the totems.

HL mm the war of Makado?

MM Ja, Makado didn't start with anything because people when they write they want to write what they want to achieve. It started because they wanted to hunt animals and take the tusk. Mm. The mother of Makado is my is the makhadzi of my father. We have so much animals they are fenced somewhere we no longer stay with them. Last month they were announcing in the radio that there is a lion which is jump off from the fence of Kruger hey people must be careful. I was saying that I wish they don't find that animal until it kill everybody. Ja. Why do they fence it? it is looking for that people, the

totems. Mm. We were having many leopard in this Soutpansberg mountains they are longer there. There's no home. People are making field up to the mountains. Where do they stay? We have people who their totems are the snakes but when people they see snakes, they say hey kill it. you know we have in mupo, every spring, it has a snake. The spring cannot survive if there's no snake. We have the snake of river but today when people go to spring, they see a snake, they kill it. Economic development - when they see the spring they fence it. I can take you around to the springs here in Venda – the government put the cement in the springs. The spring get dry. For what? Because the spring stay as a spring. Hey we want people, we have a hot spring, we fence it. because we build hotel and that people make money when they come here. Ja, for me this global trends is economic development until people reach there were Chief Seattle said after the last tree, after the last river, after the last fish, this is where people can said oh we can't chew money. We make the money food. We can't make money to give us the wind to breathe. That's why for us in Mupo Foundation we say we care for the future generation. We are not doing the Mupo Foundation organisation for employment because employment will serve the local the person who is there at present. We are not doing that. Mupo is not the job creation.

HL its life creation.

MM its life. Mm. Yes so that we care for the future generation. Mm. then we have the big challenge of globalisation of economic development that's why today the people of mupo are in court, fighting for sacred sites rights because of this. they see sacred sites, they see money. They don't care even about the animals who are jumping on those trees. Because when they put that lights electricity light in that sacred site everything has to disappear. For what, for people to just sleep there and benefit what? Why don't we just save this lasting place which has resisted when they debush all the nature and on top of that they don't because they don't have mupo knowledge, they're disconnected with their elders. Because here in Venda the sacred sites they have trees which attract rain, the ecosystem evaporate even the rain to fall. That's why I don't understand the people who under government offices, I can't understand because they're doing job creation, not good. because if you are in the department of environment up to the minister of environment without when you don't have knowledge that in the sacred site is an ecosystem which helps us a lot and there is ecosystem. They said they're the environmentalist. They can't understand that sacred site is the only place where it became habited of this other species when we destroy. On top of that they know that environment law but they couldn't understand the place like Phiphidi Falls it attract rain, the trees which are there, are the trees which attract rain. But they don't have knowledge and that's why they cut and they pave and even they hide

the soil and put electricity to disturb this other species. That's why I don't understand them, they're the people who just want to earn money and live for now and don't care about the future. Mm. that's why I understand. There are many things which are connected. Because mupo is connection of everything. but they are disconnecting. In mupo we have a person, we have animals, we have grass, we have water, we have nature, the whole nature, we have out there the planets which are out there, it's also part of everything. we destroy this one but if you say it's only person and he has to consume everything here, how is he going to survive? Your father is in the car.

HL is he in the car?

MM Ja, that's how I understand my life. I grew up in that way. My father didn't show me any other way. Even when I go to school, my father was not telling me that I go to school to get a job. I was just going to school like other children because his passion was to teach his children about where there's life. I remember my father saying that you have mind, you have the fingers, you have the legs and there's nothing which I give any child, use that thing and when he want to give us food, he has a big field even if you go there today there are many big trees there he didn't debush the trees. There's a river at home. When we want water he show us the river. I remember I was telling this children of my brother that my father will beat us if we go to collect water from this machine. He will say I drink the water from the spring only. Until he died he didn't let us collect water from this machine. He beat us if we still try to go there. He beat us. Because everything he was showing us come from nature. Everything. when I was growing up, I didn't remember my father buying a bible. I didn't know bible. My father go to the mountains to the field and come with wild fruits and he gave us. But today you ask a child what is the fruit, its only found from Shoprite.

HL Ja.

MM Oh, tea?

IL Thank you very much, that would be very nice, thank you.

MM oh we were on the global. There's a lot we can talk about.

HL okay, maybe this next one then about **which of these trends give you hope for the future?**

MM mm the hope of the future is that I have realised that people are looking for the west to solve the problems which they are experiencing

HL so people are looking to the west to solve the problems?

MM yes. And it's not working. My hope is that people will realise what is life, what is mupo. We have the problem for the younger generation, the youth, they are in not uncontrollable. They are, the youth of today, I don't know how to describe them, they are out of hand. If you go to the parents, you find the

parents crying for the younger people. The youth, they don't respect them and they want solution for that. Even the government, many complaints from schools. We have diseases, sicknesses, there's no you go to hospital, you go to our local hospital, you wait in the queue to jump on the bed even the other patient is to be taken away. We have sicknesses, they are not getting healed. We have food I can say its food insecurity mm. some people have already started that we are eating organic food. Why are they coming with organic food because for us organic food is the food which we were taught by our grandfathers.

HL it's the food that your grandfathers, it comes from your grandfathers?

MM yes which they were eating, they were coming from the soil and the compost. Why people are eating organic food now and you'll find organic is expensive if you don't consider the law of origin.

HL ja

MM yes, we have the governance system which is failing, the government. Politics is not fulfilling anything, it's a big challenge that people will remember what went wrong. And it gives us hope because we are the generation which is going to, and the younger generation is going to remain and looking for a way, that's why I said, why don't we save this other thing for the future generation. That's why for me we said mupo programmes is for bringing order because of this governance system which is interfering to bring disorder and also to bring order for the future generation. That's our hope. Since I have been meeting with people from different parts of the world, up to Amazon, there many people they come, they have meetings like you. I was at London in Schumacher College where people were talking about territorial disorder and bringing order to the territory. We have people from different parts of the world. many parts of the world. USA, Russia and many people. Environmentalists, the lawyers, we were also sharing the same vision. We call our cause earth jurisprudence

HL earth jurisprudence?

MM Yes. There's only one teaspoon. We have rooibos.

IL Very nice.

MM Ja in earth jurisprudence we are talking about natural. Then we see the hope. Then that's the hope. The world is talking about this challenge. Mm. it's not like nobody's doing anything. That's the hope.

HL that's lots of people are all working towards the same thing, the same vision.

MM and today we are having the climate change, global warming, they are looking for the solution. That's why for our self we are doing the ecological calendar. You know the hope is also if there are these negotiations or the meetings or conference on this issue because for me we are the generation which is

on the edge to (shows falling off the table edge), before we destroy everything we leaving the hope that we are having the meetings about this threats which were coming and the children who will come they will see how to solve this problem. We have many people like our programme we have nursery indigenous nurseries. We are planting trees so that we just place back the trees on the mountains on rivers. Mm.

HL Okay

MM that's how we see it. Can I pour?

IL thank you.

HL thanks. Okay, shall we go on to the next section. Yes? So the next one is talking about Nature. So

What early memories / experiences do you have of Nature? of mupo.

MM of Nature?

HL early memories or experiences?

MM if I understand this. ja, as I indicated that I grew up with my father where we get things from nature. From childhood we were bathing in the river. I remember every time every day my father before sunset he would be calling us have you gone to the river. Then we'll be running there. And also in the morning, when we wake up we will go to the river to collect water . to the spring. That spring we crossed the river and we reach the spring. Then we also bath. The river is still now I cannot last a month without going to bath in the river. A river is very...I'm very much connected with the river. I don't swim I just want to go and sit in the river, in the water, bath. And when we were in this river, we were having this little things which play in the river. We have the fishes, we see the baby fish, the eggs, ja those things we used to watch them ja we enjoyed that. And also there was this black thing - we called them thamba mati. It's a black small thing with a hard end, body. It doesn't fly, it just play in the river.

HL tadpoles? Tadpoles? Not tadpoles ... for the frogs

MM not the frogs

IL water boatmen?

MM like beetle.

HL oh yes, it's those, it's like this, like this shape (draws it)

MM yes, it, yes the water make a circle when it swim. Ja, we used to play with them. They say if they bite you, you become a girl. A boy. That's why they say if they bite you, the breasts are going to grow, then the crabs, they say when they bite you, you become a boy or a girl. I remember them swimming, these things. Then those ones we used to play with them, wetting them, they make a circle in the water,

the water makes circle. Then they say if you catch it, it will bite you, the breasts will develop. And we listen to the frogs, the frogs, because my home was, is near the river, there were many reeds there. We know we saw different frogs there and when they laid, when they are small frogs, so many memories about the river. And then the other memory is that the fruit, I grew up eating the fruits from the forests. At my father's field, there were many fruits. He didn't cut the wild fruits, we go there to climb the trees, up up there, we go to pick the fruits and we were having seasonal fruits. Wild besides this one planted mangoes.

HL did you grow up near here?

MM aah aah, its very far.

HL very far.

MM near Makado. We also go to the mountains. Climb big mountain there for fruits. Because we go by group as young girls. And then wild vegetables so many I'm still eating them a lot. When the first rain come, we know there are vegetables which germinate on their own, we go to pick and then when they plough there are others which grows. I still know them by different by all their names and we also have some vegetables which are found only in the mountains mm we go to pick them. animals – my father's field there were many baboons big baboons we used to play by when they cry whoom and we also did whoom. There were a lot of baboons there. And monkeys. Birds, so many birds, my brothers were the ones who knows the birds by name, but I know a few. We have songs which we sing about the fruits, birds, the animals. early memories about the nature. but the other thing about nature is when I saw my father. My father's a traditional healer. He has his patients like a hospital. Because these patients will go to the field and they will go to the river to bath. I still remember the spot in the river where the people go to bath and the trees, big trees where people sit there is a big shade. Ja, and big stones at my father's field, there are big, big stones ... maybe from road up to pumpkin. we used to sit on on those stones, you can even sleep. Then I remember this people going and sit there. There are other things which I remember about nature is the way my father used to nature. because my father every time before sunset we will see him coming from the field, walking along the river and walk and turn and come home, we know that now the sun is going to set, when he arrive home. Because when he arrive home, he will sit at the verandah there which face sunset but I still remember him every time. He will walk near the river, walking, walking, walking coming home. Mm. I think that's okay.

HL You've spoken a little about this, but **Have you experienced times in Nature which you would consider a turning point.** So maybe living in the forest was a turning point?

MM I was very stressed. Lots of contradictions. Then I remember I went to Levobo to another doctor, a very older man, Dr Nula. Then he told me to go to hospital for x-ray and come back with the results of x-ray because he said I maybe sick. He said you worried? I said yes, he said what's wrong. I said I don't know. because I was not ... I started to tell him about the contradiction with my uncles. I went to the hospital they take x-ray and go back to Doctor Nula. Doctor Nula said I have the pulmonary TB. I have to go to hospital. And then I went to hospital. They admitted me. the day they admitted me, they said I have to stay in the ward. I was fighting with this doctor when he was writing I said I can't stay in the ward. Then they said, there's no way, you have to stay. Then They took me to the ward. When I was at that ward, I was struggling a lot because I said I can't stay in this place and then I wrote novels, none of them has been published. I stayed for one week in the hospital. The day I was admitted I sent my mother to come back with my books. I was having my books in the ward, then I was writing the other novel there. I stayed there for only one week because I said to this people, I can't stay here. then I said if you give me this medicine, then I will drink it but you have to free from this place. Then they free me. I come to my mother's house. The following day I run away to the forest. I left even the medicine.

HL you left the medicine behind?

MM because I know that if my father was still alive, I would not be drinking those things, they were not nice. And also I know that if my father was still around, he will be the one who will be helping me, but my uncles don't believe the herbs. I remember when I asked my uncle, I know that there is a tree where I go and take the roots and boil and drink. My uncle, an advocate, a learned person, he said to me the knowledge you are using is a demon knowledge because it's the knowledge of the dead person. That thing make me my heart to feel very very painful because I saw my father kill healing many many people and I see my father's patients going to nature. that's the reason I run away. I stay there in the forest and learn so much about nature as a healing.

HL mm.

MM goes outside to speak to someone.

HL and IL exchange.

MM Ja, everywhere in the forest I was staying there, eating, drinking water from springs. Like I know my father was healing people like that, eating many wild fruits and herbs. My makhadzi was still alive that time. She helped me a lot.

HL did she come to the forest as well?

MM she was unable to walk. I go there to visit her. The turning point that we is one day when I was sitting on this big tree. I was very thin. Then I was feeling that life had stopped because I was on my own at that time. And when I walk in the forest I just want to be on my own. Then I was sitting there and I see this big tree here down there was compost, dead leaves and things walking on it. I was thinking much about my father and then when I look at these dead, brown trees and things walking there I see that this trees is completely dead. I was thinking much about when a person died because this person cannot come back at all. Then my mind was looking and concentrating on those dead leaves, that they get finished and they will not come back to the tree. I remember that time I was like I don't know I feel like I fainted until I was somebody pull my head to wake up and see the leaves, moving like this. I can't remember I can't forget that spot. When I see those leaves moving, I feel some strange happiness coming to my heart. mm. That happiness make me to stood up and said I have to live like this tree, leaves, not like this dead leaves. Eeh I spent a long time there but I my putting upon this tree that's why I love the trees. That thing gave me hope. From there I felt I had to say myself I have to stay these green leaves and from that moment I was always looking at the trees, when the leaves are moving. That moment made me to live mm because I was feeling that my life is no more. And that's why my colour is green. But it came like that, even if I can be said, if I see a tree and I spend time looking at the movement of this leaves, I just forget many things. And this thing for the trees, I respect the trees and I wish even the future generation to see the indigenous trees and its leaves. Because for me I could listen also to the sound of the wind when the leaves are moving, hey it it is life. And also to watch this movement. That's why for me I always say just leave the trees to feed us with the mupo movement. Yes. I spent so much time in the forest there but what helped me these diseases was nature. I was eating from nature, I was breathing from nature, I was not suffocating myself in that hospital. I think I will not survive if I stay in hospital. I got healed and we started to build that village, that homestead. That's how I started the journey to find myself where I am. mm. Ja. From there I even to take people to nature, they see healing, they experience healing. Yes.

HL Okay and then what do you understand by the concept of a person having a “relationship with Nature”? That's I mean you've also answered that a little bit. So a relationship with Nature is mupo.

MM mupo

HL mupo I keep saying it

MM as I said why we are doing this programme, we are doing programme to revive the value of mupo. Because a person cannot live without mupo. Through my experience in life I have seen mupo as sacred space.

HL Yes

MM Yes. When I say through my experience because like when we say mupo we don't mean only the wild, we mean everything. At night at sunset myself I sit there and I have my sacred hour to looking at the moon, looking at the stars, ja, it's to have relation. I have taken teachers to experience mupo life, experiencing the stages of dawn, in the morning. that what happens when the night is break down and we are starting the early stages of morning, to see all these stages of dawn, yes, until the sun rise. I did that with the teachers but I also have a day which I have to do that

HL so you put aside a day in your week to do that?

MM not in a week, I can do it once a month or maybe next month because you have to wake up at three. And sit out. there is so much healing on that, because that air which comes, and when you look this colours when they are starting to appear even the stars when they start to disappear, for me its healing, it's the relation. Mm. this is some of my sacred hour and I do this when I'm going to do the patla, do the prayer in the shrine.

HL so you do that before you do the patla?

MM ja, because we do the patla early morning when the sun is about to rise. Ja, that is a very special moment for me. because that is the moment which you cannot do every day and its very very special. Having relation with the nature is just to, I will use my examples, I also do the silent walk. Here. I just walk in the forest there and come back. You see, you listen, you feel, not talking. The other relation with nature is about what you eat. If the food is coming from that soil, its coming from nature, that food, I don't know. the people whom I took around to this process they feel that it is something special. Because when I go, like when I visit the old women who are here when they are in the field, I see them that they have relation with the soils from their garden, from their field, their seed, they know also when this thing is going to germinate, at which stage it's going to start ripening. This is where a person is also connected with the calendar or the seasonal, the seasons. When it is raining also, it is a very special time. Eeh. There other relation with nature is when we read other people's books about nature. because this is where somebody can develop a relation with nature. because you will find it sometimes wanting to experience. I like my best author in the whole world is Thomas Berry.

HL Thomas Berry. Yes. Which particular book can you recommend?

MM Evening Thought.

HL Evening Thought. And Great Work.

MM but I recommend Evening Thought

HL that's the best one?

MM Ja. And that story Evening Thought, the title Evening Thought.

HL I will look for it. I don't know it. I know Thomas Berry, but I don't know Evening Thought

MM Yo, Evening Thought. It's very special. It's like themes themes. There is also a theme about evening thought. He talks about when the sky appears golden, with the stars, when the sun hide. It's not, it's beyond human creation and human technological everything or liberty it cannot even be said by email, this thing which happen in the sky. And he also talk about how people are created connected with the whole system of mupo. Mm. For having a relation with Nature, it's not an activity which somebody has to go can say I'm going to training for that. You can build it on your own. I recommend it to the people who are down, that is better to get out of the room, out of the house. Even a small tree there. Is only that nature has been destroyed. For me the hospital is a place to suffocate people, it's a matter of survival, of the fittest. You know in our custom, when a person is sick, if there is death, even next door, that person will have to remove that him or her from this house. Even if the death is somewhere because the spirit of death depress that person. In our custom if a person is sick, they said the elders, especially the makhadzi don't sleep, you have to go out. and feel this muya mufhe, muya mufhe is this air, this natural air. Mm. the medicine which they give you from the herbs, it works when you are also breathing muya mufhe. It can't work if you are locked inside. They said when people are working around this steps, where they are working , you are sleeping, it is depressing you. same with the pregnant woman. then that's why I said the hospital is a place for suffocating, that's why I resisted stay here. for me when I look at the patient of the hospital, they could get the healing beside their own medicines which they are getting if they are out. I don't know how we can make a hospital without a roof and walls, like Kruger Park. Put the animal. It will be difficult but this was going to be a healing place. Where there are only rooms. When they get hurt, where they go to sleep but the rest of the day they sitting there, their mattress, their mat is under the tree. For every day they are in the closed room, the person is dying here, I am sitting here, I'm sleeping here. this person is dying, this one maybe is dying. That spirit of death is depressing and you are also sick, you are staying with another sick person. It is a room, there's no muya mufhe here, that fan is not muya mufhe. Mm. that's why I said myself I I I if I didn't fight that I get out of this hospital, I was going to die. And for us a person who is sick has to drink water from the spring. Mm. That water is like Panado, is like medicine. It's just water as it is. Ja. Even if you don't drink that water, even I grew up knowing that. That if you become sick, you stay with water from that

spring. Ja, I have to drink water from the spring, not from the tap. Mm. that's how a person can rest and feel life again. Mm. That's why I recommend the natural to the person who are sick. Mm. take a person who is sick and go to the river and just let that person bath in the river. You will see a change. Clean river, not this river which are polluted. Mm. that's how the relation with nature. and for us you look at the elders who are staying in place like here, township, and you go to see the elders who stay in villages, you will see the comparison. This one they're already weak. But you go up to the village there, we have villages which are near the mountains. This elders they are working up to 90 years. they are strong, they breathe muya mufhe, they walk. They eat food from the soil, not from supermarket. My father lived for ninety-seven years, the year which we are estimating. My father for the rest of his life he has never gone to hospital. I have never heard that my father was sick. Even when he died he was not sick. He told us not to drink this water from the machine. We have a clear spring, it's still there. And he comment every time when you go to field, he come back in this big coat with the pockets with fruits and he call us to sit and give us to eat. He recommend to us every time to eat the wild fruit. And he told us to go to bath in the river. Mm. That's how he created for us a relationship with nature. Mm.

HL and the other question you've actually already answered. The next question is **Do you feel that you have a relationship with Nature?**

MM Yes I have a strong. I can't live without nature. Even for my son, he has already developed that.

IL I'm going to sit in the car and read, okay.

HL okay.

MM it's not too hot.

IL no, its fine.

MM there is a shade

IL no its fine in the car. I'm reading a book about birds.

MM oh

IL Anyway, thank you very much for the tea. It was very nice.

MM you are welcome

IL it just touched the spot. Thank you – I'll see you just now.

HL and then you've also answered this one, but you might want to say something else. **How and why are people generally considered to be "disconnected from Nature"?**

MM how and why are people generally disconn... or the people have disconnected from Nature? Ja, they have. People do not see Nature as their part of their, not part, as life.

HL as life.

MM Here in Venda, I cannot say Nature. I say yes, its Nature. they are disconnected from Nature because they are disconnected from mupo. If people cannot see the value of mupo, they cannot see the connection of mupo, of Nature. one thing – they don't respect the rivers because the water's coming from the sink, from the bathroom. They don't even think or remember that this water they are drinking is coming from sacred site. Because the rivers here in Venda, the springs, the fountains of this river, they are from the sacred site. Thathe. Sacred forest.

HL how do you spell that?

MM T-h-a-t-h-e.

HL Thathe.

MM Ja, here in Venda

HL that's the sacred forest?

MM yes, it's the start of the Pondo, big rivers here in Venda. Mm. all the water which is flowing in the tap here, the whole Thohoyandou, they're coming from Muchinduro River, Muchinduro River start there at Thathe Forest. This rivers which are flowing at Kruger Park, they are start from there.

HL at Thathe Forest?

MM Mm. and people have disconnected because they don't river because they see water from the house. That's why they don't respect river. You know the people they just see bridges built and the water is flowing, they don't think that even the water in their taps there is the same water from the this river. That's why they can't respect it, they pollute it and I'm going to talk about reality. People are even dumping their litter in the rivers, napkins, this pampers in the river. Mm. that's how a person is disconnected. You know the thing which makes people to disconnect is when this modern way say everything will be provided in your home, from food, from water is in the home, you can't respect the river. Myself where I grew u. I saw that water come from the spring, water come from the river. Then we respect it more river. Mm.

HL and also people have to go outside to get things for their house. So if you have to go and collect water, grow your own vegetables

MM you become responsible. You connect to nature because you connect to the soil, you connect with the climate or seasonal patterns. You expect rain. But if everything you just go the shop and get it, how can you respect everything? We can take example. People have disconnected from the nature because

they don't even respect the trees. Grasses. What is the role of grasses to a person nowadays? Grass. If you say you have to respect grass and all insects, but I am talking about grass, what is the role of grasses because the people go to the shops and find milk there. They cannot see the value of grass. I use this example to the young children for our programme. That read me your understanding of the story of milk. Until you get milk in your tea or milk in your bowl. Where does milk come from? It is a long journey. Children see milk a person see milk in the packet. I said to the person you have to respect the grass. For what? A calf has to graze and both cows, cow and bull. They have to graze, grass and when they graze grass, it become a pregnant cow. It still graze and sit under the tree, under the shade. After that it gave birth. It has to graze for milk to be there and feed the calf then we get milk. But if we cut all the grass and we give these animals this it still go to nature even though they dry then. that's why I say there is a disconnection because of providing human need on their plate, not that you needing, you have to search for it. Mm. then my example.

HL it's a very good example.

MM besides grass, you have to respect grass, you have to respect the trees because the grasses do not always stay there in open space. You have to respect trees, trees have to draw rain. That the grass will grow. That is the reason why we have to respect sacred site for us here in Venda. Because sacred sites for us it is the place where rain come from. The trees there they absorb rain, they evaporate and the rain will come so that the grass will grow and the animal will graze and that the animal will be happy and we will get the milk. But if you just bring the box of milk, how can a person connect the milk with the grasses and rain because there is no connection between rain and box of milk. There's no connection of box and milk and grass. I said to people I said because I haven't met many contradictions of people do not understand I said you are drinking milk hey you are picking that milk from the shelf there of Shoprite, do you respect grass? Hey the connection of me when I stay in the paved home all over there's nothing in my home where there's I just switch everything for what grass for me? they think milk just come from somewhere. Mm. mm this is the complete disconnection by providing the human needs with spoon spoon everything. Mm. I talk about disconnection with water, with river. Now the nature, grass. I've already mentioned the trees. Ja, for me, I feel the people have disconnected besides only for the human need, which feed their stomach only. But they also disconnected from nature because they don't understand that indigenous forest has to be there.

HL Yes

MM Yes. For me its disconnection because if they debush all the indigenous trees and they plant other things. they don't know that and there's that other thing which was mentioned by the other doctor. He

makes me to think deep about his statement. Doctor Malo, Melaco from Ethiopia. He do the seed, he said we don't know what are we losing from the wild and we will regret after the whole wild has been destroyed. I came back and look at these trees, looking at here in Venda where we have wild dense forest with many things but one tractor which just go and rrrrr. The soil there it has many many things even the worms. People want to domesticate everything, they will debush the whole wild forest and put the fertiliser to grow their crops. They lost the big trees which drew rains. We lose all the insects which stayed there. I was sitting thinking I don't know where to get a machine to measure the muya mufhe which we breathe, that if you destroy this portion of indigenous forest, muya mufhe is limited.

HL is less

MM because after they destroyed this whole mountain, indigenous forest, the air is no longer the same. You go to Thohoyandou and you go to Thathe, you don't breathe, even here, you don't breathe the air in Thohoyandou. Mm.

HL how do you spell the muyo?

MM M-u-y-a m-u-f-h-e. Yes.

HL and that's the air? Natural air?

MM natural air. This is one we are breathing. muya mufhe. If the person is dead, there's no muya mufhe getting in.

HL no more

MM And this is the air from the leaves of the trees. For me its disconnection if people cannot understand even muya mufhe we breathe is coming from the indigenous forest. For us, because I am speaking as a Venda person and for me, for us to have the nature it's our spiritual way. If we don't have nature, we don't have our spiritual way. Because we respect God through Nature. if I disconnect from Nature, how can I continue to be connected with my ancestors? That is and God because we have this plant, millet, we have millet. Because when millet is planted it follows the seasonal changes, the eco-calendar, its mupo. It follows mupo pattern. Its planted there in the field, or outside there, or at an open space where there is muya mufhe, where it is in nature. the second thing when this millet is growing to get ripe, it's always in nature. I have it outside there, I planted it. you will see that it is following mupo because it germinate and grew and bear. When it bears, it is called finger millet, it do like this (shows fingers opening) to show the sun that its getting ripe. You will see it the following day you will find it doing this, from here, it will be doing like a hand. For us its mupo and when it is fold like fingers it is ripe. It's not machine which told it to do that. Mm. it ripe, when it ripe, makhadzi and the young girl will go and pick it. and before we pick it there are signs from ancestors and the signs from the bird. Birds go

there to eat it. Yes. When your makhadzi pick it, they come back home and after crushing it. they also use the moon also. They germinate it. its nature. after germinating it, in the evening they will be grinding it and preparing the drink for millet in the evening. Yes After that we don't go to the house, even the traditional hut which is built of wood, we don't go there, we go outside and makhadzis will do this (blow) outside where it is nature, open space. It's not allowed to do it inside the house, it's our connection with nature. mm. for us we don't pray without nature. we pray outside in nature and where we pray, we have the stone, we have the plant, when we (blow) we put on the plant, which means if we don't have nature or if we disconnect with nature, we can't

HL you can't you don't pray.

MM how are we going to pray? Where are we going to pray? Ja, we can't. A person who has disconnected from nature, even cannot even understand this. I'm not to the way I used to tell people. I don't undermine the other people's religions but for me it is other religion Christianity it hurt me. But for me I don't see connection with Nature in Christianity because the destiny for Christians is to go to heaven and is only to to save only you the person's soul. It doesn't care about other species. It's for human, that's why they say God loves only the person out of the whole creation. For me I don't understand that. Because they said that you saved, you go to heaven. They don't talk about the relationship with Nature, they say you dominate Nature. that's why at the end they say hell you're going to burn for life for many many years. For me I don't know whose God who who is that God who will cut all the trees and burn people. It's like a joke for me. But if fire comes from the wood, how can God punish all the woo all the trees by burning a person? Mm. Because for us we respect the trees, when we pray we respect the trees, we have sacred site, it's a forest which has everything about nature and we go to do the rituals there. Respecting. That's why in sacred site there is a law that you can't move the stone, you only follow the path. You can't cut the tree, in sacred site you can't even cut any animal, including insect, in the sacred site. That's why we are against development in sacred site. Because in sacred site it's like more than a church for us. Everything it has to stay as it is, the stone, everything you can't disturb. For us our spiritual way to God is through Nature. That's the origin. That's for us is our law of origin. That's why we stay connected with Nature. Because when we do our prayer we have to get water from the spring, we it's not water from the tap which has been prrr (blow). We have tobacco which is planted and for us tobacco is plant which is sacred. It is planted with rules that men cannot go there. Where we plant millet and tobacco we have the rules that you don't disturb this plant. Then our things for connection with God is Nature – its millet, its tobacco, its water from the spring. And we use all these things outside, with makhadzi, ja we you can't do without Nature. You can't pray without

Nature for us, God for us is mupo way. That's our spiritual way. And if we now these people we said when you do your prayer you go to the concrete house like this with the zinc and you take the book and it's a man wearing the suit and the shoes. He's the one praying for you, for me it completely different because for us we do it outside and not for prayer I want money or I want blessing. Makhadzi went she put the words she will pray for the health for everybody in the clan. Ask for rain. Pray for healing in the whole territory. That's the simple prayer covering for everything. That everything in Nature has to be healed so that we also have healing. We call it shothodzo. Makhadzi pray for shothodzo.

HL can you spell that?

MM S-h-o-t-h-o-d-z-o. Makhadzi patla or passa makhadzi he pray that we have to be protected from all the sicknesses we are asking health. We also want shothodzo from the whole up to everything which created for whole mupo. And we ask rain it is the time for biting what we have harvested we thank rain. Yes. That's our prayer. Its mupo, its Nature. We thank Nature to provide us food. This is when we bite, we say we are ruma, we bite the things which we are reaping. We first bite before we eat

HL okay, so bite and then pray?

MM Yes. It's the same prrr (Blow) Makhadzi. And after we plough, before we till the soil, we also do the prayer. Makhadzi. ask rain, when we ask for rainfall, of course its God, but we ask Nature to bring rain and respect tree. For us you can't cut tree for no reason. It's our customary law of Venda that even when you want to cut tree you have to get permission that tree is can be cut. Because ancestors and our spiritual way is that you respect Nature. Mm. Our herbs come from Nature. We stay connected because when we want healing, remedy, medicine we know its Nature that provide. Our water comes from Nature. Our food comes from Nature. Shothodzo come from Nature. Then how can we disconnect from Nature? Mm. I want to answer this question do you feel how and why are people generally considered – they are disconnected from Nature - when they want food its material from the shop. No connection to Nature that this food I'm eating, this milk I'm drinking is connected with grass. Grass is not Nature. How can you connect with Nature? When you want water, it's the tap. How can you connect with the river and respect river? When you want healing, sorry, it's the hospital, the medical, the surgery, the hospital, - this is where healing come from. How can you understand that healing come from Nature if you when I'm sick I go to hospital. And the food medicine is in the shelf and it's in the bottle. Then how can you understand that there's connection. That's even why these tablets which we drink we don't know even if it's a tree or what. How can I say that this is a tree. Then how can I connect with Nature? mm. For us when a baby is born, we take outside to the moon and we show the baby the moon. And the baby knows that the moon when I grow up there is moon. Then how if everything is in the concrete

when this baby want to go to toilet it's in the house, when he want to drink water it's in the house, when he's sick there is a cupboard with medicine. When you want food, the food is in the fridge, in the cupboard. How can he see outside there is something which connect with the life? When you want to pray, you get in out of the house, you go also to the house like this and this is where you pray. For me that is my argument how can you feel connected? Mm. When they read law, the law is from the book and there is the house. For us the law we learn and experience you go to the river, we know river's law, we go to the mountain, we know the animals' law, we know the trees' law, we know everything. it's the law which comes in the vein mm because it's part of my life, ja. That's how we see. Mm. Then my answer the people are disconnected from Nature because everything which provides to their needs no longer comes from Nature, it comes from materials. Up to the healing, healing, healing. That's why for me I say the hospital is the place for suffocating people. Up to the prayer, spirituality is again in the material thing, a book. A person just pray outside ja then we can't see the value of mupo, we can't see the value of Nature. and that's why we don't even see that when the animals and everything, when they breathe up there in the mountain and their cow dung they are making other things to be there. We don't see we just see that food it's from the shop. Ja. You tell a person that the dung for this animals here they enrich our food, they enrich everything here. Eeeh its disconnection. They don't see. Because the person see that animal is only for me to please my eyes and see the styles of animals in Kruger Park or zoo its final. There's no connection. For us the animals they're our totems. Mm. that's why for us in mupo we want to try and bring order to the present, to the governance systems which is making people to disconnect from Nature, from mupo. They don't see the value of mupo. And we care for the future generation who are coming. We are just building something for the future generation. Mm. that's how, it's too deep this thing. Mm

HL it is deep.

MM our ancestors go back to that ...maybe we'll come when we come to spirituality. Our ancestors go back to the soil. It's not that they become dust and they're finished. They go back and their spirit is in the trees. That's why sacred site is there are trees. that's why our shrine is the plant. Our spiritual the spirit of our ancestors go to Nature. Mm. then we seek connection with Nature. we can't live without Nature. Mm.

HL Okay, we've answered number five and I think we've answered number six and number seven.

How does this disconnection manifest in our daily lives and what implications does it have for us? I think we've answered that one.

How do you think we can restore connections with Nature?

MM you know there is one thing which for me if I am here at home I hear that the elder has passed away ja that funeral pains me. for me it is like a library which has been burnt down. A library of knowledge, not just library. Unless all systems of governance, not government, all systems every structure can create a gap can create a space to fill a gap which is there between the younger generation and the elders because to restore the connection with Nature the knowledge this experiential learning and its only with the elders only. It's not the thing from the book. A person can go and interview an elder and the elder can say all the things that I will make workshop. I will do this with all the people. Without the presence of the elder in that process it's just like a person going to visit a museum. Because an elder is not going to say I am teaching you, you just see

HL Mm you just listen and watch

MM yes and you are drawn. When you are listening and watching you feel and you are drawn in the process because an elder is not going teach you that this is the law that you don't cut the tree, this is the law, that this tree is sacred. An elder will go and sit under the shade and talk this story or talk with you and you will learn something. An elder go with you to the river as a woman and you learn what she is doing. You feel the water, you feel it when you walk, you listen to the story and you see. That's why I say people can organise all the workshops and can do all the things and said we are going to save or preserve the knowledge without the present of an elder it's like reading the book in the museum and go. because the elder took us to the natural process of connecting you to the nature. there is another point there. When I say the elder's present has to be there, you know, we are the generation on the edge and the elders are already going, the elders they have this knowledge through experience from their parents, the parents from their grandparents, this is intergenerational, coming coming. We are the one who have this knowledge and experience has to come with us and continue to live it with the children. The children will also live it then because they can't learn by the book. That's my point is that the present of the elder is still there so that when an elder died he left or she left this thing in my veins. I continue to take the other people to the other younger generation to the process. Then its continuous. It pass through generation to generation – through through through. Not impose it when the person is not there. That's why I see it to restore connection with Nature it's a process which just go through it. With elders who have experience. It's completely contradictory with the teaching. The university and the schools can do all the courses about the nature but without getting through the process. That's why I said I feel like crying when they said an elder has passed away. This elder is a big loss because the whole library has burnt down without another reference because every elder has his own her own

knowledge, her own memory. Mm. that's why we can't replace. Mm. I think that's the way. How can people think they can't restore connection with Nature. We need the guidance of the elders. Mm. Because it's not the thing that I am going to teach you about Nature. Mm. it's through experience. Through the process which comes to the vein, which comes to the understanding, which comes to the feeling. Mm. that's how it is.

HL so maybe we can talk about spirituality. **What do you understand by the term / concept of spirituality?**

MM For me the term is a new term which people describe things. But in our language we have vhadzimu

HL can you spell that?

MM V-h-a-d-z-i-m-u. We have vhadzimu and ancestors. Vhadzimu for me to describe is the same with the spirituality because vhadzimu is the ancestral connection to Nwali. I connect to Nwali through my vhadzimu

HL you connect to your

MM to Nwali, God

HL Oh to Nwali yes

MM through vhadzimu yes. That's our spiritual way.

HL so it's through the ancestors

MM yes, and this is spiritual way or connection or vhadzimu. I have the vhadzimu of my father and the vhadzimu of my mother. Whom we say this is the ancestor of the head. The head is the father of the clan. And the ancestor of the breast which is the mother... that's why for me when I understand spirituality, spirituality for me is the connection to Nwali, to the creator, to God in English maybe.

HL but it's not this Christian view of God as this old man in the sky with a big white beard

MM it's not that God, that's why I said maybe. For English description but for us it's the creator.

HL the creator

MM whom we say (in Venda) Nwali, the one whom we don't know but he know that he created everything, not only the mother planet. He created everything including the planets which are on the skies, the moon. He created all natural creation.

HL so the planets, the moon, the stars, everything.

MM Yes, not the world

HL not the world, no.

MM Because even for us in Venda, when you say the world, its shango. Shango is where people live

HL Shango

MM it's where we are living here. Shango

HL Shango

MM we mean Shango is here – Shango –la-la-la. Then God didn't create the world only, he created everything. and that's why we say maybe. He's the creator Nwali. That's why for us we say Nwali created everything. that's why Nwali also gave the law, the law of Nwali you don't get punished because you will be burned to hell. You get the punishment now. You just ignore the law of Nwali, you will feel your chilli in the tongue. As my mother said that Nwali law is chilli

HL Chilly?

MM but this new laws is sugar.

HL oh chilli not like cold, but chilli hot

MM hot

HL hot so you feel the laws of the ...its chilli hot

MM hot

HL hot

MM but this other new laws is sugar. I can just ignore them. I feel sugar sugar until the sugar get too much in my body. That's shy how my mother described it. That the law of Nwali will just become hot (screams) and you will learn. Ja this is the God this is Nwali for us who created. Then we were saying this spirituality. Ja for me this spirituality is the connection of us with Nwali through vhadzimu, that's how I see the spirituality because this connection it makes me to respect Nature as my connection with to Nwali. This spirituality makes me even to respect others because we share the same Nwali and this spirituality it gives me as a person to understand myself and it drives me to live according to the to Nwali laws. Ja. This connection through my vhadzimu it gives the laws to my veins I live them. it's not that they come from somewhere.

HL they are part of you?

MM Yes and I don't end there. I am also mupo. I'm also mupo. And I'm also in Nature. yes, for me this connection the whole thing is holistic. Mm. that's why for us the spiritual connection to Nwali is when you even before your mother gave birth to you there's preparation. When you are born, they do this ritual. For my birth there is this umbilical this thing when it seven days it's off. They also put it back to Nature. Then when I grow they are having rituals which is connecting me to through Nwali, through my vhadzimu, the mother and the father vhadzimu. You grow different stages of growth, there's this

connection because we have initiation school, we have different ceremonies. You get married there's also the thing. Seed is involved from childhood, birth. This is the connection. You get married or you have children, there is still this connection. Until you get aged, there is still this connection through vhadzimu. When you die, they also do the ritual. When they bury you, they also put the water, they also put the seed, then you are buried. It's a cycle. Spiritual connection spirituality is not the thing of going to the church. For us you do spiritual connection every minute, even when you are not doing anything, you are already connected. When I sleep, my ancestors come in the dream. I dream my father, I dream my grandmother, I dream this people who have died. Then this is the connection. For us this is spiritual connection.

HL so spirituality is also just part of your life, way of life, it's not something which you separate out into different parts of your life.

MM Yes, you said its way of life, yes its way of life every minute. It's not that something I will do it the other day and go and do it and when I finish it I am no longer there. It's not that. For us it's the whole cycle. It's not linear if I steal somebody's words. It's not linear. Cycle. That's why for us it's when you are born, that's why when before you are born, you are also chosen that you will become this and this and this for us. And you will be chosen to be makhadzi, you will be chosen to be a leader whom today English said is a chief or a king. That thing is not for us is where government set up. For us to be a chief you are born even before three generation in your family are not born you are already prepared somewhere by ancestors that in this decade somebody will be born to become a chief. That is done by the vhadzimu. I didn't chose myself to do what I am doing. Nobody who chose me. Nobody. And I cannot have power to deny or power to chose. There's nobody. Vhadzimu for us they choose before you are born. That's why when they chose you they also gave you wisdom or strength. They prepare the whole journey for you. That's why for me I will emphasise for me the concept of spirituality – spirituality is the connection to Nwali through vhadzimu. For us spirituality is vhadzimu way. Mm. it's not somebody will go and pray for me somewhere. You are ancestor you are really ancestor - they are your spiritual connection to the creator. That's why for me spirituality is through vhadzimu. We are many people in the world. Here in Venda we have many different clans. Why are we looking exactly the people of this clan? (Speaks in her language) children we have similarities. Why don't I look (speaking in her language). Why do I look like my father? Why do my father look like her father? Or look like her mother? Why? You see Thama and me. For us the head is the one which is the gene which is strong. The father. Thama does not look like me – he has different colour. Even his action are different. I look like my father. Why if the people say "oh, my father have to say he is outdated, he has died, he is a demon". Why do I look like

her? My brother who gave birth the child would look like my father and doing what my father was doing. Why? I am not doing the madou thing or the (speaks in her language) or somebody's thing. for me its spiritual its vhadzimu. Why do I don't look like other people? Not like my father or my father clan. You go if there is a gathering you see the children they look alike. They have many similarities. Why? If we have to say we don't connect with this. and it's our spirituality this vhadzimu because when they die they become vhadzimu to us and we look like them. Why my father come to my dream and tell me things? Why don't somebody from madou come and tell me things? For me that's our connection. And there are people want to cut this connection. Like this people when they tell me that I have to say my father is a demon. My father can't be a demon because I still look like him, I resemble him, I even here you can look there is similarities to the clan. The blood which is flowing here is not the blood which flows from my father. Then the spirit must not be the one, must be the spirit of somebody like Abraham or Adam. How can I erase this spiritual – do not come to me and said I must not dream my father, I must dream Abraham whom I don't know! Our spirituality is before you are born. Before before before before you are born. You cannot disconnect from your spirituality, only you can confess that I'm not connected but you still connected with them the vhadzimu. The person said I'm not a person for vhadzimu but when he go to give birth the child still looks like his father who has died maybe ten years ago. Why? The child do not look like somebody. When this children has also this things the style of living like this father whom he didn't even saw. Why don't that child change because if you say I have to disconnect with my father. Why can't I even completely change? This is a thing which I don't understand when they say there is another way for spirituality. Yes, there is another way for spirituality but it must not say that our own original way is not welcomed. Mm. there are many things. Even the name – it's my father who gave me through vhadzimu he gave me Mphatheleni name Mphatheleni and for me it a has meaning. Mm. and this children when they say I am a Baptist when I am a Christian I don't follow the ancestors but you still keep the name which you are given by your father who is dead and when the child is born it still looks like an old lady who has changed that child and stop using this name. this people they make me sick because they also said these people who are dead they are the demons but they still keep their surname or the clan name. they also disconnect there's a. that's why I say you can never never disconnect from your vhadzimu, that's the spiritual way. Spirit you cannot erase it or wash it. Mm. that's why if you disconnect it haunts you. there are many signs which will come and they show that this one you get sickness it cannot be cured. You get problems, it cannot be cured. Mm. this is happening. that's why this people they hide there at night. they go to makhadzi, they say to to makhadzi put the snuff and don't tell anybody you have put snuff. It's happening. the whole priest go and said

makhadzi can you put the water and the snuff for me, things are not going well. You can't disconnect from spirituality. From vhadzimu. No way. No way. And the ancestors when they are dead, for us they are dead by the flesh but the spirit is still there. This is what happened to Africa. I was saying this in Kenya that the Africa is suffering because of two things which are the main major thing of life. The first one is the language. We have every tribe or every group of people they are created with the language which the words of this language they carry a deep meaning which cannot be explained. They don't need to be explained that we their language. When you say mupo as a Venda person you will be knowing what is mupo beside going to the dictionary. Only the children who are born there today and stay with them in Soweto you don't show them mupo. every word when you say vhadzimu you know what do we mean. when you say kotsi meaning father its deep meaning. Eme its deep meaning from the breast zulani there's deep meaning. But Africa when it got colonised they changed the language that the younger generation when they learn they don't learn by their language. In this initiation schools there are many words which we don't use in daily life. Many meanings to Nature. children in the initiation schools they learn through Nature. but the language has changed that you go to school and you learn there by different language which does not carry the meaning. That language change everything. there is another thing which lies like poison to Africa is when Africa was disconnected to the to to disconnected spirituality in spirituality. They brought a new religion that is live your life with fear to go to burn in hell if you don't follow that religion. I do not understand that. That I have to do good things because I don't want to go to hell. In this disconnection to spirituality they did it. they disconnect the younger people with the elders. Because they know to the elders there is much spiritual connection. That's why I said you can make all conference but you cannot teach this thing. it needs the company of elder. Disconnected the younger generation with the elders. The elders are the teachers in the initiation schools. The elders who the one who guides in the family you stay with the elders. You learn everything through experience with the elder. The elders are the one who take care of the children. In Africa here they created and established their own schools where the children are no longer learning from the elders. They learn from the teachers who are not the elders. Through that when they disconnected the younger generation to elders because they see that there is spiritual deep connection with the elders, they name or labelled these elders when they die they become demon. You don't follow your ancestor because they know when they die it's a spiritual connected through ancestor. That's my understanding and through experience. Then they said when these elders die you not connected with them. Hey Jesus do not want your ancestor he only want Abraham and Isaac and who who. You go to hell if you pray through your ancestor. That's my understanding through experience also when I see how we suffered.

Then today people say we don't connect through ancestors because they've undermined the elders when they are still living and even when they died. That's why there is the breakdown of connection. But this elder whom you are saying that he does not he is not wise he cannot teach me anything I will learn from the school do you know that when people graduate they finish school they don't respect their mother homes their father homes they go to stay elsewhere because the Bible say when you get married you disconnect you part from your parents. Then you stay alone you don't want your mother in law or your father in law or the elders. You don't want your makhadzi. Its disconnection with the elder. So that even when you die they are not well with you. They become ancestors they continue say you don't follow those people they are already died. Ja, this is Africa, the language and disconnection in spirituality through with elders and ancestors. This is what Africa is suffering. Mm. and this elders they first brainwash you that you don't learn thing through your language so that even you don't talk the language which the elders speak. Mm. that's how spirituality to me is. And for me spirituality's not the thing for praying, it's not prayers spirituality. Its way of life as you said. You know our children when they grow we we when a baby is born in the family, they all love that baby. When the baby see the elder, they love the elder. But once you take them outside they no longer see that person as but is the magic come the thing which makes this children to love the the baby boy baby. Also to love the elder there. But a new thing come to disconnect disconnect. Its automatically for us when a baby a baby in the village or just a baby when a elder came you will see the baby crawling to that and saying in our language gugugu unless if it's the baby who is born somewhere and just did that something happened but naturally a baby see a person gugugu an elder and this siblings this young children when they heard there's baby at home they want to be there. You see that connection but we break this social structure. Where. Because you will say I don't want this elders, I don't want this people because they are dead the ancestor but you gave birth to the person who look like that elder. Its only the body, the eyes, the nose, everything, but not the spirit. Like when we grew up we're told that when a baby is born it's another who came, it's your makhadzi who came back. It's your older grandmother who came back. We grew up knowing that. Mm. It was having a lot of meaning. This people were wise. That's why I say when they die they are the library. They understand it. and they will see that this baby looks like somebody. This is how Africa is suffering. I think that's how I understand the concept of spirituality but for me I will add it again spirituality's not a way of doing things for a certain hours or a certain day, it's a way of life. That's why for me spirituality is not that I have to dress neat and to go somewhere and somebody is sitting up there and teaching me spirituality. No, it's not that, it's way of life. For us to say that its complete difference. The law which we get in the other new Christian way it's not the same law which is there at home. It's

not the same. There when you pray you stand up. Here when we pray we take shoes we kneel down we look down and sit on the floor on the floor but there you stand up. The prayer which they pray is not a way of life at home. We don't pray it every day. The people whom you meet there they are not the people who are with you every day of your life. How can it be spirituality for me? because there people I don't share life with them. I only see them on Sunday only. Then how am I connected with those people? The worst part there's no Nature there. I go to the room like this. spirituality is in Nature. spirituality is everywhere where you are. it's not the place where you build it, I'm building a spiritual place. They said the person is the body, the soul and spirit which means that the body and soul then spirituality we don't have to follow the original way we get the imposed way. We just come in here 1800. What about those people who live long, long ago. We still have that millet, the origin of millet we don't know where it's come from but it's our spiritual tool. We don't know where it come from but even if we trace the Bible, even the law in the Bible are our laws. When we read this Bible it's our law, the only wrote them and want to instruct people the law, not the way of life. Then spirituality is not to follow the commandment of the Bible, spirituality is way of life. Those laws written in the Bible is not complete without the whole holistic of the mupo which includes the people inside and it's not complete if it doesn't include Nature as the most most key for life because you can't live without Nature. Mm. that's how spirituality is.

HL then I think you've answered this one. **What is / constitutes / characterizes a spiritual relationship with Nature? I think you've answered that one. Do spiritual people necessarily behave in sustainable ways?**

MM in sustainable ways? Yes, spirituality if we mean the spirituality which I described.

HL Yes

MM because our way is sustainable because it's a circle. It's not linear. It's not the end product. An end product does not sustain. It's not sustainable for me.

HL and if spiritual people are living the mupo way then they are living sustainable lives.

MM yes if they live mupo way but if they mean another spiritual way which is the establishment of spiritual religion it's not mupo way. Because for us the sustainable way is when you see Nature as the thing which is there as your life. Not as the thing which you resource from it. sustainable way for us is continuous cycle – there's no end product. And I will not say sustainable development. this is sustainable development in this thing but sustainable way of life. And not life of a person, life of the whole. Do spiritual people necessarily behave in sustainable ways? I will say that the original I will say

the vhadzimu way is sustainable life, it's not sustainable development. we don't develop the spirituality, we don't develop mupo, we don't develop life. Ja. If they are doing the spiritual way its sustainable way, not sustainable development. and there's no establishment for spirituality. That's nobody who has to do that. Its Nwali himself and the creator which unfold this way to people, that's why spirituality for us the water, it's about the river and the spring. The food is about the soil and the rain and Nature. it's about the seasonal patterns, the eco calendar, it's not the development for end product. It's not economic development because the other people say sustainable development is also economic development. spiritual people they live the sustainable way because they care even for the future generation and they don't even forget those who have died. It's a cycle. It's not that I am living on the world for ninety seven years. its sustainable because it's a cycle, it's like a wheel that when you are dead in spirituality you are not finished. You are not the end. When you live you connect with those who have gone. And also prepare for those who are coming. That's for us is sustainable way. Mm.

HL and then Do religions have a role to play in the transformation to a more sustainable world?

MM do religion have a role to play in the transformation to a more sustainable – which religion?

HL religions in general.

MM in general. Let me think. do religion have a role to play in the transformation to a more sustainable world? eeh. For me I don't see religion as the – how – play a role. You know if religions see Nature – not Nature – if religions for me if religions see mupo values it will play a major role for sustainable life. Ja, if religions see the mupo values it can bring sustainable life but if religion do not see mupo values its vice versa then no sustainable life. Because religion is not for human need only or human destiny.

HL human destiny?

MM Yes. Because is not for human destiny. For for for religion to see the human destiny it dominate the other species. Because the destiny could be for human. The destiny has to be sustainable to in a holistic way. Then it can play a role for sustainability if it see on that window

HL but it must look at it from in a holistic way

MM not for human destiny

HL not only for human.

MM it will play a bigger role if it see mupo values. For me that's my emphasis – this is where it will embrace Nature, that Nature is not for human resources, it's not for human needs. The holistic, the whole thing and religion will also the religions will have a role to play in the transformation for sustainable world if it pay attention on the role of Nature, on the role of mupo. Role of nature, role of

mupo, role of nature, for the rights of existence of everything. this is where religion should show that man is not created to dominate Nature. it must not pay attention on saving the soul, it's about I don't know which word I will say. It's not about the soul, it's about the holistic of all creation of the universe.

HL so it's not just about the human soul?

MM I mean that, when I said soul, it's about human soul. Because the religions like saving the human soul. Mm. that's how I see. And religion must not be something which outside, part, which the whole life is on this other side. There is a space for religion somewhere. Like when we say its matter of Sunday, its way of life. Religion has to focus on where we come from and where are we going, not to hell or heaven. When I say the origin way, when we say where do we come from, we have origin which has to be accompanied by the laws of origin or guided. Law of origin. Mm and the law of origin respected Nature because it saw the value of mupo. The law of origin has never seen a man as a dominating he has seeing the man having rights to dominate other species that's the law of origin. Not so long the imposed law which is a new law which interferes in the whole fabric of governance system of mupo. It brought disorder. That's why I say this new law which is imposed. it also imposed a new way of spirit of religion which is not the origin. And that religion it only talk about the human destiny, human soul, human destiny. While our ancestral laws of origin, it talks about the holistic view of everything.

HL and then I think you've answered this one...oh... you've answered this one a little bit. **Do you participate in regular spiritual practices, rituals, etc.?**

MM yes. I participate in rituals. We have rituals. In Venda we have thevhula, we have u phasa

HL can you spell

MM we have thevhula T-h-e-v-h-u-l-a. We have uphasa – u space p-h-a-s-a . this is our rituals. We have a ritual for ruma – biting the things which we ripe we reap. Before we eat we have this ruma. Thanking Nature has provided us, thanking ancestors they are telling Nwali to bring us food. Before we go to the new, which is to start again, when the rain comes, we also do the ritual to ask rain so that we get healthy, we'll get food. And this things we participate. Also for spiritual practices for healing. My father was a healer, I'm also doing the healing. I have to do this ... and spiritual practices. I have to wake up early and do the patla.

HL every day?

MM not every day. There is special patla there is also I can find myself doing patla the whole week. I can find doing patla when we if there is a need I have to do that but every day when I sleep I do snuff, it's my way of life like my makhadzi, but when I sleep I put snuff on the pillow and say I am going to

sleep then the dreams comes I sleep well. When I wake up early in the morning if I slept well if I feel something bothering I go and put snuff. You cannot say I am doing that's why you cannot say its Sunday for us, its everyday.

HL everyday

MM but we have the bigger ritual for the clan, we have the bigger ritual for the biting. There are many. Like our healing thing, it's also the spiritual practices. If I go up there at the mountain and I look for herb, I first have to tell the ancestors this and this, tell Nwali that I'm going to use this to heal. Mm.

HL and this one you've answered very well right through – **can one have a spiritual relationship with Nature?**

MM Yes, that's the other thing also. There's many things I can, when a child is born...

HL Okay, then sustainable development. What do you think the world needs if we are to overcome the global crises facing us?

MM the world needs to go back to the roots because the leaves are always green because there are the leaves, the roots.

HL the roots. So the leaves are green because of the roots.

MM the global crisis and the threats which are coming is because people have destroyed mupo and they end up destroying nature. I'm saying that they have interfered so much to the mupo flow, not destroy, interfered to the mupo and destroyed nature

HL the mupo flow?

MM Mm. if they don't remember this root, the global crisis which are happening is going to lead to death

HL death?

MM end death! We have the simple thing, the global warming, it's not the interference of human activities to the mupo flow, its hot. up there, its polluted, down here its polluted, down there under the soil its polluted. They remove everything, mining, there are many machines, up the sky all this technology disturbing all the flow in nature or in mupo. How can we live? How can the wild become healthy if mupo is not healthy? How can that happen? Unless they remember the root, the green leaf become green because of the root. The world's forgotten the root because of economic development. as I said from the beginning, that in Mupo Foundation we are trying by all the way to find way of order because of the new the modern or the new governance system which is bringing disorder. And also the

future generation this is why we want to bring order looking back at the root, where do we come from are we only the one species on earth, that's why we said that and also that's why I said the world do not need economic development because economic development's going to bring this thing. The world do not need money. What are we going to do with the bags of money if there are no more trees, no more rivers, the sea and the ocean is polluted. What are we going to do with the money? If the world want to overcome this global crises because there are big threats coming it must look at the different policy makers that every law every policy it has the nature care. Not conservation. In a deep deep sense that health come from nature, food come from nature, rain come from nature, life comes from nature and life is holistic it's not one. if the world want to overcome the global crisis it must stop looking at the human need only. Because the human need is going to consume everything and human will be left I don't know where. Because if people are poisoning the soil, they are destroying nature. they are poisoning the atmosphere here. Where this human going to stay? They are poisoning the water, up to the sea. I mentioned the sea. If the world want to overcome this global crisis, yes we have done the massive destruction to nature but if they want to overcome it must look I wish I am Mandela or I am somebody who can be listened that all the world SAVE EVERY INDIGENOUS FOREST, SAVE EVERY INDIGENOUS TREE wherever it is wherever you want to build something unique, SAVE. Unless we save the indigenous forest, there's no cure , there's no other thing which can overcome the threats of global crisis unless because the indigenous trees, indigenous forest, they are the only key of our life, of everything. it's not about nature only, it's about the indigenous forest, the indigenous trees. We go to muya mufhe from the indigenous forest, the whole ecosystem is stable there where there is indigenous forest. Just go to the indig the wetland there and remove the indigenous forest and plant your own plantation. Show me that it is remain as wetland. A person just go to the old plantation and show me there is ecosystem balance there. If people are talking about overcoming the global crisis, they must first go to the rivers which they are blocking, and see what is happening after that blockage which they make. They run the whole river up to where it go to the big river or to go to the sea and see the consequences of blocking that river. That's why I wish I can speak to the people there who are making the policies. They must show me these people departments which are making the mining companies or the mining development. they go to the place where they do mining and show us what the effects after that. Then they could save this other places which they want to mine. The world will not overcome the global crisis which are coming if they do not look at the consequences of their works, of their activities, of their deeds because it looks like the world is continue to do this and do not look at the effects of it. And to overcome this global crisis it's not for us who are living today it's the future generation of the

earth, of the planets , the future generations to come, not only future generation of the world, not the future generation of the human only, I mean future generations of

HL everything

MM everything. if they want to overcome. I think I will stop there.

HL Okay, I think lets answer these two together. Do you think consumption and materialism are problematic? If so, why? And how do you think we can overcome consumption and materialism?

MM problematic is the problem?

HL Ja

MM ja, it's a big problem. Consumption and materialism is a big problem because this thing only look for human need only. Human satisfaction. It's a clear thing that through consumption. People see the water in the tap, they don't see the other thing. they don't see the value of the river. People see the market or the shop which provide food. They don't see food as connected with the nature. when people think of materialism, they only think of money. Own own I own I own I own. They think of themselves only, they don't see the rights of any other thing. Materialism is not holistic view. It's a linear thing. it's not the cycle. Mm. I own I own I have the material. After you have the material and all the money, the banks will be full. Are we going to grind this money and chew it? Yes, ja maybe we'll grind the money and chew it. because even the seed, the soil is poisoned because of money. If somebody want to own the seed, that you no longer select you own seed, you go to buy the seed which has chemicals which does not grow on its own and you also put the chemicals on the soil. For what? You poison the seed and the soil because of owning, owning, owning material, owning money. Mm. Materialism and consumerism it will stereotype people that you eat for hunger you don't eat for health, you don't live healthy, its matter of owning owning having having material. You know materialism and consumerism –it make people worth, not to have a well-being, but to have worth it's not necessary as long as I have. Ja, this is the ...and this is leading to death.

HL and how do you think we can overcome it? I suppose it goes back to what you're already saying how can we overcome consumption and materialism?

MM We can overcome this thing because of changing the policies which is governing the world. Because unless we change the policy, people will not be able to go back to the root. The root I mean that we are living in the holistic life, not human need , life. We have the corporations, they only see materialism and consumerable. But if the policies are not changed to the values of mupo then how because we all the corporations here we have the indigenous forests extending here. the corporatives

see money by using that indigenous space here then how can we do how can we defend that indigenous forest? We people whom we saw the holistic view we see the indigenous forest to be saved as it is, but the corporatives see the mineral under the indigenous forest to be taken away, then how can we defend that if the policies are not changed? That's how I see only see if we overcome if the policies can be changed to the values of mupo, to the values of nature, that it's not about the world, it's about the whole whole holistic life. That's the for me when the policies came how can we defend because the corporatives are extending there to make money. Then the government is at the centre with its policies. And how do we think we can overcome this ja the policies if they are changed, we can but it is also the backward to overcome. But if we see human need only we cannot. Human need, materialism, consumption or consumerable, it's for human need, it's not for other species. And a simple example a person because of consumer and materialism block the river so that all these species beyond his blockage don't have rights to exist. We only see the rights of existence of every creation. Only after one tree is left and one river is left but now we don't see. We block the river, you see the animals migrating from here, they stay here, they stay here, they follow the river, that during the rainy season yes the water is here, I can migrate to this other place. My dung and my footprint when I walk here it missing the nature but you just make a fence that this animal has to stay here for materials somebody has a game park and people will come and watch the animal. For what? I wish I become a lion and lock up all the people and the animals they come to watch the game people. Ja. For what? You see the sacred site, you think of mine. Forget that this is ecosystem which is very sensitive. This trees they are helping all. This habitat for all other things, but because of materialism you wanting to put electricity inside there. But what about those things which have run away from plantation and stay there. Only safe place, refuge. My for me this thing consumption and materialism is destroying nature and destroying life. And it is bringing disorder. If this disorder continues, what about the future generation? Because our ancestors didn't bring disorder for us but we are like the people that are greedy, that there's no rights for the future generation. If they want to prove it, let them make the whole world or the whole South Africa to become Joburg, the whole, they will see the consequences. Then why don't we save these other places which just remain. That's why I will say materialism and consumption to be overcome is when the policy makers change and they said every indigenous tree, every indigenous forest, every river must not be touched up to now if we want to overcome. But if we want to continue to destroy, there's no future. It's better to tell all the women no longer to give birth. And all the animals they terminate to no longer have little animals because where are they going to sleep. Because we think if we have water in the tap it will continue to flow every time. They don't think that rain come from nature, they don't

think that food is from nature, they don't even think of health come from nature. they want to pave all the soil that people walk on the clean place. They want to cover the whole sky with the wires that we don't have to see the mupo light. They don't even know. that's why we say what we are losing from the origin or from mupo. We don't know how much we are losing. We don't know what this is and that light making to our eyes. We don't know. until the whole sky is covered, then we will see that light does not come from our senses here, it come even from the light. It's the thing we don't think but we think for the future generation. Look here, the ears can no longer listen, its everywhere the noise. And what about the future generation? If the policies are going to be changed, it will also change the education policies. That children are not going to school for career orientation only. They're going to education for life. Because yes a child go for career, that I become this career, then I earn money, its final. That money does not fulfill. Where do people go to the nature or not nature – they go to Kruger Park. They said hey we want to go... why, for what, what are these people looking for if they don't stay at home? What is that thing which they fulfill if they see the animals? We are lonely without this. There is connection with this animal, why why? We animals are our totems. Animals we enjoy to see them, we know that when they grazing, when they walk, it feeds us. But somebody just fence them. Why? We know that people is connected with animals, people is connected with nature and I want them to stop to do this if they don't see connection. That's my argument, that we have totems, we have animals which graze all over here and people forget that the animals have to graze accordingly. They're the big animals we do not graze down down . There animals which graze the leaves, there are animals which graze the grass, there animals which insects which play after this grazing has happened, then why are we blocking the benefit of all this? Mm. This is when the policy change – that life comes from nature, life do not come from materials. Life do not come from owning nature or dominating nature. Life comes from when a human being is the whole, it's the we are mupo is the bowl of nature.

HL is the

MM bowl of life. Bowl like container

HL oh bowl, bowl, yes

MM Then in this bowl, everything is there, is covered, is protected. It has its space but if we destroy this bowl, nature's

HL is gone

MM we also go. that's how life is, but the policy if they don't change....

TAKES A CALL.

If we destroy this bowl of mupo, mupo bowl, how can we live? Because people say now they nature is getting away, we have this threats coming, then the policy has to change. The policy if they don't change, then there's nothing. I want to ask these policy makers, when they sit down and think and think and think, don't they think that, because it's not children who make policies, its people who are educated. They say they have done environmental laws and we do the policy for environment, why do they forget that there is a bowl of life? Ja, they put the, they don't care about nature but they grown up people, they say we environmentalist. Why don't they tell the corporatives that if they mine this place, we are here as environmentally people, there's no life if we mine this. But um I don't understand also this people, they highly highly corporative people, they highly highly well people in the departments or whom they said they learn things, they the ones who go to Woolworth and buy organic food. Why? They're very conscious about their health. What about the peoples whom they are leading? Like we in our way, we say a chief wamsanga, its wamsanga because they are the people. If you kill all these people, you can't be wamsanga. And these people they also allow the accept this thing organic food, for whom, which means we have they are still not as we are in South Africa it's still not a democratic world where it has to benefit everybody. They put the organic food they're expensive. For whom? We have food parcels in schools, why don't they provide the organic stuffs in schools? But the minister said I'm the minister of education and when I buy my food I go to Woolworth, I buy organic stuff. But he pass the law that there must be feeding scheme in he doesn't concern which means that this world which we live in, this governance systems which is governing us, is not a sustainable governance system. It's a governance which want to benefit now and die and leave everything on the edge that you will see your way on your own. It's not governance for sustainability. That's how it is, its matter of my my , not wellbeing. I I I I that's how I see it that we still in the consumerable..

HL Ja, I think we need to move on.

I think you've answered this one **What is your view on why there is suffering in the world?**

MM aah because people have ignored the bowl of life. They disconnect from nature, they separating which I said, that food is provided. The world is suffering because of materialism and this thing.

HL consumption... and then I think you've also answered this one what **In your view what is the world 'calling' for?**

MM Death

HL its calling

MM view? The world

HL what is world calling for? But I think you've also spoken about this, in terms of returning to the root.

MM Oh, what the world is calling for, oh , it's the crisis, the threats coming they are the wake-up call that you have forgotten the root.

HL Yes

MM if it was not happening, we'll be destroying everything. The consequences which is reminding us the way. It's like the green leaves forget the root they're the ones bringing the green thing.

HL and then this question **How do you think we should go about 'sustainable development' in South Africa?**

MM by the policy makers.

HL the policy makers

MM they have to be changed before they destroy the whole South Africa.

HL but then what you've also said, you've made a very clear distinction between its not you've said sustainable development equals economic development – we don't need that, we need sustainable life

MM life

HL Yes. And that's about returning to the root

MM yes

HL it's about remembering the value of mupo

MM yes. And sustainable development in South Africa is what we are doing at Mupo – there will be sustainability if they bring the order for whom the government and by changing the policies. And also for future generations because what they are doing now is for finishing linear thing. they don't care about the future generation. I think in South Africa it has to learn about the values of mupo and remember the value of mupo because now even they want to interfere in sacred site they put electricity in the sacred site and they pave it so it become a hotel, where is the rain going to come from because there is no magic for rain. So the magic for climate change solution, there's no magic if they don't go to the root of nature, of mupo value.

HL and I think this one you've also answered very well **Do you think there is a relationship between Nature, spirituality and sustainable living?**

So that one word, hey

MM there's no no no its nature, spirituality, it's just like this – hands clasped, fingers interlinked. All this is under mupo

HL yes, that's why I said one word mupo

MM Yes one word.

HL we're finished, no more!

MM Oh

HL that's the end.

MM mm, they are nice questions. It makes to think a lot. People will understand this?

HL I hope so

MM There are people who think like this?

HL I think like this. I think that's why when I first read about you on Schumacher College, on the website, that's where I saw your name first, I thought I want to talk to this person, because this person's got a lot of information and wisdom and then that's how I tried to I couldn't find anything I looked looked looked and then I found GRAIN and I found Elf and then I tried to contact her but she didn't reply and a friend that I'm studying with is a very good friend of Elfrieda's

MM Oh

HL and she said and then she put me together and then I got your contact details.

MM I saw your emails. It was this year hey, when we were so busy about this court case thing

HL Yes, ja.

MM then I said hey this week when I come from Kenya, then I have time

HL some time. No I mean I think that the work that you're doing is very important work and its more people need to know about this and more people need to start living like this. that's my argument in my thesis is that people are disconnected from nature and they need to get back to a spiritual relationship with nature.

MM mm

HL because of all this materialism and we're living by the wrong values

MM Ja

HL consumerism and the as you say the whole economic economic way of life, it's all the wrong values so if we get back to nature, get back to a spiritual relationship with nature then

MM yes, and this is how the life will continue to flow cycle, not finish

HL ja

MM people have lost the values of life

HL so what I'll do what I do is I go home and type this all up, the whole interview, it takes a long time, I type it all up so I'll send that to you

MM Okay

HL and then I'll also send you this recording.

MM oh thanks for that. I will listen to myself also

HL Yes

MM thank you very much this one I will listen

HL and also when the thesis is finished, I can give you a copy as well.

MM thanks a lot

HL thank you and thank you for your time. You've given me a lot of time and

MM I make this day for you

HL I am very grateful, thank you very much

MM it's the one which you sent this? (referring to the list of questions)

HL Yes. I made a few changes , that's why its crossed out, because I was using this one, put in another question and I moved those two so I don't know you can keep that if you want to

MM thanks. thanks for this because I also want to listen.

HL Ja, thank you very much.

MM you are welcome, very welcome. I was also happy to spend a day doing this.

HL thank you thank you very much. Okay Now you can get on with your day.

MM hmm?

HL Now you can get on with your day.

MM Yes, I want to plant pineapples

HL oh okay

MM My father planted pineapples and I am getting seed of pineapple and planting

HL oh wonderful, that's good. My father also, I mean he he's the one I've learned a lot of my nature information. He also doesn't believe in going and sitting in a church. For him it's to out to into nature when he was young he used to also climb mountains

MM that's nice

HL and be very active so I learned a lot of my beliefs and understanding

MM Fathers are very special, old fathers not the new ones like today's fathers, the old ones. I admire everybody who has an old father, they are very I will I think I didn't get enough time with my father

HL Ja. My father is now 70 70 he's going to be 77 in May.

MM Very special person. Yo. The fathers, that's my father there (pointing to photographs on the wall)

HL oh there, okay

MM and then that's the father of mother and then the mother of my mother

HL Okay, thank you again very much

MM you are welcome, we didn't even cook lunch.

Appendix I

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION: NIRMALA NAIR

Interview with Nirmala Nair 2 May 2011 – 15h00 to 17h30 approx

HL Okay so the the first question is tell me about the work you do so that I've got some context.

NN Shall I start at the moment what I am doing because it's quite related to mindfulness. At the moment we are I will use the term I we interchangeably because my work is part of ZERI work also. At the moment we are assisting Bhutan in developing new economic initiatives in alignment with gross national happiness. As you know Bhutan is the first country who coined this term gross national happiness – happiness of the people, of the ecosystem and overall wellbeing. So they invited us as the state guests last year to assist them how we can help them develop policies economic policies that will be totally in alignment with people's happiness and the wellbeing of the people and ecosystem etc so that led on to thirty five new portfolios, innovations and technologies that Bhutan could use without really degrading their ecosystem and their forest and all of that. From there came this idea that that we should showcase Bhutan's work on happiness and how we create competitiveness and happiness in a way that the new innovations and technologies can create a new economic environment. So that's what we're doing – we're doing a week-long seminar with about seventy five people from around the world, really top-notch business and investors and fifteen innovators are gathering about a week long interaction with the local Bhutanese government chaired by the prime minister and gross national happiness commission so I've been busy, busy, busy. Really trying to organise this seminar and that's really deeply meaningful and soulful work for me because it allows me to see that there is a small country in a mountain kingdom in the Himalayas whose really ready to take a very out of the box thinking where you're not trapped with just the economic incentives but you can also work with them and show that this is possible. If a country as small as Bhutan can do this, anyone can do it so that has been my dream project for this year, to be able to work and showcase these new technologies and how we can create this really bottom up initiatives.

HL Just explain to me exactly where Bhutan is

NN Bhutan is sandwiched between India on the one side, China on the other side and Nepal to the west I think north west, China completely north and south India.

HL and any other current or past work that you want to mention

NN you mean in terms of how, in terms of the work itself, my work has always been trying to see how we can bridge development with well-being but with a deeper consciousness because my frustration with most of the sustainable development work is that it's not touching upon the consciousness aspect. We shy away from consciousness, we don't use the word conscious or meditation or spirituality and yet we are talking about sustainable development and for me sustainable development is sustaining life and sustaining life has to be in many other ways not just in material ways so you sustain life from the source of energy, you sustain life from the world of matter but from the world of energy. So the dance between the world of energy and the world of matter has to be somehow meaningful articulated in the world of sustainable development. It's happening now, we are very slowly we're beginning to use the word spirituality or consciousness and mindful living etc but it's still not embraced from a heart space let's put it that way. From a head space we are accepting it and we are theorising it and doing seminars and workshops but really accepting it from a heart space means having to undergo a lot of one's current assumptions about lifestyles and assumptions about our roles and identities and belongingness and rootedness and all these things and these areas are so murky and so deep that we don't want to tread upon them so we kind of live in our neatly boundaried comfort zones and start defining all of these concepts and again enter into an intellectual debacle about what spirituality or mindfulness or deeper consciousness or systems thinking is all about without really coming down into a heart space so that has been my challenge and that's one of the reasons why I haven't been able to fare well in the world of sustainable development or in the world of academia because I feel as though I need to do more justice from the world of energy and this energetics and consciousness space and then come and talk about the sustaining life from that perspective so to that aspect I think my work with ZERI has really given me on the one hand the credible scientific you know scientific stamp in a way because a lot of the work we do in ZERI is with scientists and this has basically allowed me a forum to prove that we can actually talk about wellness, wellbeing, deeper consciousness all of these things while being able to challenge existing business and technology and existing economic systems. So it's a kind of a juggling many balls in the air and yet some falls away and some doesn't hit the aim but I've managed to create my safe space in that thing without having to compromise my heart space. That's my priority that I don't that I cannot actually operate as a being unto myself if I have to compromise on my heart's belief systems. My head comes in every now and then and knocks me here and there but at the end of the day I feel I am answerable to the heart. So that's where my work, quite a lot of the work that I do in terms of consciousness and training and workshops and healing it's all been around about how we bridge this gap between the world of matter and the world of the energetics and how do we find a comfortable middle

ground and Bhutan being the Buddhist country I think that it is just in their bones. So maybe that's why I am so deeply blessed and honoured that I am getting this opportunity to work with them because the more I work in that context, the more I'm able to fine tune the whole concept of mindful living. How do we actually do that in a way without compromising quite a lot of the other essentials of living practically and doing economically and policies and the government and all of these issues. A long-winded answer.

HL and how did you get into or find your way into the current field of work? You've little spoken about through ZERI

NN I'll have to take you back, quite a way back how I entered the ZERI frame of work. I used to work mainly with rural women in Rajasthan in India and my work mainly used to be around development issues, community development issues but mainly focusing on leadership training for women and really assisting them and enabling them finding a voice and pushing for women's participating in local government. All of that, more or less, like the good old style of feminist conscious raising workshop type. This was in early seventies, eighties and around that period I got by that time I had already done my masters in sociology so I was deeply into all of this social development, community development kind of work. Then I had a scholarship fellowship rather to go to Netherlands to the Institute of Social Studies to do another Masters in development studies focusing on gender in development. That took me quite deeply into the classical development theories and critiques of developmentalism and made me start thinking about the role of development and what's happening with the mainstream development theories and how it's impacting on people's lives etc so I think in a way I owe it to my stay in the Netherlands and my masters at that time actually was on the whole concept of conscious raising and development and how does it affect the whole conscious raising training programmes and its relationship to the whole development theories and development programmes. That journey then took me directly and indirectly to South Africa because I was still quite a hard core developmentalist while I was staying in the Netherlands. I had begun to question developmentalism but I was still quite into the development philosophy as such but I think it was my coming to South Africa in a funny sort of way that really really toppled the apple cart so to speak. I think that toppling happened because it took me on a journey of my own self discovery because I came to South Africa with quite a big ego, thinking here I am a hard core feminist really into gender and development its global issue, it's a global thing and I can go and work with this anywhere and the world needs this so I'm kind of one of these indispensable beings who can float around, do this work anywhere and everywhere but I think South Africa really gave me a big whack and wake up call. I suddenly discovered that I couldn't really do much with my expertise and

knowledge etc in South Africa for various reasons. I think the race and class and all the kind of set up at that time. And the way South Africa was dealing with development was very different from the way we in India we were dealing with development issues and gender and all of that because here the race and the whole and your struggle and it was just around that time when.. it was just before 1993, just before the elections so the country was still very much into... development issues were not a priority at that time, you had many other stuff to do and the country's focus was all on other aspects, the elections and the new government etc but it have me a big push to start using that period to understand the role of identity, of and many other issues about how do we construct this identities, about who we are and where we come from and where does our whole idea of belongingness comes from and who shapes our belongingness and how is it being shaped by our own immediate social realities. So those issues took me back into my own exploration of who am I and where have I come from. Here am I in a Hindu, Indian, rebel woman married to a white English-speaking South African who I thought had quite a lot of shared dreams that I had when we met in the Netherlands, but when coming to South Africa I began to realise that when you are in your own country, people's psyches and people's sense of who they are change drastically and dramatically and it was a big wake up call for me that how whimsical and flimsy this whole notion of identity is especially if you've done a lot of deep inner work. In the absence of not being able to do deep inner work, what I call soul work, if you are involved only in a superficial political realm, doing political work and you think that your political work is also your soul work then it creates a trajectory of an identity that is constructed around these externalities or external realities that shapes the aspect of who you are and it has no relation to a deeper aspect of your inner being that the core of your inner being that is still clamoring and crying to come out and I think I realised that there was this disjuncture in all my relationships that I encountered in South Africa. I had to kind of stand back and see that okay so there is a big gap when people are not even able to understand what I am talking about because everyone is talking about only from an externalised construct of who they are and where they coming from and the hesitation to get deeper into that deeper, murkier stuff that the soul and the self has created became a big problematic for my own personal relationship and life and professional work because I wasn't able to engage meaningfully with most of the people that I wanted to engage because they were not ready to go into that deeper, darker, murkier space because they were very happy to move in the comfort zone of the political, rosy-hued identity that haloed them and that shaped their being of who they are and what they are and they basked in the glory of that and they didn't want to go deeper into the stuff because going deeper into the stuff means dealing with all the mindfulness stuff. it's really coming and grappling with that kind of discomfort, that paradoxes and that kind of a dark,

deep, demons inside of us that also raises a lot of issues for us and the for me it became very very apparent because I was involved with this multi-racial kind of relationship so it was certain kind of, taken for granted-ness in terms of the language and the culture and simple every day realities. It became a big problematic because most of the people, the so-called activist kind of a world didn't want to engage with it. I mean now looking back I was at great pains to really even communicate the issue of eating habits and lifestyles and mindfulness with any of these people that I moved around and engaged with and now suddenly seventeen years these are all catch words. I remember sitting in a COSATU meeting and one of the training things in Salt River and there during the break time they all came with Coke Coca Cola and burgers and then I was talking about yes it is about gender yes it is about development and all of that but I always brought in the whole aspect of health and taking and addressing the issue of health politics and then how the pharmaceutical companies have basically made us slaves to some of these habits of and they would all kind of look at me and think that I am kind of crazy to be raising all of these kinds of issues. Here we talking about rights and how this and now that why we would we now meander away to what we're drinking and eating during lunch time and so it became increasingly impossible for me to work in most of the kind of little work inroad during that time. It just became impossible, I thought we're talking at different different language. Fortunately now I see quite a lot of those groups that I worked with are now talking about health and good living and food and organic food food security and all of that so it's good that its ten fifteen years down the line its becoming a common but I think yes that's how I arrived at ZERI because I began this deep, I almost went through my dark, darkest phase in my life was in South Africa. I lost my belief in development, I lost my belief in the kind of gender development we were all doing at that time, this was early eighties. So I started doing my own I became a bit of a recluse and started doing my own reading and research and self-study. And I came across ZERI at that time through Fritjof Capra's book Hidden Connections - there's a whole big chapter on ZERI. So I wrote to Capra and then I got Gunter Pauli's email and then I never looked back so in 19, no in 2000 I had the good fortune to meet Gunter and I went to Nairobi and there was a big meeting with Wangari Maathai because Wangari is a very great friend of Gunter and ZERI so I was very fortunate to be there and had long discussions and then he invited me to come and do a full ZERI practitioner's training in New Mexico so I ended up going there four times over two years or something and became a fully accredited ZERI practitioner and came back and he gave me permission to start ZERI Southern Africa so that has been the start of a new life for me at least I've found a niche where I feel as though I could work with all of these mish-mash of unarticulated so-called unviable concepts but put them all into some kind of a package with the science and innovation and technology

and deeper concepts of wellbeing and all of these things. And I started moving away gradually from the mainstream development discourse because I just felt that it wasn't making sense for me because it wasn't addressing quite a lot of my own personal belief systems of how to marry the whole notion of living wellbeing plus continuously changing ecosystems and all of those things wasn't being answered to me by the normal mainstream sustainable development discourse and I found quite a lot of it very hypocritical and really. I've come to coin the term it's like a sustainable development industry where these kings and queens float around and who doing their own little dramas and the rest of the world must just follow and it just become a big consultant driven big multi-national industry basically. So that's where I feel that ZERI somehow has opted out of that because we don't fundraise and we not really an economic institution. We're more working on a network and really emulating how nature's networks systems would work so it's like knowledge capital and open source and really not working on ownership-based, this big entities it's like creating and fostering and nurturing wherever the climate is viable. So whoever asks us to come, we go and do our workshops and trainings and that's allowed me to sustain my life's work and my soul work in a way. I found a place where I can marry both and then they can both co-exist without causing discomfort to each other so I could kind of say that I am being truly mindful in this kind of work that I am doing, that I don't have to compromise any of my belief systems. Sjoie I don't know how you're getting to – your wrist is going to. Why don't you bring a type writer and type?

HL I can't type as fast

NN Okay

HL I'm a two finger typist and I can type quite fast with two fingers

NN so it's better to write

HL I just hope that that works (referring to recorder). Okay, the third question is **What global and local trends do you see currently impacting on your work?**

NN Globally it is really I think all the current unraveling that is happening, economic unraveling, natural systems unraveling and the collapse and all of these things in a way has been a big blessing in direct blessing not even in disguise. A direct blessing for us because we've been going on and on about localised decentralised systems for a long time and it has not been really wide heard or if it has been heard it has been hi-jacked and manipulated and contorted to make it look as though its decentralised system but actually it's still controlled by small groups of people. So Bhutan is a classic example, here's a whole country whose government and policy makers including the investors and bankers are sitting with us and designing the entire country's initiative, based on our principles and philosophies so it's really a

big. It's quite a big thing for us, for ZERI to be able to do that and then in other parts of the world and most of our operations have been in Japan so far and having had this devastating triple catastrophe in Japan with all the earthquakes and plus all the radiation and the Fukushima etc it has been a major major wake up call for the rest of world so as a result now Germany has really decided to move away from nuclear completely and Germany's working with ZERI to work out how we can actually work on a setting up a new system where Germany as a country will not have any more nuclear and as we speak right now Gunter is sitting in Germany working out all the numbers and statistics and details of how Germany can achieve this and then how we can assist them work towards a new package for energy and all the relevant matters so it's coming at a very critical time that suddenly people are beginning to realise that what ZERI has to offer in terms of a cascading portfolio of packages to really enhance the local ecosystem and the wellbeing of the people and their economic situation is possible. It's become more and more realistic and locally what's happening is I am working with very closely with a couple of projects. One is in Eastern Cape where we are working to design a whole zero waste agricultural business cluster. The entire municipal operations will be looking into creating jobs and livelihoods from agricultural waste, creating about 3000 different jobs but it will be all cluster packaged locally, intricately interlinked from waste of one to another so it's a whole cascading systems and agriculture ministry has been very interested in our work for a while so they have now they invited me to submit a concept paper on agro-ecology so last year I submitted a ZERI based or ZERI inspired agro-ecology so it will be drawing all of the Cuban models of agro-ecology but then shaping it based on some of the ZERI ideas and ZERI inspired principles and practices so that is going quite well so the whole idea is how do we create a cluster of training institutes around the world, around the country, looking at agricultural or agro-ecology training centres. That's one of the proposals that's in the pipeline and the ministry's really being open and working with us on that. Then there is some other initiatives that are happening in terms of urban space development where they're going to draw in a very big way on ZERI's idea of a clustering new ways of creating urban space where you can harness your energy, water management and water treatment plus food and food security, training and all of these things into an urban new city development so they have been working with Gunter on that and I think I can't name the project yet because it's in the pipeline for the political kind of approval and all of that. If it comes through then it will be one of the biggest projects that we'll be working on in Western Cape

HL Western Cape?

NN Ja, it will be in Western Cape. So things are really looking up and there are also groups in other parts of South Africa who are interested in setting up a lot of small training initiatives around the country

because when we need to bring in all these technological innovations we need local investors, but then we also need locally trained people who are able to think in this kind of way because yes we call it systems thinking but it's so different from the kind of systems thinking usage. It's also really leveraging quite a lot of that whole deeper consciousness about wellbeing and harnessing this whole principles of compassionate co-creativity and all of these deeper aspects which sustainable development discourses are not really touching upon so it's a very big space to create those kind of a training so we're now offering a training in August to all the conservationists, specially custom-made for ecologists and conservationists to work in this kind of approach inspired by ZERI and by biomimicry, the design principles. So both Claire and I will be doing this series of workshops for the SANBI [South African National Botanical Institute] people. So it's kind of really opening up in a quite a big way and I think we've also been asked to develop an evaluation tool and resource kit to develop a whole resource kit to see how do we do environmental evaluations differently. Because at the moment we have so many of this programmes happening but none of them can really tap into these deeper aspects that we're talking about so can we actually create a model where we can look into some of these. Can we create any kind of a usable models which are flexible and resilient enough to harness some of these aspects when we design evaluation tools so that's another project that we're working on currently. So its slowly the world is embracing ZERI.

HL so you would say in terms of the global and local trends, it's the global is more I mean what you've mentioned now it's been sparked off by Japan and this whole shift away from nuclear and then locally looking at there's issues of job creation, different kinds of training, urban space and looking at conservation and looking at how conservation is done and environmental assessments.

NN Ja, ja. Because what I am trying to do is also bring in a little bit of that whole Bhutanese energy. You know how do we actually create a space in South Africa where we can start meaningfully addressing the issue of wellbeing and the happiness aspect. I mean we just need to walk around this country anywhere from the malls to rural areas to anywhere. We know that people are deeply deeply unhappy here and deeply wounded, deeply angry and then we bask in this whole façade of happiness outside with big smiles but there's nothing inside, there's a deep hollowness and emptiness so I really want to somehow addressing that and address it in a way that we can move away from that place of fear and discomfort to a more place of liveliness and deeper honesty even if it's a discomfort, let's face it honestly. Yes, it is discomfort, yes it is hurting but let's grapple with it and see how we can move towards a more resilient notion of wellbeing. Nobody goes to be happy one hundred percent of the time but it's not a happiness of that kind of a thing, it's more deeper fullness that we need to look for instead of this deeper

emptiness that we're dealing with. And then we pretend that we're happy outside. So somehow if I can bring those into some of the kind of work that we're doing, then I can think we can make a big headway.

HL and then which of these trends give you hope for the future?

NN the trends you mean

HL of the things which you've just spoken about now

NN well you know the trends that I spoke about are projects. What gives me hope is the creation of a space and an ever expansive space we're able to harness and leverage these different emotions and feelings and quite consciously work towards consciousness. So it's that creation of that space, that meaningful space, that gives me hope. And I think what's happening in all of these trends that space is opening up and because that space is opening up, it becomes a very fertile ground to really play around with the soil there. Earlier we didn't have any opening in that kind of a way, all doors were kind of locked and barred. So projects become meaningful only when we are able to create that conscious space.

HL and now we're moving on to the Nature section which is about Nature.

NN right

HL and the first question I want to ask is **what early memories or experiences do you have of Nature?**

NN Oooh I can go on and on. That takes me to a completely different trajectory because I suppose in a way that's the reason why I am doing what I am doing because I never went to school for the first eleven years of my life. I grew up in the mountains of Himalayas in Cashmere. No schooling and my playmates were stalactites, looking at the snow and playing in the wild and going out in the open. No formal structures so, no restrictive conditioning about what to be and how to be

HL it's amazing

NN so I think that created a or rather shaped the whole idea of this space, that fertile ground, the soil, the wilderness, being at one with Nature and then that creates your entire being of who you are and what you are. because at the moment you know we don't have that luxury and that at the same time we need that, we need to somehow enter into your own internal landscapes even if you don't have the external landscapes. We have an obligation to create those internal landscapes and because I had the external landscape of that beauty and pristine wilderness and amazingly majestic nature around me all the time with no boundaries. I was able to tap into my own internal landscapes in the same unfettered

way but now to be able to translate that into an urban scenario living in a city has been a very hard task for me. it's not been very easy so that's why I suppose I ended up in Cape Town and not in Johannesburg. So my escape even now is the mountain. I just disappear and do my solitary explorations, the nookies and crannies of the mountain which really feeds my soul because I don't think I would have been able to sustain my life in a city if this mountain's not around me. Yes, so that's my nature. Nature is an integral part of one's being.

HL so in the Himalayas.

NN Cashmere

HL Cashmere— amazing

NN No schooling

HL No schooling until you were eleven – wow. That's really amazing.

NN it's so sad that there was a time when I started to schooling I was made to feel so conscious of my lack of proper schooling that I grew up for a long time feeling very embarrassed about my upbringing, that I never went to school and I used to feel really really complex stricken about talking about it because I just felt that it's just not God I never went to school. And now as I got older I began to realise my God what a privilege!

HL absolutely

NN what a privilege! So now I talk about it all time. In my twenties and my thirties I tried to hide away even when I came to South Africa I felt that people were not taking me seriously because I never went to school. Now I say oh well you don't understand me because I never went to school, good. You'll never understand me.

HL Have you experienced times in Nature which you would consider as turning points in your life? And such moment.

NN Ja, ja, ja ... all my vivid vivid vivid memories of ... turning points I don't know how you can call it turning points because my memories are so alive, my memories of Cashmere is so alive. I just feel that every iota of thinking that I have and conceptual clarities and break throughs and all of these things I owe it to those few years, the formative years of my time in Cashmere. Somehow it is still so deeply embedded and alive in me that I consider that my treasure chest, I dip into it and I dive into it and come out energised. And as a result I feel as though wherever I go or my entire life I have been so privileged to engage with the beautiful nature and in all my travels. My own association, my inner work, my deep soul work and my outer work – community and all other kinds of work – is almost like a mirror. It's like if

there is an abundant nature around you, then there is an abundance consciousness around you. and the abundance comes from being deeply rooted and embedded in that fertile nature and amazing ecosystem. Whether its living in Rajasthan which is completely barren and I mean ten years of my life I lived in Rajasthan and so from Cashmere to Rajasthan and then I come from Kerala which is again a completely different ecosystem. But all of them are so deeply rich in their own different ways so its nature is not just you can't really have a blueprint of nature. it's so unique and it's so deeply alive and I think the more we're able to connect with that aliveness of nature and not just go for mundane hikes up the mountain. Put your takkies and backpack and become this globalised, commercialised interaction of nature. that's not what I am talking about. I'm taking about something much more I hesitate to use the word spiritual. It's not even spiritual, it's something very deeply primal in us and it's that primal connectivity that we need to start harnessing when we talk about nature and somehow when we harness that we are simultaneously allowing the creation of that rich, alive internal landscape inside us. So it kind of goes hand in hand. It goes in tandem. So yes I forgot the question now. I got carried away with my own memories.

HL well, I'll just remind you **Have you experienced times in Nature which you would consider as turning points in your life? And such moment.**

NN Ja, I think basically yes and I can't think of a life without nature actually in a funny sort of way because we're so integral to nature.

HL and What do you understand by the concept of a person having a "relationship with Nature"?

NN you see it's a tricky question isn't it? Person having a relationship with Nature – that question in a way assumes that you are outside Nature. there is a disconnect and Nature is out there and you are engaging with Nature out there. But whereas for me the way I look at it I am nature. I am part of Nature. I am in nature and nature is in me and I'm in nature. so its somehow it's a bit difficult to explain and when I go for my walks or when I sit here in my little garden or even when I sleep or you know there is this sudden seamless. It's almost as if your skin just melts away and then you have kind of dispersed into nature and nature has seeps into you. it's a funny experience that I've had often which has made me realise that there is no such thing as I am having a relationship with nature. But again I think it comes to how your brain is wired. Your brain gets wired in different ways for different people so if you are wired in a particular way then you stand outside and watch which is what most of the western training's

probably about. Then you start looking at nature out there then you need to ja I can go on and on about those polarised ways of dealing with nature.

HL ja so it's not a relationship

NN Being in

HL being in and part of

NN it's a beingness like a beingness. My beingness is nature and I think that's it's a boundary-less because I am part of this larger cosmic consciousness so at the end of the day I maybe in a solid, in a physical world but this solid, physical form is just energetics and its just connected to this zillions of little particles of nature and then that's what we all are in a seamlessly, intricately, interconnected energetic what's it called like lace network. So I think it is a beingness that I would feel more comfortable with. The beingness of life. It's a very deep philosophical question isn't it.

HL yes, lots of these are.

HL well now, so the next question is **Do you feel that you have a relationship with Nature?** but then its more than just a relationship, it's what you've just said, being

NN ja, ja I am nature, I enjoy the beingness of me which is part of the nature.

HL How and why are people generally considered to be "disconnected from Nature"?

NN how, how, how

HL and why

NN I think a lot has to do sadly with our globalised, materialised left-brain upbringing. That's one and two is if you are brought up in society that doesn't allow that beingness to come alive, if there is no space through rituals or belief systems or celebrations, you name it in many different ways. The society doesn't have a space to allow that beingness to come alive so a child has no clue that it is possible. That you can live differently so the child grows up .. at best the child will grow up having a relationship with nature and investing loads of money in takkies and gears and walking up the mountain or at worst just not having a clue about inner or outer ecosystem that the child is inhabiting so then create then starts a whole trajectory of disjunctured, disjointed, disconnected existence so it grows up continuously trying to fill that hole, because there is a hole because society and the family and the parents haven't nurtured that hole because that hole inside your heart is the beingness, is the nature, is the aliveness so when you don't fill it with the right kind of ingredients the child goes with a hole in the heart, bigger and bigger and bigger and its always trying to fill it all the time with goodies and the goodies just dissolve

and dissolve and nothing can fill it. so it becomes a gaping hole in the heart. as the child becomes an adult it just doesn't know how to relate to that hole and its continuously, desperately trying to reach out to the world and consume more and more goodies and get into all kinds of obsessive, addictive behaviours and neurotic dysfunctional relationships and it perpetuates and then you create a generational gap and it's like a generational hole in the heart which is what I think we are suffering at the moment . It's a generational hole in the heart. There is no beingness. Even in my own family I feel with my children. It's not easy to bring up children in the city with these kind of deep philosophies and the deeper connectedness because they go out into the world which is so diametrically opposite to what one's belief system is so then they have to at a higher level make a choice so all you can do as a mother is basically live my truth and then see whether my children are going to appreciate it and take it or run with it or live with it. you can't really... because the world outside is not easily going to allow them to fill their hole in the heart with the beingness. It's basically trying to teach them to fill it with achievement certificates and accolades and accomplishments. And sadly when I look around, even the local indigenous population and the African cultures here who do have a deep connectedness. Even they seem to have really losing out on some of these deeper aspects. A lot of my younger friends from this part of the world, they are complaining how they can't really engage with it because a lot of their peers don't want to go that route of the indigenous rituals and spaces which do create that meaningful filling of the space. They don't want to do that, they feel ashamed and embarrassed and don't want to go that route and...

HL How does this disconnection manifest in our daily lives and what implications does it have for us?

NN Ooh. Dis-ease. I call it d-i-s dash ease

HL yes. Dis-ease

NN You look everywhere - relationships, ailments, families. It manifests ad nauseum every single aspect of our life is being afflicted by this disconnection and this kind of. I think it is that's where I feel that whole notion of well being and wellness. What we have done, especially in South Africa, we have commoditised well being and wellness so successively. Every shops that you go to, every mall that you go to there is a wellness centre and they have made wellness beyond ordinary people's reach. Wellness has become a commodity and sadly nobody's questioning it. what is a birth right of humans to live well and to be well has been taken over and commoditised and that's a classic example of the disconnectedness. If the society's not disconnected, if the society's at one with nature then something like this would not be happening. the people would be really more empowered to take charge of their

wellness. They will be more critically thinking and critically sensing beings who will challenge this upsurge, the completely absurd wellness industry. Just ripping off ordinary people so that's for me that is a classic example of why we are not able to succeed in that whole endeavour of living well and being well. We haven't succeeded in that, we've just commoditised it. So do you want more tea?

HL I'm good thanks. Do you want some more?

NN No.

HL do you want to get that? (cell phone bleeps)

NN no, sorry I actually should have switched it off.

HL not it's okay.

HL and how do you think we can restore connections with Nature?

NN restore connection with Nature? oh, it's an exercise in itself isn't it? I don't know especially when we're talking about generational gaps, its we're also talking about generational healing.

HL Yes

NN not going to happen overnight especially if you want to create blueprints and models and formulas, it's not going to happen overnight. So much has to happen simultaneously, that whole intricate web of life need to come alive and I think that... I don't see any easy solution Helen I don't see an easy solution. I think the only way we can start is being very simple and small initiatives but zillions of these kind of small initiatives at all levels, bottom up and simultaneously doing policy changes but also using all vehicles that we have at the moment to start interfacing and interjecting ideas which are which will turn around the thinking whether it is business or economics or policies or tertiary education. We need to bring in mind-altering and mind-changing stuff into the broader sectors and move away from this kind of a really very anal kind of a approach to quite a lot of these things that we seem to be ... remove the fear to start with and begin to take the risk. We don't need to have so much structure bound stuff for everything. at the moment the more the moment you have a good idea we kind of almost encapsulate it into a structure and we create a kind of a body and there must be people driving it and ...we've got to start looking at nature. Wild or pristine or abandoned or whatever. As long as the conditions conducive to life are there, nature survives, nature thrives. So how can we actually start creating those conditions in a way that can facilitate a new generation of thinking and for that start using every possible vehicles and avenues to start creating those conditions conducive to life. That's what we need to start doing which means changing the syllabus, not totally, but bring in new thinking, different syllabus, float different kinds of workshops or have new kinds of products , of innovation and design. We're doing all these things at the moment but we're all doing it at very disparate level. There is no connectedness,

there's no, everything is highlighted through I don't know very deeply divisive competitive and ego driven stuff. how do we actually move away from that ego driven stuff to basically to what I always keep coming back to what Mahatma Gandhi said 'Be the change you want see'. Everybody keeps on using that term but they hardly understand what it means. You've got to start walking the talk. you've really got to live here I am talking about just to give you a very small example. I really believe that I don't want to go on and on buying organic food. I want to start making and growing my own food so I had it in the big mansion where once upon a time when I was married I had all of that. I moved out into a townhouse so everybody started looking at me 'So now what are you going to do? How are you going to grow food?' I said oh well, even in a townhouse, we can grow. There is no such soil as poor soil. There are poor minds and poor heads but no poor soil. And I have actually shown that. In my tiny little townhouse I am growing every single things that I want to eat. I just harvested my banana yesterday.

HL Wow, wow, really?

NN its sitting there ripening. So I think so in every simple way wherever it is possible I try to practice all of this that I feel is essential for us to come down from the ivory towers to simple realities, ground zero and start practicing these kind of things that you can change your life. Living more austere and living more simply is very important to start with. I mean we can't talk about sustainable development and be living the kind of opulent lifestyle that quite a lot of our sustainable development consultants to live, charging that kind of fees. Everything is so money related. How do we start moving away from a money economy to a non-money economy – that's another thing we need to start looking into. A more appreciative economy where it's not the money that is guiding everything but it's more a kind of a value, an appreciation and compassion and exchange and nurturing and fostering and all of those things. How do we create that into a non-monetised form of exchange? At the moment our unit of currency is basically money and because of that, a lot of the other stuff is not really happening, that non-monetised aspects, of value, value-adding and appreciation and all of that. It's not happening because nobody has got time, everybody's counting how much time they can sell and how many thousands of Rands they can get for the hours they've spent. So I think to answer your question I don't think it's an easy formula, it has to be quite a there has to be a growing body of critical consciousness and if all of us in our own ways, in our own varied different walks of life can become a line of influence, keep on influencing various spheres of our networks, then slowly we're contributing towards a growing body of critical thinker and then critical consciousness. Without that we're not going to really change anything. I mean getting a country like Bhutan is not going to be an easy task every day, where a country is going to just embrace all of these things and then add to their existing body of consciousness and deeper

consciousness and then take a real leap frog, they are not going I'm not easily going to find I don't think so so that's an unusual scenario, having a whole country grappling with it.

HL I'm just going to divert from here because I want to ask you more about Bhutan because they declared this gross happiness index

NN Gross national happiness

HL Gross national happiness. It was a long time ago. The king

NN yes, the king, the royal, the fourth king King of Bhutan he felt the global trend towards measuring development through economics economic development is not good enough and he felt that that trend could be very very detrimental to a small country like Bhutan. It will just go with the whole globalised commoditised economic development initiatives and his country ecosystems and then people's belief systems and values and traditions all of those things will get completely washed away in the sea of devastating economic initiatives that could come into the country. I mean it is coming already. So he was very clever – so he decided we need to start looking at the happiness of the people, we can't just focus on the economics alone. So that's what created the whole gross national happiness. Very deep thinking philosophers and academicians were involved in it, particularly from Centre for Bhutan Studies who pioneered the whole conceptualisation and subsequently working on the whole thing. But along the way they also realised and then they also had the king step down, the king said now it's time to have a popularly, democratically elected government and people were really sad and people were protesting against the king stepping down. They didn't want an election.

HL the opposite

NN Ja, they didn't want an election and there was big mourning and big kind of a turnout all around Bhutan. People really pleading and requesting the king not to step down and he did step down and they did have a very peaceful election about three years ago, three or four years ago I think. it's a very small, its only about three years I think, so then the new government took over and the king is really not part, the fourth king is not, he stepped down and his son is now the new king, but they don't interfere with the government. But the government subsequently began to realise that well we do need economic development so if you want to really promote economic development, what kind of economic development should we have? We don't seem to have any model around the world and Bhutan is completely, the forest is one of the biggest source, resource forest and the main source of revenue is hydro, selling hydro to Indian and a lot of the goods and services come from India, they're highly dependent on India so they've got India on one side, China on the other side, these two big giants can

swallow up Bhutan in no time. So they had to strategically position themselves very very smartly and intelligently looking at their potentials and the resources and at the same time the constraints that they're faced with. So they began to I think they're first country who have stipulated in their constitution that they will preserve their sixty five percentage of their forest will be preserved.

HL Wow.

NN and any development that takes place has to be designed in such a way that sixty five percentage of the forest is intact. So they could not find any kind of models of development that could allow that so it's in that context that they reached out to ZERI because they were aware of ZERI's work because Gunter Pauli has been in touch, he's quite closely working with the royal family for quite a while and the royal family had been aware of ZERI's work and so they invited Gunter for an initial couple of meetings and started brainstorming what are the possibilities of creating a new kind of development where sixty five percent of the forest is intact and plus it is mountain locked. Very little flat land, its mountainous so that's how we started discussing with them and last year was our first official state visit. The chairperson of Club of Rome and the head of IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature), Doctor Ashok Khosla, Gunter Pauli and myself. Three of us were involved in this deliberation last year in June. So we presented thirty five different portfolios whereby they could be totally independent for their food, they don't have to depend on food from India, they could be totally generating their entire energy. They could completely do away with municipal waste water treatment plants, they can do away with their landfill sites, they can do their own subsistence rural farm producers which is what they're doing but then start adding value to it by creating a very interesting farm waste based packaging so they can do away with all of their packaging currently which is being one of the main problems, you know where do you throw away all the packaging. And they could start looking into using all of these integrated systems thinking into their tertiary education and all their other educational systems where they start talking about their traditional values and beliefs, happiness and all of that, along with a new kind of science, innovation and economics. So that has been our whole of entire focus so that happiness doesn't stand in isolation but it's totally well embodied in the plan to sustain the local economic development which regenerates the forests and the wellness of the forest and wellness of the people.

HL its really interesting that. It will be interesting to see if other countries will start adopting that because I know there's a big move away, well not a big enough move, but there are people who are starting to question the GDP way of measuring and looking at happiness and Happy Planet Index and that sort of thing.

NN Ja, exactly, the Happy Planet Index and all of these things came out of this gross national happiness because quite a lot of the consultants who worked with the king at that time were I think were part of this whole work in Bhutan and then they moved away and then quite a lot of them are in Denmark and UK and US and they've gone off and creating the same kind of thinking

HL Models and thinking

HL Ja, ja, that was a bit of a tangent

NN I'll send you some details about the Bhutan stuff because I think it ties in in some ways with what your thesis is about also

HL that's would be good. Okay and the next section is on spirituality so **what do you understand by the term or concept of spirituality?**

NN It is a very contentious word, isn't it spirituality? I sometimes struggle because I don't want to use the word religion because religion has got its own rigid kind of notions and ideas so I can understand how the word spirituality came to almost encompass a kind of a very eclectic ways of holding many belief systems altogether but I think spirituality has also become a little more new agey and it kind of doesn't really convey what it should be conveying. I think either the word needs to be or the concept needs to be infused with better meaning because at the moment the word spirituality just hangs on its own. It doesn't it's almost as though you can be there dabbling about spirituality and all of these kinds of things and you don't need to look at practical realities, you don't need to look at all the issues happening to people or to the planet. It's that kind of a I think it's very funny actually it's that kind of disconnected belief system that gave rise to materialism, that same thing you've tried to replace that same disconnected belief system and change the materialism and put spirituality there. So it's almost like a result of that polarised world view, both completely disconnected but both not really talking to each other and then in the end if you look at in a different way of understanding spirituality we live in a world of matter and we live in world of spirit and it's a dance of or rather in the Hindu way it's a union of the spirit and the matter together that has given rise to the physical world so when we talk about spirituality or the people who have reduced spirituality to just the word spirit they feel as though they don't need to deal with the world of matter you can just going on chanting Om and the world of matter will take care of itself. No. So I've always been, maybe it's my Hinduism, I've been shying away with the word spirituality because it's also very limited, narrow perspective the way it's understood and I haven't focused too much how to expand and stretch the definition of that words but for me spirituality is my beingness, its living with my beingness where I am alive, where I am aware of the spirit that has it's the

spirit that comes through my body in the form of life and then creates the world of matter around me. so for me that's what spirituality is about, being in touch, being in tune with my own inner spirit that part that keeps me alive and that's my spirituality and then I practice it in many different ways, in no rigid formats and its continuously evolving, emerging organic process. What I believed of spirituality ten years ago is not what I believe now. so there is no hard and fast rules so it's as long as one is deeply respectful and connected and truthful to that kind of process of messy emergence if you want to call it, that is spirituality for me. and then yet the trick of putting it out there so publically then one can couch anything then in the name of that and we can talk everything is spirituality then, so where do draw a line so that's where sometimes I find it a problem to bring in that whole responsibility, who am I responsible to? Am I responsible to life or am I responsible to my fellow human beings so these are the bigger issues of ethics that comes up when you start looking at it from that perspective. I don't know whether I've answered you?

HL Ja, you have because the other questions will sort of build on this question. Then the next question is **what is / constitutes / characterizes a spiritual relationship with Nature?**

NN spiritual relation with Nature – you know it's for me again I would call Nature spirit. For me Nature is also spirit because that's where I feel I am unified with Nature because it's the same life, it's that life that unites. A tree that is sprouting and me that is sitting here – what is it that we have in common? We may have our cellular structures slightly different and we may have different shapes of leaves and hair and skin and bones and trunks all of that, but there is life and it's that that unifies me and that's a common denominator and it's that spirit that I connect with and life, life and spirit I would use it more or less in the same way. That's the connection I have and if revere and respect that life and spirit then I am revering and respecting nature and that's how I engage or my relationship gets manifested through that reverence. And through that connection which is also multi-layered, it's not just one faceted, it changes. The little girl who played with the snow aged six in Cashmere had a relationship and was aware of that aliveness and that pulse of life and then she felt at one with Nature, now as a fifty-five year old grey haired woman I have a different relationship and yet it's the same. Its manifested slightly differently through the different ways I engage and talk and deliberate and discourse and all of that, but the essence of that is still the same. It's that essence that keeps me pushing and probing through the kind of work that I do in an uncompromising way.

HL Do spiritual people necessarily behave in sustainable ways?

NN Well I would say not necessarily. I would refer back to that issue of the disconnected relationships where you could be spiritual and then really not understand what is happening around the world. I can sit and OM and I can channel and I can do my pendulum and then people can just you could sit back in your spiritual ambience and to allow the world to go whatever. For me it doesn't resonate with me. I just feel that we're here to engage in the world of matter, through the world of spirit so that's very important for me to be in my spirit but also not to deny the world of matter because after all I am put in the world of matter to do work on this world of matter. If I just want to be in spirit, the great cosmic forces would not have allowed me to incarnate in physical body. The fact that I am incarnated in physical body means I've got to some bloody work in the world of matter otherwise I would just be spirit in the thin air. So this is my karma action philosophy coming in here.

HL Do religions have a role to play in the transformation to a more sustainable world? If so, what kind of role?

NN I think religions do have a role to play after all the majority of the people still go to church and temples and mosques. I think the religions unfortunately wield a big power on the masses so if they can come out and start deliberating and engaging consciously with all of these issues, why not? I vaguely remember I think it was somewhere outside Johannesburg I had a big ZERI workshop and there was the Catholic bishops some big to kind of church person secretary or something. She was so interested she said we have so much of land, we would love to all of this kind of sustainable livelihood strategies and mushrooms and all of that. People who come to church, they would like to engage with all of these things. I thought that it was a good idea. and she was very keen but they never got back to me, that's another story, but why not? Most of these religious institutions have a lot of resources and they have a lot of people at their disposal because these people come to worship there and if these religious people can be assisted to see a different kind of perspective about the issues that we're talking about, who knows maybe they will have far more of an inroad with their believers than people like you and me. So I'm just looking at it from a very practical point of view because I'm not interested in changing them from any religion to anything else but if you can use them for effective ways of engaging with nature and issues of sustainable development why not? I think that Geoff Davies is already doing quite a lot of that and in fact it was Geoff Davies' inauguration of SAFCEI when he invited me as one of the speakers I think that's where I encountered this Catholic bishop. I think that's where it was, many years ago, when he launched SAFCEI, I was one of the speakers in his launch. He's always been a great supporter of ZERI.

HL Do you participate in regular spiritual practices, rituals, etc.? Please explain.

NN Ja I do a lot of rituals and rituals of various kinds, the ones which I make up for myself. And even though most of my rituals and practices have a kind of a Hindu colouration to it because I was born and brought up as a Hindu, I'm not, I wouldn't say I am a deeply fundamentalist Hindu so I'm quite eclectic so I draw from a lot of other practices and shamanic traditions so I believe very... I'm very clear that you need ritual space in one's life and I try to create ritual space every day if possible so that's an essential part of my living. Because I think it's through the creation of the ritual space that you're able to access that beingness in you and it could be through sometimes it is meditation and sometimes it is just silently listening to music or walking in the mountain or simply doing my gardening or in many different forms. I don't have any one or two forms and I really don't believe in that kind of rigid modalities. She's also interested in the interview – hey Bindi (referring to the cat).

HL she's hungry

NN No, I think she's saying hello

HL I've also got cats

NN that's why she's coming and sitting comfortably so otherwise she won't. She's very shy.

HL I think we've sort of answered this already but can one have a spiritual relationship with Nature?

NN Ja, I think did cover that

HL Okay and then sustainable development –

NN Mmm

HL what do you think the world needs if we are to overcome the global crises facing us?

NN I think the first and foremost will be to have community-driven local projects where people can actually decide. There's a word that Mahatma Gandhi used to use – swaraj s-w-a-r-a-g and it means local self governance. And he wrote a lot about that in the fifties and sixties. It's not exactly the same as the local municipal government structures, its much smaller, it's like village structures, village governance and there you bring in all those aspects that I was talking about earlier about non-monetised qualities of co-creative co-existence at local village level. I think that's what's going to happen is that we will be forced to go that route sometime sooner with various planetary crisis happening and the global economy unraveling. I think we are underestimating quite a lot of the crisis the impending crisis that's going to hit us so we'll be forced to go that route anyway. All of these big big structures and

the banking structures and the monetised structures will somehow wither away or will be forced to give way to a new decentralised entities where we have far more power to design orchestrate life at local level but then the corollary to that is that's where the consciousness and the mindfulness becomes very very important because if you don't have an awakened critical mass at local level you won't really be able to even if you've got the power and resources, you won't really know how to navigate that and live in that kind of decentralised local ecosystem because you can't be greedy and ego driven and holding on to your power and name and fame and your offshore banking and four by fours and SUVs and then still want to live in a small little village. No, you can't do that. As this saying goes you can't have the cake and eat it. At the moment everyone's saying why can't we have the cake and eat it? No, you've got to make a choice. You've got to decide whether you want to live locally, simply and austere in whichever way you can or do you want to actually be part of the whole big jamboree global jet-setting sustainable development experts going around talking about all these nonsense. So I think it's that choice will be thrust upon us whether we like it or not when the global catastrophes strike one after the other leading Japan of course. Japan has already started. In a way why it has happened in Japan is also part of the cosmic drama because I think the universe is trying to show us if any country can do it its Japan because they've done it, they've shown it, they rebuilt that entire country post Nagasaki Hiroshima. Now they'll do it again. I was just reading the other day that they have now they saw Tokyo now has the largest rooftop agricultural land in the world. and they starting they just sold the land what is the land land is rooftop. Because its radiation they know that they can't really food can't go out, no food is going to come in, radiation is just inevitable so now they already started there while dealing and fixing all these things. They've started how we going to live, where's the food going to come, so now they starting the grow food with no soil, no contaminated water. they've started already. So that country knows how to live authentically and quite simply, they struggle and they survive but it's up to us whether we are ready to learn that kind of a lifestyle. Because you've got to forgo quite a lot to live like that, to be able to... there was an email going around from Sendai I don't know whether you also got that. An amazingly beautiful beautiful letter – an English teacher who has been living in Sendai said her encounter and her narratives so beautiful so she was saying when the water comes, water will come only once a week and in which ever house the water is coming they will put a sign up water is coming so everybody will go there and start collecting the water. and every evening green bereted old men will go from tent to tent to tent peeping in and putting a plate of food, some simple plate of food in every refugee little shelters. That kind of compassion completely egoless compassion – can you imagine that happening in South Africa if any calamity strikes here? somebody was telling me no, no, no in the face of crisis we will all be

like that. Ja, maybe I don't know. I remember when things happened in all these xenophobic riots and all, everybody is trying to get what they can so I don't know. it's that mindfulness and really that being connected to one's true authentic sense of being who you are and where you are and what you're here for. It becomes very important, that becomes the training ground so to speak. if you want to really move towards this scenario and then maybe crisis is the only way that we learn. Maybe it's only through crisis, maybe when everything is hunky dory and everything is happening around us, maybe we'll never learn, we'll stay in our egotistical comfort zones, I don't know. How's your machine doing?

HL it's still working

NN you don't need to change anything, it just goes on?

HL ja, the batteries are fine

HL and you've sort of referred to this but **Do you think consumption and materialism are problematic**
And if so, why?

NN oh ja, very much so. I think, I don't know how aware and awakened people are but we have become slaves to certain kind of a commoditised ways of living so we just take it for granted that we can't live without any of these things and I think it's almost like got into a supermarket syndrome of life. You walk into a supermarket and you just take a trolley and just pick everything and put it there, go to the cash till and pay. So life has become like that also. You just drive here and drive there and talk about this and earn your money and then come back so it's really become a huge big giant supermarket. So you don't even you can't even think anymore, you can't even dream anymore that there is life possible outside supermarket. There's no, you can't comprehend it and I think that is the problem with this kind of very insidious consumerism. It's so insidious, it's almost like a silent killer. It's like a silent disease that has started infecting the entire social organism so each and every individual has become like a cancerous cell of this big big infectious disease called consumerism and its killing, its killing the social organism and the individual cells in the form of human beings are dying down, the cells are dying down so that's metaphorically speaking that's basically what is happening. I always used to say that I shouldn't even probably put it here but I don't believe armed revolution but if somebody tells me like you know okay give us one example of activity that you can do if you are given something to blow up, what will you do - I'll blow up the supermarkets because I think they...

HL I think you'd have a lot of people with you on that

NN because I think it's become the menace, they've become a deep cancerous cell in our society, the supermarket, however much they're trying to do clean green act. The fact that I mean how unrealistic is,

I mean how can they ever be sustainable, how can they ever become clean and green because what they're doing, they're depriving a local grower from putting up a little stall right in front of his farm yard and put whatever he's growing right there. The kind of camaraderie that you have living in that way, where you have street side vendors and local little shops and things that are grown only in a particular kind of a season so everybody's cherishing and nourishing and enjoying what grows there because it's so precious and you have to enjoy it right there. How can you actually get away from that kind of set up to a supermarket which is providing everything, every time all time twenty four seven? It basically takes away our right to enjoy nature at nature's own seasons. It is basically completely paradoxical and contradictory to what we want to do. it's like almost like a gluttonous joy, okay you want to enjoy strawberries in a particular season when it doesn't grow you can still get it. You want to enjoy this from Timbuktu that's coming you can get it. so it's that kind of a ramp, it's like feeding our rampant consumerism with instant gratification so we've become so enslaved to that kind of a idea of living we just can't comprehend what it is to live locally. There was somebody who was telling me how impractical it is to be locavores and start creating so I said you know we had that, we lived like that, you go into any of those tiny little villages, you eat what you getting that season and you enjoy it. you have a community of feast, you've got lovely sharing because you can't store it, you've got to share it. and now you've got freezers and you've got mobile trucks with freezers and you can store it you can sell it thousands of miles away so it's gone against the grain of sustainable development, the supermarkets. To give you a very classic example of when my banana that I harvested just yesterday. A bunch of bananas has hundreds of bananas and we use the banana stem also, we cook it, we don't throw it away, every part of banana is used. So when you harvest a banana usually in my village it's a feast because you can't eat it on your own so its chopped and cleaned and shared and given to a lot of people and then you cook and everybody eats and together it's like a big feast. Now here I am, I cut my banana and I have a couple of Indian friends who understand these delicacies so I go and share all of this. So I thought my god what a sad state of my life that I can't share it with my children because they're now staying with their father and the father has booked a sushi restaurant in Kalk Bay so he has to take them for lunch at sushi so I said you know girls I feel really depressed because you'll get sushi all the time and also sushi can you imagine its completely and you've never seen a banana stem, you don't know what it is and this is the only time you can see it and experience it and your mother has grown it in her own garden and your father prefers to take you to sushi so that's it. so that's a classic example so for me my life is the case of deep disconnect you know because I have chosen a family for whatever reason who doesn't believe in the kind of path that I'm wanting to pursue so as a result I've chosen not to have the family and I've

chosen and I can't compromise. I can't have a family where I have to compromise some of these things so as a result I live on my own and I share my banana stem and bananas with a handful of friends who appreciate it and my own children been taking away by their father to eat sushi. So I think it's quite a nice little cherry on the top for your question - consumerism and globalisation how we get so enslaved. I mean again to give you a very classic example of how we are so enslaved on Friday was this big wedding this so these girls were all... I brought up my children with no television and they never had television because I believe yes, there are useful ways of using television, but generally it's just a useless crap of a machine so these kids were with their father, watching the entire day, the wedding so I had to find out something and I phoned them and they're all sitting in front of the television and they got very upset with me. So I said you know what so the younger one said "oh mommy, it's so much like a fairy tale so you mustn't get so upset". So I said I'm not getting upset but you know what, we as human beings in society we have lost the magic of creating fairy tale in our own lives. So what do we do we get enslaved and we externalise our magic, looking at someone else's fairy tale and these globalised fairy tales creation of these kind of deaths of Dianas and marriage of her children, people are so hooked up, it's like an addiction because they want it, they want the fairy tale because every single human being has got this deep desire to create a fairy tale in his or her own life but we've become so important by this consumerised culture, we've lost the magic, we don't know how to create fairy tale for ourselves so we become obsessively addicted to the fairy tale outside and we get two billion hooked on for an entire day, looking at this fairy tale scenario outside because they have lost the magic to create their own fairy tale. And that's a sad thing. again it ties back to the same issue of consumerism, we've lost, we're disconnected, we don't know how to create magic, we don't know how to create fairy tales, we don't know how to fill our gaping hole with the beingness and come alive. And then all this girls will dream of a wedding that and then the fashion designers and wellness people and spas will start selling goodies, the cheap imitation of the fairy tale wedding. Oh how sad.

HL So how do you think we can overcome consumption and materialism?

NN Changing the way, no not even changing, let me rephrase it. you know when we start experiencing the power of taste, the power of how we can impact our own life so dramatically with things that we can do to ourselves, we need to experience that. The school text books and supermarket formulas are not going to help us. If I taste the spinach and potatoes and stuff grown by me in my garden and I've tasted it and I know the texture of it, I know the flavour of it, I know the feeling, I know how well it digests in my body and I know how well satiated I feel when I eat a meal with everything from my

garden and that feeling is so empowering. No text book and nothing can actually compensate that so if you have if you have multiple experiences like that where every individual is actually experiencing it in little little acts, then it is coalescing into a much bigger act, a bigger experience. It's not like you go and have a big whammy of an experience. It starts in small pockets in many different ways how your life and your body and your being is responding and reacting to situations and stimuli inside you and around you when you eat this and when you eat that. It starts that simply. And then once you discover that then it opens a whole new journey, then it almost like its prompts every being to go on that journey of self discovery and the more you go on that path, the less you'll be able to traverse back and at the moment what's happening, coming back to my bane with the supermarkets is not allowing that and our centralised systems, centralised structures and centralised marketing and supermarkets, it's not allowing people to experience to go on that journey of self-discovery. It should start very young of course when they're children it should start with the families and it should start at schools, it should start at many levels, at multiple levels, with multiple agencies working on that but I don't know. we can always sit back, fold arms and say oh it all sounds so complex and it's so difficult. There is no easy answer, of course there is no easy answer. Creating conditions conducive to life is simple but yet complex. It simple but if you put a seed there in the soil, the seed is not going to pop, come out in one day. No, it needs the right ambient temperature, it needs the right warmth, it needs fertile soil and minerals. It needs many things and then maybe in ten days, maybe in two weeks, slowly the seed will start germinating. It's a process then how somehow that whole instant gratification consumerist kind of system has short-circuited the whole process. So everything is product oriented and there everybody wants an instant product so how can we do it now so it takes away that whole beauty of that journey into that process, the process is completely divorced now from the product. Because you're being inundated , flooded with product, product, product. Even the process has become a product in terms of the training modalities and all of those things. Every process is now packaged and sold as a product.

HL Its true

HL and then what is your view on why there is suffering in the world?

NN why there is suffering? Do you want my answer as a cosmic healer or as an Hindu karmic person or as a good old cynical developmentalist?

HL Maybe you should give me all of them

NN Because I think the suffering is here because we asked for it cosmically-speaking. We asked for it. It's how you want to see. With our kind of that instant gratification supermarket product-oriented

obsession and development and modalities, we created the suffering ourselves. Nature never really gives suffering. Nature has I mean in a Hindu pantheon we have a god of creation and we have a god of destruction so you can't have

HL sorry god of construction

NN creation creation creation

HL and a god of destruction

NN destruction. You see in the western world view suffering is bad and you must everybody must be happy and the American media feeds into that through Hollywood also. Happy family syndrome. There must be happiness, happiness is like a commodity basically so suffering is bad and death is bad so you don't and in between is disease which you don't really talk about it. you talk about all kinds of disasters, cures to the disease. You don't try to prevent the disease. You fall ill and then you cure the illness so there is no such thing to get out of the dis-ease of the society, the people, the planet – nothing. They don't do that. And yet they won't talk about suffering, suffering is bad so you've got to prolong even if you are hung with a hundred thousand little tubules, tubules and all of that, you must still stay alive, you mustn't die. So you don't talk about death. Whereas coming from the Hindu background, suffering is there and death is there and life is there. They are all part of reality so you've got to kind of face all of them and the only choice you have is how you deal with suffering, how you deal with death and how you deal with life. That's where the whole mystical spiritual aspects come in. if you deal with all these things only with the material perspective obviously you will go on trying to fix the suffering. The more you try to fix the suffering, the more there is suffering. Because you are focusing on it. it's like I was having a conversation with somebody I don't use the word poverty alleviation anymore because energy goes where your attention goes so you're focusing more and more alleviating poverty and in a cosmic consciousness cosmic consciousness there is no good and bad. Everything is equal – black, white, death, life, suffering everything in the cosmic pantheon – everything is the same so you're focusing all the time on poverty alleviation, okay, you'll get more and more poverty.

HL that's true, it makes sense

NN You're focusing more and more on violence and suffering, oh okay you like it? that's where your energy is so you'll get more of that.

HL Yes

NN and I think the policy makers who don't want to delve into any of those understanding of the cosmic functioning of this planet, they get more and create more and more suffering, more and more violence and more and more. So how do you break out of that? That's when you need to delve a little bit more

deeper into the Buddhist kind of approach to suffering, you don't get affected by it, you just see how you are responding instead of reacting, it's there, okay so what can we do? that's a completely different approach. I was talking to somebody about... somebody was saying, oh if China and India going all and all, producing so many people, the whole world is going to be taken over by Chinese and Indians, well, maybe already its being taken over. So I said well, have you ever thought about why western world is so obsessive about not dying, if you let go of your fear of death, there won't be so many births there.

HL that's a unique way of looking at it

NN Ja, this person just looked me and said what are you saying? Ja, look at the medical establishment, holding on to death, not wanting to die. The more you don't want to let go and then just give up, this fear of death, like continuously going on and on because death and birth must go together. There is a dance of life and a dance of death, it happens simultaneously. That's the law of physics, law of entropy basically, the more. It's like one is kind of gravitational, it's like breaking down the matter and the other is making the matter. As the spiral goes spinning faster and faster, you unravel the atoms and the molecules and as you slowly start spinning then you ground yourself in this more and more. so I think the western world is afraid to let go of natural spinning cycles so the more they kind of controlling all of this and manipulating it, the more on the other side, because that other side is Asian psyche don't worry about too much about life and death. For them they live and die, live and die, live and die, they've got a very different mindset so they are not afraid of death so they can actually be born and then die the next day. Its fine. They can be poor today and tomorrow they're rich. They're poor in one life and rich in another life. It's a cycle, it's a cyclical process. It's never ending so they don't really stay stuck on the whole thing. But the imbalance is coming from the western mentality where everything is so geared towards preserving life from women not wanting to age to people not wanting to die so I think that has created a very very deep imbalance of a funny sort. It's really a very funny imbalance and I wish somebody would explore deeper into this phenomena actually. I really think there is something there which is creating the planetary imbalance of resources and life so that all the resources get accumulated more and more on this side and the life is getting stagnant because life is not really allowing the free flow of energy so then the other side, because this life is stagnant, the other side is yearning to give birth more and more so it's that kind of a complete imbalance. It's a very strange theory of mine that I've been pondering for quite a long time.

HL You know what's interesting is because so often because whenever you start talking about sustainable development, people always bring up the overpopulation issue

NN Yes

HL and what I've been noticing more and more is that its white middle-aged men who bring up the overpopulation. Whenever you start talking about problems

NN Anywhere, anywhere

HL in there world

NN when is China and India going to stop producing?

HL and Africa

NN Look at all the African people, they are all producing so many, when are they going to stop producing?

HL Mm

NN and then yet it is that fear that somebody's overproducing and that we have to control our resources because those are the mouths which are going to take away our resources. It's that fear which is perpetuating this imbalance. People are not realising that, it's quite sad actually.

HL it's a good response. I'm going to try that next time and see what people say.

NN I have a scientific and sociological basis to that, I'm not throwing it out, so let me just give you that. I come from a province of Kerala and India has always had overpopulation but this tiny little province has always civilized its population. We never had to go through big, state, injected population control drive. We never had to do any of this kind of top-down population control and family planning. How did we do it? Just through enlightened rules and enlightened critical masses so until 1950's Kerala was ruled by royal kings the old princely states and they all had women rulers and all these women rulers were very very enlightened and they made sure that education got a very very prominent place in quite a lot of the communities and the villages. It was very very strong focus of these women rulers, they were quite enlightened royalties. And then came 1950s popularly elected communist regime I think Kerala is even now it's considered the one and only place where they had a popularly elected left wing government. All the other places it's been overthrown or coups and all of that. Here it was popularly elected and there've been a lot of studies that it's that enlightened ruling that the royalty who paved the way for a certain kind of a consciousness because the education was already in place so the left wing communism when they came to Kerala it was much easier to deliberate and discourse with the masses because they were already quite into quite a lot of these discourses. So they could understand and grapple with the theories of communism much more easily so as a result we have now the lowest population in the rest of the country – only two percent growth, it's really quite low, I think it's even less than that now and we've got the highest literacy in the rest of the country and we've got the lowest infant mortality, lowest maternal mortality and apparently our human development index is on par with Sweden even

though our per capita is the lowest compared to the rest of India. We've got the low per capita so I what happened the left wing government took over Kerala just quite politicised and very critically aware masses but they didn't interfere with the traditional culture and traditional wellbeing and all of that. So our traditional belief system and practices and medicinal practices and eating habits and all of those things remained the same. They didn't change like in the case of South Africa or wherever so people still they're very proud of the language, the language didn't change. We've got the world's largest number of translated literature in Malayalam even though it's a tiny little, its only 40 million, but every single language around the world is main literature pieces they've all been translated into Malayalam. So it's a very highly erudite and very highly literate society and the education and health is the primary basic foundation which actually made sure that that province could sustain itself, almost like its paths, its uniqueness compared to the rest of the country so I think it's not just what I am saying is if you allow some of these deeper wisdom and the deeper insights and weave into modern day policies and practices you can actually work with it, you can actually work, but if you start enforcing quite a lot of the things from the top and a top-down kind of a policies and elites sitting there and trying to bring down the population then it's not going to work. Because the ordinary people are not benefiting

HL No

NN whereas in Kerala the ordinary people were directly benefiting. We had a land reform and then we succeeded in taking all the land and then really distributing it so all the workers who were working on the land became the owners, the land owners. This was in the sixties so all the rich middle class had to keep some land and the rest of the land went all went. There was no such thing as absentee landlordism it just disappeared and then in the same way you go to every little village will have a rural library where you don't have to buy your newspaper and then people can come and they'd sit and they'd read their books and discuss your newspapers together and during the tea break or lunch break, the workers would all come and then sit there and that kind of a shared building of social fabric. So they nurtured that from the fifties onwards and then it fed slowly slowly into the whole development of a critical consciousness alongside that feeling oh yes we are from Kerala we are very unique Indians, not just outside any Indians. You know that kind of a pride, a sense of who you are, where you come from, what you are. it's very important and you know then if look at that, if you compare that with what is happening here, we're just being bought into the supermarket syndrome of who we are. Our whole identity and ethics and ethos and values and tradition – whose upholding it other than huge big head gears and African garbs, there's nothing inside. We're all becoming slave to the American, western world views basically. We talk about ubuntu and Africanisation but we do it driving SUVs and four by

fours, four piece suit and. I keep coming back to this issue of identity. It's so important. That sense of identity, sense of who you are, eventually determines how you engage on this planet so that determines your connection with nature, that sense of identity.

NN you want food Bindi? You calling me? (talking to her cat)

HL In your view what is the world 'calling' for?

NN what is the world calling for? I think the world is basically going to break us down, break humans down. Probably. I mean I don't know. I think the world is really asking for us to be more compassionate, I would imagine. Be more compassionate and be more realistic about what we want to or not rather what, how we want to live. I think the world is really calling very deeply because I mean just imagine everything that we are doing now it's even now in the face of all of this crisis, here's South Africa still giving another ten year's leash to that nuclear plant and still talking about fracking and still talking about oil based developments I mean really? Is it sustainable, I mean is it really practical? So I don't know sometimes at a larger cosmic level I feel we deserve a major catastrophe, a total breakdown, but at a deep compassionate level, I feel no I need to keep sending more love and light and not make that happen even though it may well happen. I think at a big level, at a really cosmic level I think there's stuff that's going to happen that none of us can actually change and rework. I'm speaking like a fatalist but I think at the end of the day, all we can do is to be true to ourselves. I mean I can't really speak for the world I can't say world must do this and world must do that. I can only see how I'm able to live truthfully and honestly with myself. I think my relationship is to myself so if have an authentic relationship with myself, then that self-determines my relationship to the world. Does that make sense?

HL and how do you think we should go about 'sustainable development' in South Africa?

NN Scrap it.

HL Scrap it. I think I've also come to that conclusion, thinking of something else

NN it hasn't worked, after seventeen years, it hasn't worked so is it really going to work, I don't know. I had I went to a meeting with the agricultural minister, she had some amazing statistics. People were talking about food security and then the subsidies from the government for growing organic food and then this and that. So she said I was really impressed with Tina – of course being a mother and a teacher she's probably got more insight into all of this discussion so she said look, south Africa has this worst scenario where the largest percentage of income, be it rich or poor, wage labourers or informal sector workers –all across the board – the bulk of the money goes to cell phones, motor cars, clothing. That's

the way it goes. And then she said the bigger the money, the more flashy your car, the more flashy your fashion and more flashier your cell phones. And then she said the last, they've got this whole big statistic study, she said the last is on food. So when you are living in such dire poverty and so-called suffering and all of that, how come your spending your food is last, how come? Then why do you want the government to fix that? When it is just not your priority? It's quite an interesting insight, rich or poor
HL rich or poor the same

NN ja, the same spending pattern. So I think we have failed abysmally to really change the consciousness of the people about anything and we have succeeded immensely in making the people slaves to consumerism and instant gratification. So every single person from the deepest of the deep villages to the cities, they all want to be ardent consumers all the time. The disease of you know that book Affluenza – have you come across that? So South Africa is afflicted by affluenza and everyone's deepest desire to be an affluent person. Maids and madams included. It's quite sad actually hey. I wonder when the healing is going to happen in this country? there's a lot of healing that needs to be done at all levels. White and black and brown and yellow. They say this is a rainbow nation but I always say this is a rainbow nation with colour coded barriers. If you look at a natural rainbow, you can't see where one colour starts and another colour begins but in South Africa yes it is a rainbow nation with deep deep divisive colour codedness still after seventeen years. So I wonder how sustainable development gurus will respond to that? I wonder? As a cynical developmentalist I think scrap sustainable development that's the only way. Because we haven't indigenised it. We just brought it from abroad and all over and various discourses. We never really tried to harness it and see how we indigenise the whole discourse to South African context.

NN Let me put some light on.

HL this is the very last question.

NN what is the time

HL I don't know

NN watch-less, timeless existence

Goes to the kitchen to feed Bindi.

HL So this is very last question and I think we've pretty much answered it - do you think there is a relationship between Nature, spirituality and sustainable living?

NN well sustainable living if you do it without any frills attached and more authentically. Sustainable living is natural and it is deeply connected with the spirit because you are respectful of your internal

ecosystem and your external ecosystem. That's where this whole the world of the matter and the world of energy comes together when you live truly sustainably then you're sustaining life. So that's why I always have that problem with the word development. You see when you sustain life, you live authentically, you live naturally, you live in connection with spirit and now what you've done, we've taken all those things away and we have coined this word sustainable development and then development became a focus and the development is external, it's like externalising things outside so which means you became more and more attuned to providing infrastructure and material stuff and service delivery and then that became the focus and then we moved away from the sustaining life aspect of it and that that's where the disjuncture and the divide and the disconnect came in. and now we're trying to make a kind of a I don't know make amends and piece meal work and bandage and gloss it over and all of that but it's not ... the entire discourse is based on that whole externalised aspect of how one lives. It has nothing to do with sustaining life and then we have all of the conservationists and ecosystems and everybody wanting to come with their bandwagon with trying to work with nature. but that it also coming from a completely different tangent, also from a very disconnected perspective so the two never meet and talk and in between we start having all these things like environmental management and EIAs and then you throw in a little bit of biomimicry and the design will emulate the nature so none of them can kind of come together into a wholesome whole. They all stand in opposition to the other. So when all of these boxes fall away so to speak then we'll probably have, we'll be left with just the pulse of life and then we'll be forced to work with the dance of life at the end. Because at the moment everything is neatly neatly structured, boundaried boxes that we live in.

HL that's it

NN so it I think you'll need a good massage after this.

HL I mean one of the things that I've been thinking about I mean its semantic but you get rid of this term sustainable development because everybody I mean everything using it

NN its much abused, much abused

HL I mean everybody it's so easy to say to someone we're developing sustainably or we're applying the principles of sustainable development I mean people who don't question or who don't have an understanding, they think oh it's sustainable development

NN You really go away with some real crap in the name of sustainable development and a lot of what I call the arm genta the masses don't have the capacity to question it so they think it's a good thing and then they must just do that. The three R's – repair, recycle and reuse – I don't mind the repair and the

reuse stuff but even the recycling thing – you can do bloody crap design and then you spend vast amounts of resources just recycling it. why?

HL Why in the first place?

NN Why in the first place? Why go that route when you have some other route available so I think those kind of questions nobody's asking and the people are not really awakened enough and that's the other thing which I always come back to, that's where the dis-ease and the dis-ease of the mind and the memory comes in because we don't we have forgotten a lot of the ways of living because the food that we eat today is designed to make us stay forgetful and never connect to the authentic life force. The food is industrially orchestrated, industrially manipulated, industrially engineered and it's just techno food. It's not real food that we live in I mean that we eat. Its techno food so it doesn't feed our soul, it doesn't give us or it doesn't connect us with our authenticity at all. And if masses are being fed on this industrial techno food how do we expect them to come with this kind of deep questioning? We can't so they will continuously carry on the zombie life and the zombie life is benefiting the corporations. The corporations don't want awake citizens so I mean that's the reason why there is such a lot of collusion and the ordinary people are not aware of this collusion, collusion of the medicine world, the techno world, the chemical world and you know all – they collude, they're all feeding into each other, the little little nexus, all the time and the ordinary people just stay slumbering around like zombies and... never to be awakened. It's really quite terrible actually...

Appendix J

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION: SIMON MAX BANNISTER

Interview with Simon MAX Bannister 4 May 2011 – 11h15 to 12h45 approx

HL okay so the first question is if you can **tell me a little bit about the work that you do.**

SB the work that I do throughout my life has always been engaging with the environment and looking at nature as the ultimate artist. I've always been amazed at the mystery and wonder of creation and wanted to share that experience and so my work in many ways is a reflection of that wonder, that mystery. I was first inspired by the idea of land art such artists as Andy Goldsworthy and Ahmad Nadlien

HL can you spell that?

SB A-h-m-a-d N-a-d-l-i-e-n. and this was because I felt that the traditional mediums of paint and clay were not progressive enough and were oversaturated and there were too many other artists working these and I wanted to work more intimately with nature. and throughout my life waste and the idea and litter has always stuck out within the environment and always been a bit of a thorn in my side and through my engaging with nature, my walking and my time spent in pristine environments I ultimately always encounter this extension of humanity. and its impact on the world. and so I decided to embrace it or to at least confront that dimension and so that's pulled me into the world of using found materials, mixed media combining land art with more traditional fine art and exploring the results.

HL How did you get into/find your way into your current field of work? I mean you've sort of little bit explained it there but more background

SB Well I initially always had a passion for art and creating and from an early age I used Lego blocks and sticks and things like that and from throughout my schooling career I was led to believe that I needed to use the more traditional techniques to I wanted to try and explore something different. and but then the world said to me you have to make money Simon and you have to get a job and get a desk and work like that and I had to study so I decided to use computers and art and find a balance between the two and that bought me to graphic design so I studied that and I achieved well and learned an incredible amount about the use of symbols, of colour and the meanings that those held. I moved into the industry straight after I finished studying and was very quickly assimilated into the machine of corporate life. And I found that at the end of the day I had moved around so much information that I did not necessarily care about or feel that I related to. Then it started to trouble me and I also felt that I didn't have enough

energy to pursue in my own time my own passion of how I felt and the expression I wanted to make. So after three years of working in the industry which flew by I decided to go freelance and from that moment I felt a huge weight lifted and immediately my interests steered me in a more truer direction of what I cared about and projects or groups that were more relevant to how I felt about this responsibility I felt to do something good and positive about the environment and to help the people who were involved in such areas. I also had more time to really engage with what I wanted to create and this led me into the space of art again and immediately I felt that art liberates liberated my creativity, freedom to express. Ja.

HL and then What global and local trends do you see currently impacting on your work?

SB Yes, the need to be more aware of our impact on the fragile ecosystems, the issues of sustainability measured against humanity rather than measured against the needs of the earth to function as it has done. the economical and political barriers that hinder and distract people from actually being able to change things. And just modern capitalism as it is. The environment you know to be empowered to actually change the environment is also being pushed to be the change you want to see constantly and the pressure to take that to its potential is also constant pressure. And the conflict that arises between not being able to do it. Ja.

HL do you want to say anything from a local point of view impacting on your work. You can define local how you want whether that's South Africa, or Cape Town or the area you worked in at Londolozi.

SB Yes, being in the cities and seeing how the cities affect the environment particularly the industrial areas, particularly the areas that are less wealthy, how they treat their ecosystems, um, ja, just walking on the side of the road, just seeing how the environment is affected by humanity and then comparing that with pristine nature, really getting out into the wild and seeing just how different that is to this world that we've built around ourselves. Can you repeat the question – it's what?

HL What global and local trends do you see currently impacting on your work?

SB yes, there's a huge green movement that's being embraced at the moment and people want to participate yet there every day barriers which hinder that movement. And so it seems to be losing it seems to slipping and not gaining traction as much as people would like it, ja. The other half the other ninety percent is business as usual, it continues to have those, it continues to operate as it has with a very economical objective to meet profit, profit, profit and so you have the green trend being skewed by the economical aspects. And almost having to be retrofitted into the corporate environment and in

many cases is obscured by that. We also have an ever increasing technological tsunami which is enabling more communication, enabling more business, enabling more productivity, but somehow disconnecting us from the basic elements of this world and the environment on which we depend.

HL and then Which of these trends give you hope for the future?

SB I think that they all have to. There is the concern there is the technological capability and the incredible communication network and logistical network that makes the world one village. And this brings me to the idea of the duality of life, we're being, everything is constantly expanding and constantly contracting, good and bad, evil and pure. And the fundamental need to understand our ecosystems and to make them flourish will ultimately benefit our own existence and that of generations to come. What also gives me hope is humanity's and you must find this word, it's a wonderful word, it's a love affair with our own mortality, our apocalypse and how that still has not arrived.

HL is it a love affair with our own mortality or immortality?

SB mortality.

HL mortality.

SB it's a love affair with our own demise as a collective. We've always depicted the end of days through many different cultures. I would like to integrate the idea of mythology and myths and stories and legends because those still are very much alive today, represented in different forms, in new stories and in new archetypes but staying true to their core. And the stories of old are once again a reflection of the cycles of nature and bring forward the idea of rebirth, of facing challenges and being better for that.

HL So moving on to the section on Nature - What early experiences or memories do you have of Nature?

SB I was well I guess growing up in a big city Johannesburg immediately gave me quite a distorted view of what nature is, of how its controlled by people and one of the earliest disturbances I had was the demise of the river that still flows below the place where I grew up, the Braamfontein spruit, watching that become more and more polluted within my own lifetime. I was also very fortunate to visit savannas, the lowveld, the bush and see what the world was like without human interference. However, at a later stage I came to learn that this was also not true in a way that the environment had been changed by people – the bush had been cleared and made more suited to certain animals in order to

attract them and thereby changing the ecosystem that was currently there. Also walking the coastlines and engaging with the ocean from the shoreline has also been a major factor in my life. Ja.

HL Have you experienced times in Nature which you would consider as turning points in your life?

Perhaps describe one such moment.

SB There've been many, there've been many. Nature is mysterious in how it works and we constantly trying to understand it and thereby projecting ourselves, our own intuitive personas on it, an anthropomorphisation of nature and this has been done throughout the ages. But such turning points a particular one is such I guess was seeing how nature, well how the waves had transformed certain household objects into art. And demonstrating once again how we are not in control, we are part of a much greater system. And there's always this struggle between, this disconnection, this struggle between seeing ourselves as part of nature and the tension that comes with that and through my learnings I have come to see to change from seeing ourselves as separate to being very much within that ecosystem. I'd like to think of some other moments. Maybe we can come back to that.

HL What do you think or what do you understand by the concept of a person having a "relationship with Nature"?

SB Being aware of the weather, being aware of how plants and animals depend on each other, of how it all fits together. Ja...

HL Do you feel that you have a relationship with Nature?

SB I believe so and I think that everyone does. No-one is excluded even if they are unaware of it. Every breath we take is felt by the world, every action we take is part of the collective progression of this world, whether we like it or not. And through my work particularly I've become more engaged in the subtle energies, the subtle relationships, the workings of the environment, of nature. but still those insights only open more doors to more mystery and more wonder which is what I love. And that's where it's very interesting where science continually tries to understand and dissect the inner workings and has an infinite future in that space of questioning how it works.

HL How and why are people generally considered to be "disconnected from Nature"?

SB I think since the earliest days we've wanted to, we've had the need to protect ourselves from dangerous creatures, disease and discomfort and so we immediately started to shape our environment

to suit ourselves, to suit our needs. Humans are completely unique in that we have very little fur and no sharp claws or teeth and so our strongest most versatile is our mind and we immediately started slowly started to use the best of what nature had to help ourselves and through tool making, through agriculture and medicines, we have progressively taken more control of nature and so we have got to the point where we are so good at it that it's become bad. We live in air conditioned, sterile what's the word rooms that hardly allow any natural light or air to penetrate. Everything is controlled and I love this word manipulated – for the 'man' hidden in that word;

HL ah, nice

SB ja its very interesting prefix. It talks of how we shape the world in our image and obviously talks of a male dominance. And all of these things have become so far removed from a seemingly unchanging world of all other creatures apart from those domesticated. And I'm also fascinated by domestication – I think this fits in wonderfully with what you're looking at – how certain fruits, vegetables, creatures have been taken under mankind's wing and have literally changed bone structure, appearance, taste and flavour to suit mankind. Over population and the need to feed, clothe, medicate and stimulate the world's population have driven us to a point where we've changed what how nature works, we've changed how nature works.

HL How does this disconnection manifest in our daily lives and what implications does it have for us?

SB Its got to the scary point where unless the youth is educated into about the natural processes, the ecosystems and the food chains of this world, children will have the perception that things are not as they are. for instance you know food is a great example where some people don't know what a tuna looks like or what a banana tree looks like, essentially where our food comes from. So the very core of our daily survival has been distorted by our modern culture. We can also communicate far faster, we've built a concept of time that suits us and broken life down into past, future and present and separated ourselves from nature. you see I myself I still am in the space between being the idea is so strong and so embedded in our psyche that we are separate from nature that my own new concept of trying to see ourselves very much as nature continually defeats itself. One always has to ask what is natural. And then with modern with marketing and brand positioning and just general mental pollution we struggle to make sense of what really is. I think there's a wonderful parallel between physical pollution and mental pollution - of climate, being the weather, and the climate of society, the general movement of ideas and concepts, memes and how that relates to the environment.

HL How do you think we can restore connections with Nature?

SB Asking how. Asking how things work, where do things come from, how does energy move from one to creation to the next, from an enquiring mind. And that's really the role of art, is to explore those imaginative enquiries, to understand that there is and always will be an element of mystery and nothing is black and white but rather all the colours of the rainbow and more.

HL and then on spirituality what do you understand by the term / concept of spirituality?

SB I understand spirituality to be a realm beyond that which is physical, which goes into the realm of the unknown, of the mysterious and that which can never be understood yet is a strong guiding force that permeates through all things and our quest to know that.

HL What is / constitutes / characterizes a spiritual relationship with Nature?

SB I'd like to say the word reverence demonstrates a deeper understanding. To know that there is something more than what is physically there.

HL Do spiritual people necessarily behave in sustainable ways?

SB I think they would like to except that I struggle with the concept of sustainability itself as we all must die and we are literally passing on information to the next and sustainability is itself seems to be measured against the benefit of humanity, mankind rather than to the benefit of the biodiversity of the planet. Sustainability is also distorted by politics and economics. And because of that, we continually put ourselves into self defeating progress traps where the only outcome seems to be more profit for someone. The idea is good yet I don't think it can be achieved if measured against humanity. there also every day modern needs and desires that are so complex in what they ask of this world that I don't believe it's possible to be sustainable all the time. By our existence we need to consume and survive and with the numbers that are currently out there one really has to question the plausibility of the idea.

HL Do religions have a role to play in the transformation to a more sustainable world?

If so, what kind of role?

SB my understanding of religion is a set of rules, a compass that guides that is meant to guide one's life but immediately I see the distortion of religions to benefit certain individuals while almost parading a façade of being better than any other. So I've had to invent my own religion and that is the river flowing, the sun rising, the stars shining – a more ever present force that permeates all things. My research into

mythology also reveals that things are not as they seem, that there are insights into the ways of the world that are represented as metaphorical analogies which are similar if not exactly the same throughout many different religions and the stories that they use to teach people how to behave and conduct themselves and understand this world and spirituality. And these stories do have a role to play, still have a role to play going forward if we can put aside the differences and see the similarities, to make them relevant to our modern culture cultures.

HL Do you participate in regular spiritual practices or rituals?

SB Yes

HL and if you can explain and tell me about them.

SB I am constantly amazed as to the mystery, the feeling of amazement. I also try and see the good and the bad and that gives me a disconnection to the physical and mental. I stare at the stars, I stare at the fire, I stare at the water and know that the same force flows throughout those. And I try and engage with that force. I try and bless the food which I eat and consider what energy and processes it has undergone to come to this point. I try and integrate these insights and energies into my creative work, my art. I also strongly believe in the self-policing rule – that we should treat others as we would like to be treated. And try and respect with reverence the world and my impact on that, knowing my hypocrisy through by just being alive. I also ...what the question was how did

HL Do you participate in regular spiritual practices and rituals?

SB Getting back to the enquiring and the asking I'm constantly doing more and more research to improve my knowledge on the myths and legends and insights of the generations which have gone before me so that I may have more compassion for the collective's differences and similarities.

HL and I just want to ask you, it's not one of these questions but I just want some clarifications. When you talk about the force, can you describe that a bit for me, what you mean by the force?

SB by looking deeper into the patterns of this world and its creations, there are certain there are no doubt similarities into relationships between different animal kingdoms that are never the same but always try and reflect the perfect model and my understanding of the perfect model is the very essence of life and through my understanding of what that is, if they had to be represented in a pattern, it would be the sphere which centre is everywhere and which the boundary is nowhere which is the best explanation for God that I've come across. And this is what I mean by the force, this energy that guides and shapes things throughout this world. does this answer your question?

HL Ja, but now I'm going to ask you another one. so this the force you prefer to call it the force rather than God

SB Ja.

HL so you don't necessarily believe in the Christian view of God

SB No

HL this old man in the sky

SB no that's a metaphor, that's a metaphor.

HL do you want say more?

SB Ja, its there's too many similarities in all the different religions and the stories to tell for any one to the only one. they're all extensions of the same idea , the same understanding and that's what so interesting about mythology, it's on the edge of what cannot be known.

HL and then can one have a spiritual relationship with Nature and if so, what does this entail?

SB Yes I believe they are the same. We

HL nature and spirituality?

SB yes, at their, they're on one plane. We just put ourselves on different levels in our daily lives and daily needs. I think it's the literally the fertile ground on which a true understanding of our relationship with this world can flourish. It's about knowing that other life forms are conscious, that there are spectrums that we cannot see, dimensions that we cannot understand.

HL and then sustainable development. What do you think the world needs if we are to overcome the global crises facing us?

SB the crises, yes, the crises. It's an important point. It's a very layered, a very layered, complex dynamic inter-related world, it's not like a broken pipe that can be fixed and I think acknowledging the complexity is a good start. it need progressive thinkers to be empowered, to try to new things. We need to confront our own dragons, and we need to share our insights. We need to stop *fighting*, we need to change this concept of scarcity to abundance to that of abundance, essentially to transform a fear based reality into one which nurtures life.

HL Do you think consumption and materialism are problematic and if so, why?

SB They are because they give us new and unprecedented issues to engage with that are often distracting from the basic needs that we have and the sheer numbers that are still rising call for more and more and more.

HL How do you think we can overcome consumption and materialism?

SB I don't think we can. What we can try and engage with is the idea of sharing. And not and but separate thought is try and strip away the façades that we've created for value, for real value. And if we can also feel more compassion for the animals and creatures that we share this world with.

HL What is your view on why there is suffering in the world?

SB Because there is an imbalance, a great imbalance between what resources are available and how people use them. People's greed and power indirectly harms and sometimes directly harms others. but this cannot be rectified as suffering or struggle is very much part of life. It's hard to live and easy to die. And so we go on. Also the okay but this is made more so by the disparity between what some people have and our egos need to outdo each other combined with modern culture, marketing messaging, abusing our psyches, ja.

HL In your view what is the world 'calling' for?

SB less people, more wilderness, a chance to rekindle itself, for a change in value and for a change in lifestyle.

HL How do you think we should go about 'sustainable development' in South Africa?

SB I think we should take it seriously and not see it as another way to make more money, as not another gold star to put on your annual year report but something that needs to be taken and something that needs to be addressed with greater vision of how we really relate to the delicate ecosystems that we rely on. Vast areas need to be cornered off, rivers need to be protected upstream, and we need to move more in the direction of positioning ourselves as a wild, abundant, diverse place, integrating communities and working for nature.

HL Do you think there is a relationship between Nature, spirituality and sustainable living? Please describe this relationship.

SB There must be as it's the essence of being alive and working towards a greater future for generations to come and that's not just human generations but generations of all life. We are all interconnected. And have a need to belong, to grow and to reach the sun.

HL and then you did want to think about, which question you wanted to come back to.

SB it was those defining moments, what's changed. I still haven't had a moment to think about that. I think one of them what really changes how I hunting created the need for conservation. The interplay between the two which is where we are with our relationship with the animals of this world. basically seeing good and bad mixed up. Another moment was being in the middle of the Atlantic and seeing plastic pollution float by and knowing that this was that the reach of mankind has gone around the world and there is no practical way to repair it and pick it up where before I thought there was. That was also very interesting experience was to see how these floating objects had been assimilated by the environment and were actually acting as new never before encountered hosts for new life. And that we and what we do is part of nature.

HL that's it unless there's anything else you want to say or comment on?

SB Just that it's through my observation and interaction with nature, it has given me insight into the guiding force and the mystery of spirituality. And without that I don't know where I would be. and I think there would be no possibility of any sustainable future.

HL would you say that your art is a spiritual experience for you, the creation of the art?

SB yes, the creation process is something to be revered and engaged with respect to that greater force. It is my calling, and my greater work. And I am very happy to have found that connection. The challenge now is to make it relevant and accessible to others . ja, I want to say that this may trigger like-minded thinking, that this may trigger more imaginative solutions and observations and answers to the collective subconscious – definitely.

HL that's great, thanks Simon

SB excellent

HL I wanted to ask if you would you mind if I use any of your or some of your quotes and poetry that you used in Plastikos and some of the images of your work.

SB Yes, yes – I'd love you to use that Return piece

HL yes, that's what I was thinking

SB because that's really the closest that I've come to engaging with that spiritual force through such a quirky medium using those guiding principles of nature and stopping time and manifesting that in an object. Yes, there is a lot in that.

Appendix K

IN DEFENCE OF SACRED SPACE⁶³

It takes guts for a woman to challenge modernity and male domination with ancient knowledge, tribal traditions and a vision of the future ahead of its time. But, in the green hills of Venda, the rural daughter of a healer is doing just that – and winning.

By Don Pinnock

To some, Mphatheleni Makaulule is a demon's daughter, destined to burn in the fires of a Christian hell. To others she's an emissary from the ancestors and a keeper of ancient tribal traditions. She laughs at the idea. 'I don't blame people who criticise me,' she says when I meet her in Thohoyando, 'it's just they don't understand.'

People who *do* understand hold her in extremely high regard. They include traditional leaders and shamans from the Amazon and Russia, the Gaia Foundation in London, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and, importantly, Venda elders known as *makhadzis*.

She tells me she's just a traditional woman from rural Venda with healing abilities in her hands, but I disagree. Traditional rural women don't generally win Bill Clinton Fellowships to study leadership at the United Nations and universities such as Tufts and Harvard. They don't travel to the Amazon, Ethiopia, Colombia, Barcelona, Britain and Kenya in pursuit of knowledge about ancient cultures and global warming.

Mphathe's story is altogether unusual and includes taking on a king – and winning. She's a rural woman, but also something else entirely. And that something else has been fraught with challenges and contradictions.

⁶³ Pinnock, D. (don@pinnock.co.za). 3 May 2011. Phiphidi. Email to H. Lockhart (helen.lockhart@aquarium.co.za).

I'm there to talk to her about a waterfall she's protecting. It's called Phiphidi and is lovely beyond imagining. Here the Mutshindudu River cascades down black granite into a pool rimmed by huge, ancient trees, their muscular roots entwined in seeming embrace and their gnarled branches reaching out over the water.

For countless generations women have come to the pool to perform rituals for bountiful crops, good rains and the health of the Venda people. The river is one of 24 that flow from the Thathe Holy Forest, higher up in the Soutpansberg, said to be protected by a white lion. Along their courses are groves, pools, falls and a lake where, the women say, trees, creatures and the air we breathe are purified and renewed. And they are not wrong.

Phiphidi is part of a biodiversity hotspot in Limpopo Province which supports hundreds of plant and animal species, some of which are endemic. Thirty percent of South Africa's tree species grow in the area, though it accounts for less than one percent of the country's area. In addition, 60 percent of South Africa's birdlife, 40 percent of its mammals, and 30 percent of its reptiles call Soutpansberg home.

When I visited Phiphidi a front-end loader was clawing at piles of gravel and driving a road to the head of the falls. Dirty cloth and bits of plastic clung to roots around the once-clear pool, which was opaque with sediment. There was a rubbish dump nearby and the many condoms lying around suggested a less sacred use of the site. Under construction were eight chalets, a restaurant, laundry, bar and lapa as well as an imposing, lockable gate. A Limpopo hotel group was already advertising the falls and the sacred lake, Fundudzi, in its 'Land of Myth and Legend' tour package.

The falls are within the territory of a small local clan, the Ramunangi, who were horrified at the desecration of their sacred site. The development was evidently sanctioned by a local chief, Jerry Tshivhase, and was being undertaken by the Tshivhase Development Foundation Trust, of which the BEE billionaire Mashudu Tshivhase is a director. Both men are related to King Kennedy Tshivhase.

After my visit, the organisation that Mphathe formed, Dzomo la Mupo (Voice of Nature) took them all to court and forced building operations to cease. The king, coincidentally, had his kingship stripped. The message is clear: don't mess with ancestral traditions.

As far as Mphathe is concerned, that's only the beginning. Sitting chatting in a park on a cool Venda afternoon, it seems incongruous that this pretty young mum with a tinkling laugh could be parachuting ancient knowledge into a postmodern, eco-conscious age with such force and conviction – until she starts talking about how she got there.

She's the first born of the third wife of a traditional healer who she revered. Her mother, too, had healing skills inherited from her own father, a traditional spiritual guide. Mphathe's father was 74 when she was born, the 11th of 24 children, a large clan related to the king. 'My father gave me the name of Mphatheleni, which means to re-build,' she says, 'and I take it very seriously. He knew what he wanted me to do.'

From standard eight, with her father now old, Mphathe went to live with her uncle, a fervent Christian who saw it as his duty to turn her from her 'heathen' ways. As she puts it, 'modern life wanted to dominate me.' She tried to oblige, but kept having dreams in which her father, who died when she was in her second year at university, instructed her in the old ways of her people. When she told her uncle, he said her father was a demon and prayed over her head to exorcise him.

In her final year the spiritual contradictions were becoming intolerable. Right after graduation she had a breakdown. In hospital they diagnosed hyper stress and pulmonary tuberculosis.

Her uncle visited her to preach. Weak and in bed, she had little resistance, so she fought back in the only way possible. One day she dressed herself and ran away to the only place she thought she could find peace and healing: a forest at the foot of a sacred mountain near Elim named Luvhola. Utterly alone but with a memory of herbal remedies her father had taught her, wild fruits and spring water, she healed herself.

When her strength returned she built a rough hut and daily climbed the mountain to sit and think. 'I spent two years in the forest,' she says, 'no money, living the way of my father. I wasn't afraid – my totem is the warthog. I walked a lot. Friends brought me books and relatives came with food. Mostly I needed to stay alone, but I visited older members of my clan, learning from them the history of my people. It was a rite of passage and I found the strength to do what I'm doing now.'

She gathered traditional objects, old cooking utensils, cloth and beads – some from the collection of her father. Then, with plans that came to her in a dream and help from the community, Mphathe built a cultural village – traditional kitchen, bedroom, grandparents’ room and initiation hut. She did ceremonies with snuff and finger millet, communed with the ancestors and explained to anyone who came along what she was doing and why.

A tour guide, looking for traditional contacts, couldn’t believe his luck when he visited her. Soon busloads of tourists from all over the world were coming to sit on the ground around Mphathe to hear what she had to say.

‘I made many friends that way, but I realised most of the tourists just wanted to take photographs,’ she said. ‘They weren’t going to do anything with what I was telling them. My place was listed as a picnic spot on the tour pamphlet. I was just entertainment.’ She began studying the ethics of guiding and qualified as a cultural guide. ‘But life was difficult,’ she says. ‘So many contradictions. I didn’t understand why. So I found a *makhadzi* who helped me make sense of it. One day she said the ancestors required that I have a child. That was a shock, but you don’t argue with your *makhadzi*.’

The details of how she obliged are rather personal, but the outcome was Thama, which means best friend. Around eight now, he really *is* her best friend and already deeply knowledgeable about traditional matters and her work.

Mphathe decided it was time to pull back from tourism, leave the forest and take what she had found there and within herself into the world. Back in Thohoyando she saw the offer of Bill Clinton Fellowships. She applied, but then withdrew, feeling that Thama was too young to leave with others to look after. The following year, however, the programme asked her to apply again. She was accepted and flew to the United States, where she studied leadership and other skills at various universities, including Harvard.

‘When I returned people said: “Yho, you’ve been to the United States and now you’re a millionaire. You must start a business.” But that’s not what I was preparing myself for. Money doesn’t interest me. I went back to what I was doing.

‘I worked with those who were really interested in traditions, and that’s how I met people from the Gaia Foundation. I spent days with them. They really understood what I was doing.

‘With their help and with the African Biodiversity Network we started Dzumo la Mupo to defend sacred sites and traditional rituals. I took my ideas all over the world and met amazing people – shamans, traditional leaders and people who understood the link between old customs and earth healing. In the Amazon it touched me how comfortable people were living in an indigenous way with nature.’

Back home, though, all was not well. Her uncle, who had failed to convert her, turned her family and even her mother against her, claiming she was doing demonic work. They forced her to remove from the family home all her traditional clothes and objects – and even the TV set she’d bought her mother. Her uncle held a meeting in which he exorcised the ‘demon’ spirit of her father from the house. ‘He said “I cast out the demon spirit of evil out of this house. Jesus help you.” It was a shock. My own father! I just walked out.’

Her mother, on instructions from her uncle, burned a book in which all the ailments, preparations and cures had been collected by her father over a lifetime of work. Mphathe couldn’t begin to estimate the depth of cultural knowledge lost in that single action. But it hardened her resolve to seek accommodation of traditional knowledge in the modern world.

She began seeking out elders and recording their memories. She asked them why they didn’t speak out in defence of sacred sites. ‘They said: “We’re staying among Christians. We don’t want trouble.” I did workshops with these people and with Dzomo la Mupo they are now a force, they have become free. I helped them have a voice. And when chiefs started building at Phiphidi Falls they said: “That is enough!” We hired a top lawyer, Roger Chennels, to fight it in the courts.’ And, for now, he’s stopped them.

In traditional society it’s not easy for a woman to go up against a man and near impossible against a chief. Mphathe had taken on a chief and a king and won. It is an act of bravery and defiance almost unheard of. And she’s deeply saddened that her belief in the value of cultural traditions has isolated her from her family. But she knows what she’s doing is right for the world and her people: ‘There are 24 rivers flowing out of the Thathe Holy Forest. If you cut it down, what then? That’s the end of the farming system in Venda. Sacred sites are places that make evaporation that makes rain. If you don’t protect the

pools and waterfalls, where do the people get clean water to drink? Rituals aren't empty things. They're the earth wisdom of hundreds of generations of wise people, especially *makhadzis*.

'My father would never allow trees or bushes to be cut down near a river,' she says, watching Thama swing in the branches above us. 'You can call that tradition but it's also good environmental sense. Without their shade the life of a river shrivels and dies. It can dry up or flood your land. The tradition of my people protects the environment. It comes from an understanding of the natural world, which people have lost. It is old knowledge but it's also future knowledge, because without it we'll kill creation. We're living in the time in between when people have turned away from caring for the earth. But it's changing.'

'You know if we want to save this world – especially people – we need to listen to women, particularly elders. They're the bowls, the containers of life. They are food security. Even a king can't be a king without a *makhadzi*. You can't be a strong fowl if you haven't felt the warmth of a mother hen. We appreciate highly the role of men, but we are the cradles of the human world.'

Mphathe had a meeting to attend and her cellphone was ringing. She apologised, called Thama and stood up to go. Then turned to me with a look that suggested steel. 'I have to stay strong to live the way I do and be who I am', she said. 'We're not chosen, we choose. Defending the old ways and bringing that knowledge to the future for our children is what I've chosen. It's what I must do. It's not easy, but I won't be stopped.'

Appendix L

EMAIL TO WORK COLLEAGUES

From: Helen Lockhart

Sent: Monday, March 14, 2011 3:05 PM

To: TwoOceansAquarium

Subject: what is Nature?

As some of you know I am busy with my masters thesis in sustainable development. One of the things I am looking at is our (human) relationship with Nature.

But people understand Nature to mean different things. I'm interested to hear what you think and would appreciate it if you could take a few minutes to answer these two questions:

What is Nature?

What is the value of Nature to you?

Your answers can be as long or as short as you like. Your responses will be kept confidential.

Look forward to hearing from you.

What is Nature?

Nature includes everything in the world, both animate and inanimate but, because we have become dislocated from a great part of it, we nowadays tend to think of nature being "out there", the "wild", the "untamed".

What is the value of nature to me?

Assuming Nature represents "wild", I view it as a "place" where I can re-connect with the wild and with myself. I am both in wonder and at peace when I am "in Nature". It is where I go to fill my soul!

What is Nature?

Nature is two things. It is our natural surroundings, predominantly the elements that were not created synthetically. It is also the essence of a living being. As in, the natural inclination of a human or animal. Collectively then, nature is the raw state. Unaffected by human or other intervention. Nature, as in the natural state of the world, does not really exist anymore. It has been redefined. If there is no longer a drop of sea that does not contain plastic, then all life has adapted to a new natural state. If true nature is that which has not been created synthetically, then a plethora of plant and animal life is no longer natural. Some humans are not natural. I think we have redefined “nature” sometime in the past century.

What is the value of nature to me?

I always seek to respond in the most natural way possible to every situation. Because if we seek out our most natural response, we are presenting in a raw and therefore honest state. When we manipulate our surroundings, our reactions, we are not being true to nature. I also like to imagine the most natural, and therefore logical, solution to whatever problem is at hand. For example, what is the best food for my baby? My answer has to lie in what the most natural food source for a baby is. Therefore breastmilk.

I openly acknowledge that we live in an unnatural world. So sometimes we have to find the solutions that have been adapted to suit the world that we have created. For example, if we are told that we need to take anti-depressants to cope, we can fight an unnatural intervention, or acknowledge that the unnatural existence we lead might require unnatural support so that we can adapt to it.

Nature, for me, is a human baby just born. Unaffected in most ways by anything man-made or synthetic. Nature is also the elements that my body most craves. Grass beneath my feet, swimming underwater, listening to the wind, smelling the sea, turning my face up to the sun. Nature is also God. God being my conscience. It is a measure of what is right and wrong.

What is Nature?

Everything that was not created by man & in itself has a uniqueness & beauty beyond our comprehension.

What is the value of Nature to you?

There exists an invaluable symbiotic relationship between man and the world of nature. This inter-dependent relationship is vital for both the survival of man and nature, and also for its continuous growth and sustainability. In recent times the value and dependence of man on nature for our continued existence has been highlighted in an effort to retard and maybe even reverse the destructive effects that man's self-centred greed has had on nature. The inert nature of the natural world is to provide for its human counterpart – you won't see a chicken refusing to lay eggs. Man on the other hand seeks self-gratification and herein lies the calamity that will ultimately lead to our demise. I see nature as carrying an irreplaceable value. Once you've destroyed it, not that simple to get it back.

What is Nature?

Every single creature, cell, cycle or life form that all mysteriously work together to make this planet work.

What is the value of Nature to you?

Before I had kids I used to enjoy nature, whether it was beautiful scenery in the form of watching the ocean or taking a walk and getting some fresh air. Since having children though, I think I've only recently come to *experience* nature, maybe because I'm constantly having to answer the ever present "why" questions but I find myself looking at nature through new and inquisitive eyes. I can no longer just sit on the beach, I now have to explore the rock pool and notice the detail that would have gone by unnoticed before. I love how nature works, everything has a purpose.

To me nature's true value lies in the many lessons that it holds – there will always be someone stronger, bigger and faster but with some clever camouflage and bit of willpower even the smallest survives.

What is Nature?

Being in the outdoors with birds, animals, veld (plants, insects, flowers), beach (sand and sea). Waking up in my camper and listening to the birds and the stream flowing over the rocks.

Walking into the mountain amongst all the plants, flowers, bees, birds, tiny ants running on the ground. Driving high up into the mountains and looking out over the vast mountains and seeing the eagles soar through the sky.

What is the value of Nature to you?

Huge, there is no money value just piece of mind value (does that make sense), The value is that I can think, breathe, calmness, relax, I could live out there with nothing around me just what was created by God.

What is Nature?

To me Nature is everything that is not manmade, so that includes me. I am Nature and Nature is me. If I destroy Nature I destroy myself and if I care for Nature I care for myself.

That however is not the general viewpoint as humans seem to think that we are somehow superior to nature so much so that we've created this world of straight lines and squares in which we live. This square world being the total opposite of what nature is. We just need to look in the mirror to see that there is nothing straight and square about us. This mindset has been passed on from generation to generation each time separating us from nature more and more causing us to eventually not understand nature anymore and therefore not understanding ourselves. So instead of being able to communicate with nature through positive vibrations and love, something that's suppose to come natural to us, we now need chains and whips to tame animals; and it now takes us a lifetime of dedication and practice to glimpse things that's suppose to be naturally part of who we are. Our inability to see ourselves as part of nature touches on the basis of what's wrong with humankind in general and it's made us unkind actually. Here's some examples, people who skin animals alive do not comprehend the negativity of their creation because they see themselves as totally separate from nature. They perceive themselves as manmade and very much a part of this square world.

Drug addicts in general do what they do because this square world do not make sense to them and therefore they try and escape it so much so that they do terrible things in order to maintain that escape. The lucky ones who do successfully make it back into society struggle to do simple everyday things as this square world does not make sense to them. It's why lots of the bushmen are alcoholics, society forced them into a square world that does not make sense to them, its not who we are.

So we can go on and find lots more examples in society of people who are unaware that their problems are actually because they do not know nature and therefore do not know themselves. Everybody has that yearning, they just don't know that it's actually nature calling them.

Value of Nature to me?

To show me who I am suppose to be. Nature being pure positive energy, it recharges me. To teach me about give and take, if I eat an apple I throw the peels in the garden, because that's where they belong. Simply put.

Think I got a bit carried away, I watched the trailer of *Earthlings* two weeks ago and was extremely bothered by it because I couldn't put what I saw into perspective, anyway think I just did. So if this didn't help you, it helped me.

What is Nature?

Open spaces, animals, mountains, fields, oceans, lakes... But also a little garden in an urban area.. Anything green and natural really. Any animal and plant. Anything not man-made.

What is the value of Nature to you?

It is beautiful and a place to get away from everyday hassles. I might be having a terrible day, but sitting at the beach will cure that instantly. Sitting in a field of flowers looking at the sky makes you forget the world for a few minutes. It is like the perfect de-stresser.

What is Nature?

A sense of something outside myself, sculpted and refined by God's vision and will, that I cannot control and is larger than me and the sum of my actions.

What is the value of Nature to you?

As someone who suffers from OCD and the need to control (read manipulate if you want) things around me, I find connecting or just being in nature to be a wonderfully humbling and the one place I can truly let go. No matter how often I weed, water or prune my garden does what it needs to do. No matter how often I visit a rock pool I'm damned if I know what I'm going to find with each new trip. It's very humbling, as it presents me with an opportunity to lose myself for a while. Sometimes it's a gentle and at other times radical (take the tsunami off Japan right now) reminder that I am a very small speck in a much bigger plan and I am merely a temporary squatter in someone else's backyard.

What is Nature?

Nature is all of God's creation for the human race to enjoy and look after! The beauty of it all is astonishing! Everything is created in its own perfect way to help survive in nature!

What is the value of Nature to you?

The value is great because if we do not look after nature its beauty will deteriorate and therefore have no enjoyment in life which was given to us for free!

What is Nature?

Nature is that which is not man-made.

What is the value of Nature to you?

Nature is the source from which all learning stems.

"ENVIRONMENT..."

There is something special or spiritual about nature or 'wild' environments which evoke unique emotions in most people, especially those who have had some exposure already.

Release a child into a garden, pond, stream or rock pool and you will observe this natural emotion displayed through the total absorption and fascination with which they approach that environment. (It is sad that so many modern children have no access to such experiences or have been desensitized by having such natural play areas supplanted by small flashing screens with artificial electronic noises – a sad replacement for real mental and emotional stimulation...)

Whilst some refer to built environments, I equate the word environment with natural or largely unspoilt locations. Landscaped, but primarily organic areas bear some resemblance to their former glory, but are still a poor facsimile; still, it is far more comforting to the soul to sit watching the sun set over a landscaped park, than over a smoggy city.

The thoughts that spring to mind when I am trying to define environment inevitably steer towards photographic moments, because those are the lasting memories that we have of our times away from our man-made cities and homes. Some examples are required:

Sunset and sunrise, with or without clouds, over any natural setting, Mountains, Open plains, Kalahari dunes, the Ocean. The colours and changing light never fail to evoke some change in the happy-chemical level of the brain.

Walking the dunes of the Namib, or Mountains of the Richtersveld – Who would think that such barren landscapes could make one feel good, but there is something magical about their barrenness. This is slightly artificial, because we enter such places in man-made transport and do so with adequate nourishment and water supplies. I fear that we may have a different impression of such environments if we have to live in them for any length of time, and yet there are animals and plants which do; which have been shaped over years of gradual change in their environments in order to continue fitting in and surviving. I am always fascinated by the level to which ‘extreme environment’ creatures have evolved.

Paddling on the Richtersveld Orange River – This can be viewed as an artificial, or sculpted environment, as the flow of the river has been radically changed and the banks are frequented by herds of goats and cattle; yet there is something special about this and other wilder, less tainted rivers. The sound of a babbling mountain stream is music in its own right, while a river in flood is an awesome sight to behold and experience – only a fool would approach such power with a lack of respect... often; to engage with an environment, without due care and respect, is to invite death.

Surfing a decent wave (reasonable size, peeling at a rideable speed and kissed by an offshore breeze, especially approaching sunset) is an experience that surfers, the world over, have experienced and paid fortunes to find as often as possible. One cannot surf without developing a keen aesthetic appreciation for the wild environment and there are so many remote and perfect surf spots that are also idyllic in their setting.

Motorcycling or Mountain Biking in remote settings – Mountain biking takes the enjoyment of cycling firmly out of its normal artificial urban setting (with all the evils of city traffic) and drops it firmly in the natural environment. While I am out there riding, I can stop at any time to smell the fresh surroundings, study natural vegetation and passing animals and enjoy the view. Light off-road motorcycling has enabled me to do the same with a motorbike, except go further.

Sitting around a dying fire – anywhere, but especially outside in a wild environment, never fails to hypnotize and enthrall humans everywhere. There is a special magic related to fire – so terrible, yet so useful.

The night sky on a moonless night in an unpolluted setting evokes similar feelings of awe and wonder. It is sad that so many modern children (and adults!) may never experience the full majesty of our night sky... and appreciate that we are only a tiny part of a massive, infinite cosmos.

I should back all of this up with photographs- as they will convey my mind's eye far better than words can...

I fear that I am only touching on one romantic aspect of the meaning of “Environment” to me, because these are moments and experiences that I have experienced, or aspire to – and many of them involve some awful, contrived, man-made contraptions – sort of “the civilized humans return to his roots...”

BUT- underlying this is an understanding that the world has existed and been shaped by phenomena obeying the laws of science for eons, and that its face and conditions have changed countless times, normally slowly, but sometimes rapidly and catastrophically, and that plants and animals have evolved to fit in perfectly, that the natural environment is an intricate and subtly interactive system in dynamic equilibrium which, left to itself, will remain so; but, if altered too quickly, will collapse – until the source of the disturbance is removed... or learns to work towards appreciating and respecting the natural order.

As for the value that the Environment has for us –

Based upon my initial sketches – people yearn to experience real environments. The potential for Tourism and Education is massive, assuming that we can preserve our natural world.

Understanding the natural principles of nature (environment), and employing them, will enable us to live better and to maintain the world in a healthy state.

Biomimicry is in its infancy, but, in its purest sense, looks to copying nature to solve technical problems, but also to emulating the operating principles/systems of nature. If we can get this to work, sooner, rather than later – we may be able to save the world and ourselves (I hesitate to say “make the world a better place” rather “get the world back to the elegantly balanced Eden it used to be”).

Appendix M

PROPOSED ELECTIVE MODULE FOR BPHIL/MPHIL IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT ACCREDITED BY THE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC LEADERSHIP AT THE UNIVERSITY OF STELLENBOSCH: SPIRITUALITY, NATURE AND SUSTAINABILITY.

Introduction

Human consumption has reached disproportionate levels and is responsible for the degradation of the environment and rapidly diminishing natural resources. Underlying this is the view that we are not part of Nature, but exist in a superior position from which we can dominate, conquer and exploit it to meet our own needs. In our quest for efficiency, speed and comfort, we have separated ourselves from Nature with disregard for the value of Nature in its own right. This anthropocentric view underpins our current economic system and informs mainstream sustainable development discourse.

Given the argument that our disconnection and alienation from Nature is at the crux of the planetary polycrisis and that we face a crisis of spirituality with regards to our relationship with Nature, this module will explore the concept of Nature in depth, taking into consideration different cultural interpretations, environmental ethical positions and perspectives of Nature held in ancient times. Some of the key arguments as to why humans are disconnected from Nature (science, loss of indigenous knowledge, colonialism, capitalism, globalisation, religion and technology) will be explored as well as the implications of the human-Nature disconnection.

It will also look at the role that spirituality and religion could play in moving us towards a deeper connection with Nature and sustainable lives and contemplate spirit-in-action and what this means for sustainable living.

Drawing on literature (provided in my bibliography) in the fields of sustainable development, spirituality, ecopsychology, deep ecology, environmental ethics, complexity theory, poetry and indigenous knowledge and customs, this module will explore the relationship between spirituality, Nature and sustainability.

I recommend that participants who enrol for this module do so in conjunction with the complexity theory and systems thinking module and/or the leadership and environmental ethics module.

Aims

The aims of this module would be:

- to encourage participants to reflect on the human-Nature connection and what Nature means to them personally;
- to consider the ways in which their own spirituality/religion guides and informs them in making decisions about the way they live;
- to showcase ways in which Nature is being considered in its own right as opposed to its value to humans, e.g. earth jurisprudence and the Constitution of Ecuador and;
- to provide an opportunities for quiet reflection in Nature.

Learning outcomes (this requires input from the faculty members)

- a heightened awareness or consciousness of what it means to part of the web of life;
- to critically evaluate mainstream sustainable development discourse and the implications this has for Nature;

Syllabus

Based on the structure of the current modules offered within the B/MPhil degree, the module would run over six days with classroom and group work on five of the days and the sixth day would be dedicated to group presentations. Each day would commence with meditation/silent time and community work before the formal teaching sessions start. It is suggested that this module be offered in residence and Spier (with which the Sustainability Institute has an ongoing relationship), could be approached to provide the necessary accommodation for the participants.⁶⁴

Classroom work

Participants would be required to complete several pre-course readings and I propose the following:

- Starke, L. & L. Mastny (eds). 2010. *State of the World 2010: Transforming Cultures: From Consumerism to Sustainability*. New York: W.W. Norton.

⁶⁴ Spier is a wine estate outside Stellenbosch, Western Cape, South Africa and is rapidly establishing itself as a leader in the implementation of sustainability practices. <http://www.spier.co.za/sustainability/>

- Banerjee, S.B. 2003. Who sustains whose development? Sustainable development and the reinvention of nature. *Organization Studies*, 24(1): 143–180. Website: <http://oss.sagepub.com/content/24/1/143>, accessed 5 March 2011.
- Narayanan, Y. 2010. Sustainable consumption as a means to self-realization: A Hindu perspective on when enough is enough. *Sustainable Development*, 18: 252–259. Website: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.ez.sun.ac.za/doi/10.1002/sd.476/pdf>, accessed 3 April 2011.
- Jackson, T. 2009. *Prosperity without Growth: The Transition to a Sustainable Economy*. Sustainable Development Commission. Website: http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications/downloads/prosperity_without_growth_report.pdf, accessed 4 January 2010.

Additional literature for inclusion in the core reader for this module could be sourced from the extensive bibliography at the end of this thesis.

Possible guest lecturers and topics could include:

Nirmala Nair – Bhutan and gross national happiness: An alternative economic measure

Nicola Robins – African thinking and sustainability

Muna Lakhani – Shifting South Africa to the next economy

Simon MAX Bannister – Art for sustainability

Justin Friedman – FLOW: For Love of Water

Mphatheleni Makaulule – The role of ‘mupo’ and protecting sacred sites

Cormac Cullinan – Earth jurisprudence

Ian McCallum – Poetry: a language to connect with Nature

Matthew Zylstra – Reconnecting with Nature (PhD work)

Jeffrey Rink – Implications of the human-Nature disconnection: An ecopsychological perspective

Matthew Watkin – How mindfulness could assist in making sustainable choices

Films are used effectively as part of the teaching process at the Sustainability Institute. Possible films could include *Baraka* and *Fierce Light*.⁶⁵ Time would be allocated for discussion on each of these films.

⁶⁵ *Baraka* is a powerful non-verbal film showing the beauty and power of Nature and human life.

<http://www.spiritofbaraka.com/non-verbal-films>. *Fierce Light*: “Fueled by the belief that ‘another world is possible,’ *Fierce Light* is a compelling, global journey into the world of spirit-in-action, an exploration of what Martin Luther King called ‘Love in Action,’ and Gandhi called ‘Soul Force’; what Ripper is calling ‘Fierce Light.’ <http://www.fiercelight.org/>

Although it might be difficult to include given that there is not much teaching time during the week, I suggest that a day or half a day is set aside for participants to spend solo time in Nature, taking nothing but themselves. Again, depending on the available time, it might be possible to arrange a site visit to either !Khwa ttu (a San education and culture centre north-west of Cape Town) or the Platbos Indigenous Forest near Gansbaai.⁶⁶

Community work

Every morning from Monday to Friday students are required to participate in some form of community work before the formal classroom sessions begins. Current opportunities include working in the gardens of the Sustainability Institute, assisting on a local organic vegetable farm (weeding, planting or harvesting) and helping to clean the guesthouse at the Institute. For the proposed module I suggest that the students get involved in a restoration project of some sort: this could involve clearing of alien vegetation and replanting with indigenous plants, starting a community garden at a local under-resourced school, or clearing litter from a nearby river or beach.

Group project

Group work is an integral aspect of the modules and affords the students the opportunity to experience transdisciplinarity and to grapple with the challenges that this presents in reality. At the beginning of the week a set of topics is provided to the students and it is their responsibility to self-organise into groups. Time is allocated throughout the week for the groups to prepare a presentation which they deliver to their peers on Saturday morning. Possible group assignment topics could include:

- Visit to Slangkop, a granite outcrop next to the Eerste River on the Spier Estate: discover the history of Slangkop and its role as a sacred site in the Hottentot culture. What stories does Slangkop hold of the past, present and future?
- Observations of children in Nature: How do children interact with Nature? What emotions are elicited during unstructured time in Nature? What recommendations can you provide for being in Nature based on your observations of the children?
- Nature in the township: Is Nature present in townships/how to connect with Nature in townships? How do township inhabitants experience Nature?
- Visit a shopping mall and interview shoppers about their experience of the mall and their thoughts on Nature.

⁶⁶ !Khwa ttu: <http://www.khwattu.org/>

Written work

Students are required to produce and submit two written documents after attending the module: an academic assignment and a journal. The assignment usually consists of two parts, a literature review and a case study, and the journal contains personal reflections of the learning experience. In keeping with the proposed module's focus on Nature, I suggest that students include a Nature journal as part of their overall journal. Ideas for keeping a Nature journal can be seen in below ("Get to know Nature").

A suggested topic for the individual assignment is (this will need input from faculty members):
What kind of transformations are needed in order for us to move towards a more sustainable world?
(PART A). Illustrate your argument by providing an example of an individual or an organisation which is acting in a transformative way (PART B).

GET TO KNOW NATURE

With these fun and easy techniques, you can discover a deeper connection to the world around you.

By Jena Ball

October/November 2006

Keeping a nature journal can be a relaxing and rewarding experience.

In today's accelerated world, it's important to take time to *breathe*. Literally, of course, but also to breathe in the sights, scents and sounds of nature: to watch a sunset, walk through a park or get away from the city lights so you can really see the stars shine. Such examples are easy ways to refresh and energize your body and mind. Also, by keeping a journal and practicing a few simple techniques, you can discover a stronger connection to nature. Not only will you observe unique events, you'll feel more alive — awake to the world around you and attuned to your connections to it.

That we are drawn to and can be inspired by the natural world should come as no surprise. Because human beings evolved in nature, we have an "instinctive love of living things," according to Edward O. Wilson, the renowned biologist known as "the father of biodiversity." Wilson calls this instinct *biophilia*, and says our inherent capacity to "draw deep excitement and pleasure" from nature has been and always will be essential to our survival.

David Petersen, a former Mother Earth News editor and author of *On the Wild Edge: In Search of a Natural Life*, concurs with nature's importance to our past, present and future. "The human species evolved alongside fellow animals of every fur and feather," he says. "Without our fellow animals, we would not be human. Animals and what remains of the wild, natural world are central to our emotional as well as biological well-being."

What follows are ideas to help you explore your own instinctive responses to nature and become an amateur naturalist. All you need is an open mind, a journal and a commitment to spend time outdoors. Other inexpensive tools could include books, field guides, watercolors and an assortment of colored pens and pencils.

Find a place

In his book *A Sense of Place*, artist and conservationist Alan Gussow says, "As humans we require support for our spirits, and this is what certain kinds of places provide. A place is a piece of whole environment that has been claimed by feeling." Choose a place to study that touches your heart and mind — one that piques your interest and evokes a feeling of connection. Depending on where you live, your back yard may be the nearest option. Other possibilities can be almost anywhere and may surprise you — a rooftop garden or a secluded nook at a city park, for example.

Like all relationships, getting to know a place takes time. The best way to do this is to regularly visit your place, whether it's every day, once a month or whatever works for you. Even after several visits, you'll be amazed at how many "new" things you observe each time.

Keep a journal

Keeping a journal of your experiences and observations is easy and rewarding. Journals build knowledge, help with identification of plants and animals and form the basis for reflective writing. And nature journals can include just about anything: thoughts, facts, descriptions, sketches, questions, charts or poetry. Consider these approaches:

Observe

Make a habit of noting the date, time, location, weather, wind, cloud conditions and your overall impressions each time you visit your place.

Draw

Many people hesitate to draw, but don't worry about the artistic quality of your sketches. Drawing is a great tool for recording information and will sharpen your ability to observe, identify and pick up on subtle details — you'll come to terms with your subjects in new ways.

- Draw things at eye and ground level.
- Draw things you see overhead.
- Draw whole landscapes.
- Do quick sketches: 15, 20, 30 seconds.
- Do detailed drawings.
- Sketch something and then write notes beside and/or around the sketch.
- Do a series of drawings on one theme, such as the moon's phases or how your place changes through the seasons.

Make lists

Listing is a way to celebrate your discoveries, organize your thoughts and keep track of information. List what you see, smell, hear, feel, think about — lists can be about anything.

Reflect

Spend time writing about what you've observed and how it has affected you. Let your words flow without pausing to revise. Follow threads of thought to see where they take you.

Awaken the senses

To truly observe and appreciate nature, use all of your senses. Try these simple exercises:

Hearing

Sit in silence with your eyes closed for several minutes. Use your hearing to scan your surroundings. Then open your eyes and listen for several more minutes. Try to associate movements with sounds. Write for five minutes without stopping about what you heard.

Our sense of smell is not as developed as it is in most animals, but what we smell tends to stay with us. Try sitting quietly for five minutes. Take note of various smells and the images, impressions and feelings they evoke. Next, try walking around to see how and where smells change. Repeat this exercise at different times of day and year, and during different kinds of weather.

Touch

The natural world touches us every day, but we seldom notice it. During walks, be mindful of what you feel from wind, moisture, grass, trees, leaves, etc. Then describe the sensations in writing. Write about the texture of things you find along the way, such as rocks. Also compare and contrast opposites, such as the tops and bottoms of leaves.

Sight

There are many ways to *see*. For example, a specific goal (such as identifying flowers), will determine where and how you focus your attention. Your mood will also affect how and what you see. Here are some ways to change your focus:

Shift from hard to soft focus: This is a bit like daydreaming. Pick one thing and focus on it normally, but put your attention on your peripheral vision.

Focus on colors: How many different colors and shades can you identify? Come up with creative names for them and see if you can create a palette for a particular place.

Focus on outlines: Look at the edges of things—think of objects as pictures in a coloring book. Describe how their edges overlap and fit together.

Focus on relationships: Notice the relationships between plants, animals, insects, trees and the weather. Watch how a bee pollinates flowers while collecting pollen; how small birds chase and agitate a hawk or crow; how squirrels jump from one tree to another.

Focus on details: Take one thing — such as a flower — and examine it from all sides noting everything about it: from its color, size and shape, to the various parts and how they connect.

Focus on light and dark: If you squint you will see things as shades of dark and light rather than shapes.

Focus on spaces: Look at the space between two things, such as the gaps between two trees or the petals of a flower. Draw the spaces instead of the physical object — what do they look like?

Based on the drawings and notes you make in the field, consult dictionaries, field guides and online sources with a goal of building your nature vocabulary and overall understanding of what you observe.

Of all the things you experience as you get to know nature, becoming aware of the larger web of life on which we all depend is arguably the most beneficial. Perhaps the poet Gary Snyder said it best when he wrote, “Nature is not a place to visit, it is home.” Cherish the natural world as your home, and it will always reward you.

(Sourced from <http://www.motherearthnews.com/Nature-Community/2006-10-01/Get-to-Know-Nature.aspx>, accessed 20 August 2011).

Appendix N

MOMENTS OF CONNECTION



29 July 2010: My trees before their demise



12 February 2011: A mongoose visits my garden



27 November 2010: Today I decided that part of my problem with my thesis is that I am spending too much time behind my computer and not enough time BEING OUT IN AND CONNECTING WITH NATURE! So I packed my backpack with some supplies and set off on foot to Rondevlei Nature Reserve. This mole snake (left) and tortoise (right) graced me with their presence.



17 April 2011: Morning praying mantis: we met in the garden while I was watering



15 May 2011: A curious little Cape batis outside my bathroom window



14 March 2011: A rain spider beauty reveals itself



17 April 2011: Friends, not foes

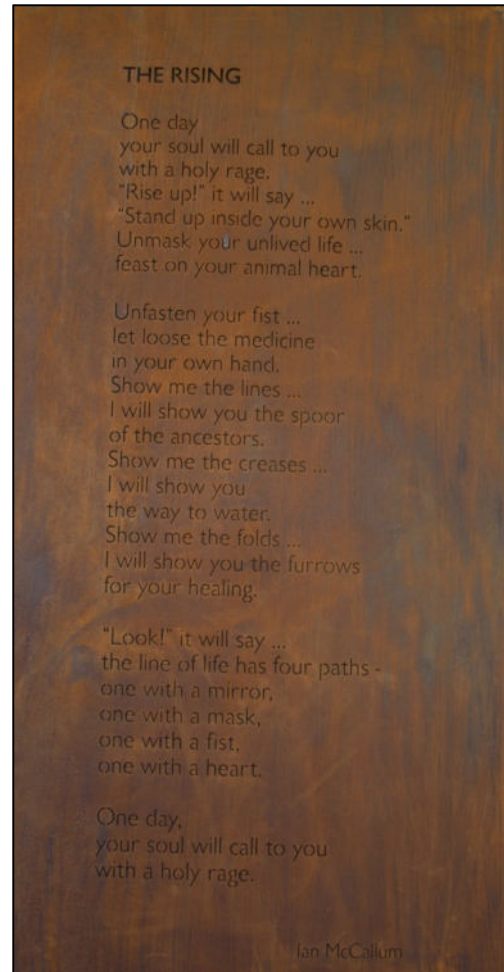
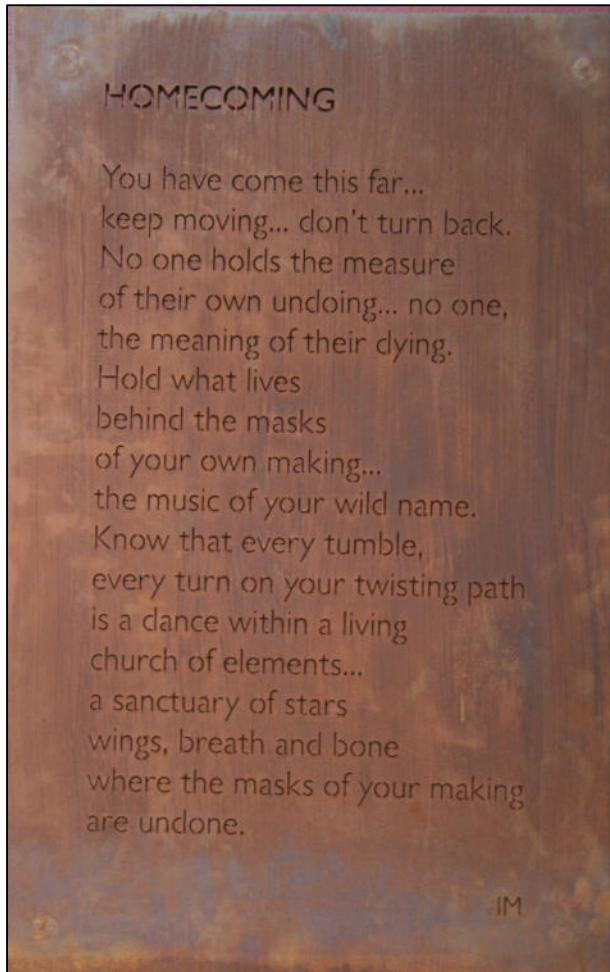


17 January 2011: My tomato harvest

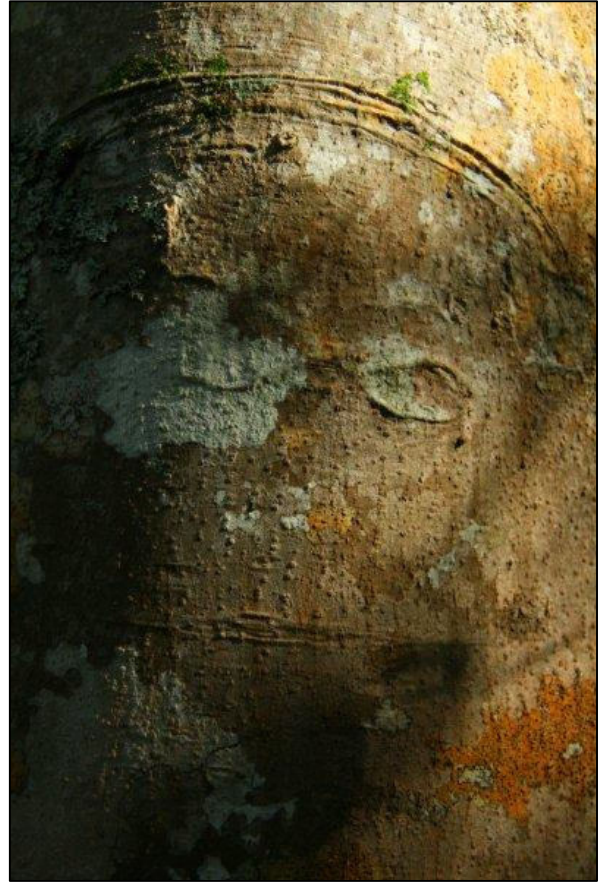
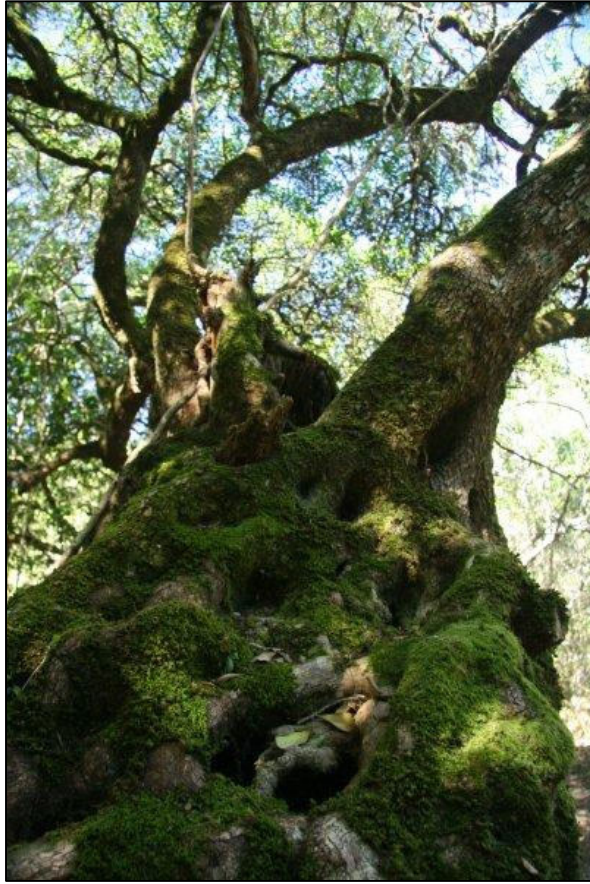


25 September 2010: Art at !Khwattu, a San-owned and managed education centre in the Western Cape, South Africa.

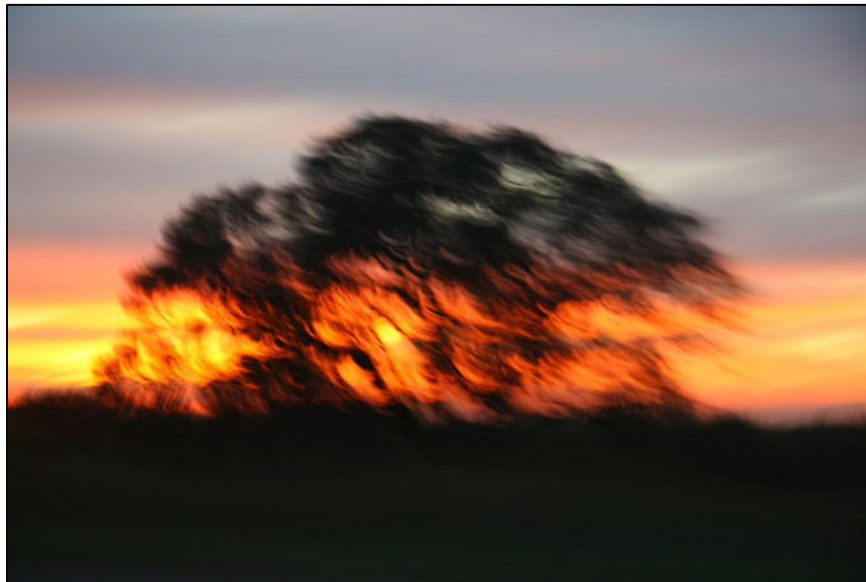
Image courtesy of Dagny Warmerdam



24 September 2010: Poems by Ian McCallum. *Untamed Exhibition*, Kirstenbosch Gardens, Cape Town, South Africa.



10 April 2011: In celebration of my birthday, I visited the Platbos Indigenous Forest.



25 April 2011: Sunrise en route to meet Mphatheleni Makaulule in Venda.

All images above H.Lockhart unless otherwise indicated.