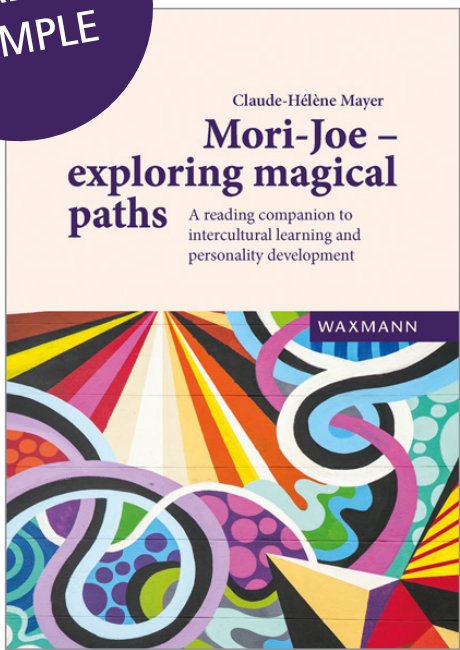


READING
SAMPLE

Claude-Hélène Mayer
**Mori-Joe – exploring
magical paths**
A reading companion to
intercultural learning and
personality development

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You see things; and you say, "Why?"
But I dream things that never were;
and I say, "Why not?"

George Bernhard Shaw

Prologue

Fifty centimetres is the diameter of the footprint of an elephant. He makes his way forward majestically, unhurried and always on the lookout. Tramping along, his movements exaggerated. The rough savannah grass groans beneath the impact of his heavy step, bending to one side or succumbing to its fate of being pressed flat on to the ground by the weight of a foot. Crackling, crunching, groaning! The small bushes and shrubs yield to this load, acquiescent, bowing their heads. Constantly in search of water and small plants to feed on, the elephant moves imposingly through expansive tracts of land. His glance skims the landscape, tolerant yet alert. Insects whirl around him. The thick grey hide is there to protect him from the scorching summer sun and the winter chill.

Tales about him abound. There is talk of an elephant's tremendous strength, good-natured demeanour and remarkable memory. Elephants do not forget.

With his ears back he collects the long blades of grass using his trunk, transporting them to his mouth and crunching them. Only if there is a threat of danger will he flap his ears outward. Relentlessly his trunk ploughs through the long blades of grass and works its way along bushes and shrubs. Smelling, sensing, selecting! The size of the grass blades, leaves and branches gradually diminishes in his mouth while he wiles away the time quietly and relaxed in the shadow of an umbrella thorn acacia. His gaze is alert, his eyes are deep-set.

When our eyes meet something magical happens.

A whole new world opens up before us. A world in which time plays no role and in which we are more significant than we were only moments earlier.

Elephant eye in the sky

Untamed, full of energy and reaching skyward, my hair stands up in all directions as if electrically charged! As if it wants to give expression to my thoughts – downright wild and chaotic. And nobody can coax it into hugging the contours of my head and behaving, yielding to looking more unobtrusive and styled, even if only a little. This is how it is with my hair. Resistant to any attempt at imploring, scolding or appeasing it into submission and not doing its own thing just for once.

Apparently there are people who take a lot of time and effort over combing their hair. I can hardly even recall when last I held a hairbrush in the past few years. Anyway, whatever for I ask myself?

“Combing one’s hair is one of the most futile things in many people’s lives,” says my mother.

My father for his part is of the opinion that young girls should pay special attention to their hair. Luckily he is only my father and generally keeps out of important women’s issues. Come to think of it, Dad’s views on men and women and how a husband and wife should conduct themselves in public can be quite peculiar at times. Obviously this outlook has its origins in a specific background.

My father grew up in the Shona culture and hails from Zimbabwe, a country in Southern Africa. He was born in the Republic of South Africa bordering directly on Zimbabwe. The Shona make up a large ethnic group predominantly located in Zimbabwe, South Africa and Botswana. Tradition has it that in the culture of the Shona the father names the newborn child. However, my father was not present at my birth nor was he around directly thereafter so without much hesitation it was my mother who would give me the marvellous name: Moriana Josephine Philine Ramona. So typical of my mother! Everything had to be a little on the complicated side. Mori-Joe for short! Fortunately, Mum is not against practical short forms.

For the past 14 years I have been asking myself why I actually carry a name like that. After all: How can anyone even be named like that? In the meantime I have come to appreciate the advantages of the name. Mum and my friends call me Mori-Joe, my Grandma and Grandpa in Germany call me Phili, my father’s relatives in South Africa call me Ra-

Farewell

We are moving to South Africa. The date has been set for after the summer holidays and ever since my parents reached the decision, my father has been in high spirits. After all he grew up in Zimbabwe and suffers from perpetual homesickness. Hardly does a day go by without him rubbing it in our faces that he is only in Germany for Mum's sake. No-one had the decency to ask me and Malka whether we wanted to leave on this trip. Mum and Dad simply presented us with the *fait accompli*. If the truth be told, I would have voted against it.

I like Germany. On the whole! Obviously there are things that I don't like. What really pushes my buttons is the constant question as to where I come from or how it is possible that I speak such good German. Why can someone not be German if you happen to have a darker skin colour than others? When people eventually discover that I am German, they act astonished, something along the lines of: I didn't know that was even possible? In the interim I have learnt not to stick around for their next question, which would inevitably be: "And where do your parents come from?"

With a beaming smile yet in all earnestness, without fail my explanation would be: "Yes, I should have known that eating all that chocolate would get me nowhere, except to turn my skin brown."

I would say it with a twinkle in the eye. Mischievous! Provocative! Irrespective of whether they were kids or adults, young or old, good-looking or not, invariably the answer would have its inquirers stop in their tracks dumbfounded. They would stand before me with gaping mouths, raised eyebrows or eyes wide open. Only after a few seconds and in what sometimes feels like an eternity, a sheepish smile, loud laughter or annoyed look will manifest itself in my counterpart. Then I cannot help thinking: Ask a stupid question and you'll get a stupid answer.

"South Africa ... Africa ... the black continent" Mum is busy folding her hoodies muttering to herself softly and staring out of the window.

The right path ... and going round in circles

Seven colours make up a rainbow. When rain permeates the sun's rays you get a rainbow. Mum is convinced that it is no coincidence that it consists of seven colours. After all, the number seven is magical. In the Old Testament it is the number equated with taboos, that which is forbidden; in astronomy there are seven visible planets that orbit the sun. Even the units of time orientate themselves with the number seven, since a week has seven days, the Biblical cycle of the moon seven weeks. I love the number seven because when you add

$1+2+3+4+5+6+7$ it comes to 28 and because it is my birthday on the 28th day of the seventh month. A magical date.

"In many cultures the number seven plays an important role," Mum explains to me on my seventh birthday. Some people even have a seventh sense she continues lowering her voice as though she is sharing a conspiracy with me and making me wonder whatever that could have to do with me.

"The human being has seven energy centres," she continues enthusiastically to be sure to keep my attention as she continues her lecture. "Also for many South African cultural groups the number seven has a magical meaning. There are supposedly even people who have been transformed into a seven-headed snake on their way home." She giggles in my ear, content. With Mum you can never be sure what she is up to and whether the stories she tells are from dreams or from real-life experiences.

Still lost in thought about the number seven and other vitally important issues, I feel a drop of water roll down my forehead, run along the ridge of my nose and make a daring leap from the tip of my nose on to my T-shirt to ooze away there into the coloured fabric. It has been unbearably humid the whole day. When we got into the taxi there is a loud clap of thunder. A storm is pelting down on Frankfurt like a tropical rain.

"When angels go on a journey the heavens cry," Grandma says in a worried tone.

I look up at her, aware of her warm corpulent body next to mine. Her eyes are brimming with tears, reminding me of the Gariep Dam on the

In limbo

I am not a great fan of being trapped in a state of limbo. To me airports are transitional spaces that keep us in limbo. When one is neither here, nor there! Not having left, not having arrived, airports are places where the past and the future co-exist purely in the mind, as one. They are permeated with thoughts and images of the past and great expectations for what lies ahead. They force us to get in touch with our feelings at an intensity level that is sevenfold of what we usually feel.

I look around me. I see people with pale creased faces; excited couples chatting away happily; men in suits bent over their laptops; kids screaming away in their prams. I am so tired. Finally, it is time. Everybody gets up from their seats, we join the queue. We are fortunate in that families get to board first. It is not long before the sound of the engine becomes audible, the pilot makes his announcements and the aircraft begins to vibrate, with the co-pilot carefully manoeuvring the jumbo jet into position on the runway. The vibrations intensify giving every cell in my body a thorough shaking through, as if untamed forces are pressing me into my seat holding my body in their grip as the aeroplane accelerates. I watch the houses rush by from my window. We take off. We rise into the sky. Light, weightless, floating and peaceful.

Ten hours in the air without terra firma beneath us lie ahead. I pray that God will guide us safely through the night. Soon my head begins to feel fuzzy; I snuggle into my seat and fall into a deep sleep.

By the time Mum wakes me, I have missed out on breakfast and we are already preparing for touchdown in Johannesburg. Johannesburg – also known as Jo’burg or Jozi for short – is a city of tiny shacks, posh villas and skyscrapers. From here we take a two-hour connecting flight to Cape Town. As we tuck into breakfast, the sun turns into a striking red ball of fire on the horizon.

The sky then transforms into a violet-red hue followed by tones of orange and yellow, becoming increasingly lighter and clearer turning

Big Mama

My head is buried in voluminous scarves. Pressed tightly against a warm bosom I fight to catch my breath. My eardrum almost bursts from the deafening heartbeat and I try to pave myself a way through the multi-coloured materials. My auditory canal resonates with the irregular sound of: Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom! I have trouble breathing. Perfume asphyxiation. The sensation of impending suffocation overcomes me. I gasp for air while my head held tightly by pulsating arms release me from their hold ever so slightly for only one moment and then press me close again. Loud laughter and shrill voices come through to my ear, muffled. I start perspiring push myself away from this huge body. My hands become embedded in rolls of fat wrapped in colourful material. As the overwhelming fear that there is no escaping this embrace overcomes me, suddenly two strong hands grab me by the shoulders and swing me around.

A wonderful round face makes its appearance before me and I stare into wide open, beautiful dark brown perfectly round eyes. For a moment I am confused. Could I be looking into a mirror? But it cannot be. The hair is missing. This balloon-like face is totally devoid of any hair. My gaze wanders to a highly-polished and greased mirror-like bald head. Somehow it reminds me of an ice-skating rink. The scent of a male aftershave makes my nose itch. Achoo! Achoo! My body makes its way to freedom. Released from the mass of fat which I still cannot believe I have now left behind me I make my way forward at last. Taken unawares, the bald head before me with the perfectly round eyes leaps back half a metre. The straight white row of teeth that had lit up the plump face until a moment ago has all but disappeared.

“Oh, I see, you met already,” Mum whispers in my ear and pulls me towards her gingerly. “This is Uncle Timothy. Do you remember him Mori-Joe?”

I shrug my shoulders indifferently and wipe the perspiration from my forehead.

A colour kaleidoscope – the place that the Hottentots and Bushmen call home

Before me is a vast expanse of blue. A very deep blue! I can almost see as far as the South Pole from my bedroom window. Every winter's afternoon the orange-yellow sphere that is the sun intersects the horizon ultimately plunging into the sea where the ocean ends. I imagine that if I was to set off from here and it was possible to walk across the Atlantic Ocean, I would eventually arrive directly in South America. If I were to travel south I would arrive at the South Pole. Whales do this journey twice a year. They spend the summer at the South Pole, the winter months on the South African coast. If I tire of the ocean view before me then all I need to do is look out of the lounge window where grey high-rise apartment blocks line up in front of the beach promenade and I can stare into the distance. From the kitchen you get to see Lion's Head forming part of the Table Mountain range. Its distinctive "lion's rump" known as Signal Hill makes for a nice hill in the middle of Cape Town to take a picnic or have a so-called braai or proverbial barbecue. When I lie on my bed, staring up at the sky and across the ocean listening to the chant of dolphins, I often ask myself what this place must have been like before the European settlers came to South Africa.

Granny Nelly shares with me that the indigenous people of South Africa were the Khoisan. The name Khoisan means something like "true people". When the Europeans immigrated to South Africa in the 15th and 16th century, they called the hunters and gatherers already living in Africa, the San; and those people who had already established themselves breeding livestock, the Khoi or Khoikhoi. Not long afterwards the two groups adopted this superficial classification and fighting broke out between them. The Khoi called the San by the derogatory term "Bushmen" to diminish their worth and to make it clear that they themselves no longer foraged for fruit and berries in the bush, but that they subsisted from livestock farming and the cultivation of the land. They, as those that had settled down, regarded themselves as superior to the wandering hunters and gatherers.

Behind bars or the sunny side of Table Mountain

Burglar bars.

We live on the sunny side of Table Mountain in a secure residential complex, a so-called gated community in Sea Point. Around us are high walls on top of which barbed wire and electronic fencing has been installed.

Mum explains: “We live on the sunny side of Table Mountain.” For Mum it is her dream come true! Or several dreams come true for that matter: Our balcony has a view of the ocean, there is a swimming pool in the garden and Malka and I get to sleep together in one bedroom. At the entrance to the complex there is a security guard who ensures that no stranger enters the terrain while a watchman walks along the periphery day and night to prevent anyone with ill intent from climbing over the fence to burgle us. That is the dark side of the sunny side.

“Where there is light there also has to be a shadow side,” is how Mum sees it.

To her it seems a better idea to be living on the sunny side of Table Mountain in an apartment than in a house on the shadow side.

The shadow side of Table Mountain is made up of many townships formerly called locations. Irrespective of which is the more politically correct term, there is basically no difference because in the townships is where you will find those people who do not have enough money to live on the sunny side of Table Mountain.

Dad’s family lives on the shadow side of Table Mountain. Aunty and Uncle live in Hanover Park, also known as H.P. During the apartheid era only Coloured people were living in the area. It is still like that today. We seldom go and visit Aunty and Uncle at their home. Hanover Park is in the grip of gangs who are constantly fighting to keep a hold on their drug dealer territories. Sometimes the shootings are so out of control that people can no longer get to work or school in the mornings.

In the case of Granny and Granddad who live in Retreat, likewise a Coloured township of days gone by on the shadow side, it is somewhat safer.

The stuff that dreams are made of

It is mid-winter. The morning of my first school day has finally arrived. I feel anxious and exhausted at the same time. My bedside clock tells me it is 4.32 am. Two more hours and I have to get up. I turn on to one side, then the other; snuggle up to Malka glad to have her warm body close by. It feels as though the weight of the world has landed up in my stomach. What impudence! I had not even extended it an invitation to do that. Breathe, like Mum had taught me. When the going gets tough: Breathe, close your eyes, go inside and feel your feelings. Say hello to every emotion that manifests itself and send it away on holiday. Thus it only takes me a few minutes before I send Mr Fidgety and Mrs Uneasy home and tell them to lock the door behind them. One after another they say their joyful farewells as they head on out to find a new home.

After this exhausting ritual I feel relieved and can breathe easy again. Honestly sometimes Mum will come up with really great ideas. It is a good thing that they have all gone. A sense of emptiness overcomes me but then I remember Mum's advice in moments like this: "Push out the old and bring in the new. If you've sent away something that was not good for you, you create space for something new. Now imagine a big room in your favourite colour. Open the door to this room and invite whoever or whatever you want to enter it. If you do not know who to invite, wait until someone comes to you. And don't forget: Only invite those that do good!"

So I suddenly find myself in a turquoise colour room. I open the door and see Malka before me. She is sitting there utterly content to see me. She comes towards me and sits beside me. I stroke her golden fur. It is soft and silky.

When I look up again a huge elephant is standing before me staring me in the eyes. "Wow" I whisper in awe. "What nice company."

It almost feels as though he is smiling at me. But no, that cannot be!

"Hello!" I hear a resounding deep but soothing voice. "I am here to celebrate with you because you have chosen to take the path of the Indlovus. You accepted the invitation. Committing to the path has a long

Astral travel

Indlovu ... elephant ... the word has a great ring to it in Xhosa. The Zulu also call the elephant by the same name, Indlovu. In Sotho or Pedi the word for elephant is Tlou, in Afrikaans Olifant.

I love elephants. I've loved them for as long as I can remember. Their massive size is impressive and they move with such ease, seemingly unfazed by anything. They tramp through the veld with big, heavy yet graceful steps, always in a group as if in formation conquering nature while protecting their young at the same time.

There are different species of elephants. In Africa you get the African bush elephant, *Loxodonta Africana*. They can grow to a considerable size, weigh several tonnes and can live until a ripe old age. Essentially elephants do not have any enemies since they are big, strong and wise and have an air of calm about them. They sleep in the heat of the day, seldom lying down, mostly upright – leaning up against a tree. Once a day at twilight they make the journey to a watering hole with their family members to drink their fill or to take a bath. Elephant calves take great pleasure in splashing and playing in the water while their parents look on, simply enjoying the cool dusk, keeping watch.

Most of my daydreams begin with the journey through the elephant eye. As soon as I close my eyes I see a gigantic brown elephant eye in front of me. I take a closer look; see how it gets bigger and bigger before my very eyes. I feel its binding spell drawing me to it and it is as though I am unable to resist it sucking me in to whisk me to another world. I suddenly see myself seated beside an elephant which had come to lie down to rest in the veld, the grass half-grown. I stroke his head. We converse. It is an in-depth conversation. All the time I touch his grey, wrinkled hide – pliable and earthy. We hold an animated conversation with one another while I touch his head with the palms of my hands and admire the large ears. And the more I stroke him, talk to him and sense his thoughts, the more my gaze melds with his, deeply till the eye mesmerises me, sucks me in and takes me through a long, dark tunnel into a totally unknown world.

On Lion's Head

I feel quite smug about my grandiose idea as I tear open the door of Dad's car and push Andrew inside.

"Andrew will be staying with us for a few days, Dad. His parents are off to England and ..."

Before Dad can come up with an excuse we are already on the road to the Murphys. They are in the middle of packing. Quickly everything is discussed. Andrew, who usually never says a word, does not say a word today either. Dad apologises profusely for my erratic behaviour. He reckons children should be seen and not heard. He smiles in embarrassment. Then Andrew's father gives him a friendly tap on the shoulder.

"That's how it is with the Europeans," he says understandingly. "They are much too lenient in how they raise their children, as though the world is theirs to decide. When it should really be us fathers who make the decisions, not so?"

Andrew's father laughs.

Dad and Mr Murphy are on the same wave-length. After all they both come from African countries and grew up with similar perceptions of how children should be raised. Be that as it may, they still do not stand a chance. In the end it is our mothers who have the last word.

On our arrival at home Mum and Malka are already waiting for us. Malka is lying by the pool chewing on her bone. Mum waves excitedly from the balcony.

"Hi Andrew!" she calls enthusiastically and surprised at the same time.

"Andrew's parents are having to go to the UK to relatives at short notice. I thought it would be a good idea to invite him to come and stay with us while his parents are in England. Otherwise he'd have to go and stay with an uncle where he doesn't feel at home."

Andrew nods in confirmation. Mum briefly speaks to Mariella on the phone while I show Andrew our home and garden.

"We could go for a picnic on Lion's Head. Let's see what food tastes like on Lion's Head. Let's have a braai!" Mum suggests.

Braai, from the Afrikaans, is how South Africans refer to a barbecue. Everyone invites you to a braai, or you braai in your own garden,

A thousand steps

A few weeks later we are on a plane to Port Elizabeth, endearingly referred to as P.E. by the locals. P.E. is a large industrial city in the Eastern Cape. The scenery surrounding it is spectacular. The Eastern Cape is particularly unspoilt, with nature at its untamed best. The pilot veers inland from the ocean and it is as though we literally land in the middle of the city centre. P.E. is the city of dolphins. They romp around just off the coast in the warm Indian Ocean which is turquoise here in some places, at others lighting up as deep dark blue.

Lynette and Theus are waiting for us at the airport. Long embraces follow. The sheer joy of being reunited is tremendous. Lynette and Theus live in Grahamstown, the so-called “City of Saints”. The small town gets its name from the more than 40 churches it plays host to. Grahamstown is located approximately 120 km from P.E. and it takes us another hour by car to get there.

There is so much to talk about.

“You have to admit, given half a chance people here will leave Grahamstown for the weekend,” I hear Mum say. “There’s not much going on aside from the university hence our weekend visit.”

Our car winds its way over small hills, through fields, meadows and along game reserves. Today we are in luck and get to see two giraffes savouring their vegetarian fare on the roadside unperturbed by our presence as we stop to observe them. We only continue the drive to Grahamstown once they move on. Their gait is easy on the eye as they move away from the road, almost majestic.

At Lynette’s and Theus’ I am always allowed to watch television. This is a welcome change when you live with parents who make it their mission to steer away from any gadgets and gizmos. Armed with chips and juice I get comfortable on the couch while Mum and Dad chat away with Lynette and Theus. Theus specially got me the latest films from the video store. Even if what is deemed new in Grahamstown has already been available in Cape Town for several weeks now I still get a kick out of

Up where we belong

“I know that you are also on it!”

“On what?”

“The path of the Indlovus.”

“That took you a long time to figure out.”

“So why didn't you simply tell me?”

“Talking about it is not that easy. Anyone opting for the path has to be vigilant because there will always be people who want to dissuade you from living in harmony with nature. It is a life lived in harmony with God's laws.”

“God?”

“God can be found in nature. Elephants harbour a particularly strong concentration of Godly energy. God can speak to us through the elephants and make us aware of the beauty of this and other worlds.”

“Are you saying that God speaks through the elephants?”

“Yes, since God is life, nature and the universe. God is everywhere and nowhere. The universe. Matter and the void.

He connects people of all cultures. In him they are one.”

“And the path of the Indlovus?”

“It is said the path leads directly to God. All you have to do is follow it. Listen to whatever it is the elephants tell you. They impart to us the tasks that form our life's purpose. We must solve them and become masters of our skills.”

“And then?”

“Before you arrived here I knew you were coming.”

“Are you telling the truth?”

“On the path you can travel in different times and to far off places. You and I met so as to be able to be up where we belong and walk a portion of the path together.”

“What?”

“You'll see, everything will become as clear as daylight!”

Marauding monkeys

The weeks fly by. Ever since my conversation with Andrew I had not had any more encounters with the Indlovus. Andrew and I have been very busy studying for our exams. Now we are off for the holidays.

Mum has rented us a small holiday home in Umgeni Heights. It is on top of a hill and always blessed with a breeze. It is almost Christmas. Durban is a harbour city of note. Hot and humid best describes it. A surfers' paradise so to speak. I laze around in a heavy bulky armchair. Malka is panting next to me. The temperature is 28 degrees Celsius. Pen in hand I write Mascha a Christmas card.

Mum and Dad are still fast asleep. I take advantage of the peace and quiet in the garden except for the chirping birds and squawking crows.

A sharp cracking sound breaks the tranquillity.

I look up convinced it is only a branch that has snapped. Then I notice a shadow scurrying along the high fence. Monkeys. A female swings herself from a tree on to the three metre high fence.

"How cute." Alongside her another vervet monkey makes its appearance balancing itself youthfully and playfully on the narrow fence before picking up speed and swinging itself from the end of the fence on to a date palm. In the bushes alongside it another monkey is doing its own balancing act with an infant clinging from its stomach.

"How sweet." I turn my attention to my postcard once again. I have to tell Mascha about Andrew and the path of the Tlou.

When I look up again the monkeys have doubled the pace of their romp. In search of breakfast they chase after one another. Right in front of my chair the infant knocks my mug of hot chocolate off the table.

"Just as well that it was almost empty," I breathe a sigh of relief watching the last of the monkeys disappear around the corner.

I am about to resume writing when I notice that the third monkey is trying to catch up with the others on the same course. Without warning he suddenly stops dead, right in front of my feet. For a millisecond his perfectly round eyes stare directly into mine. I begin to feel really ill at ease. He suddenly bares his teeth and I leap up with an almighty scream, finding myself standing a metre from the armchair. Attracted by the

Surprise!

It is already light outside and my room feels hot and humid. The mosquitoes have been having a feast on my legs and I am in a foul mood when Mum wakes me up at 4.30 in the morning. Why get up that early when it is the festive season? Not long afterwards we arrive at King Shaka Airport once again, this time it is to fetch Mum's friends who will also be spending the holidays in Durban.

"I don't get it, Mum," I mumble grumpily to myself. "Why drag me along when it is your friends you're meeting at the airport?" After all Dad had been allowed to sleep in.

"Come on, it's a nice gesture," Mum replies grinning from ear to ear. How can she be in such a good mood when she's not really a morning person herself either? I park myself on one of the hard metal arrival benches and try to get some shut eye.

"Being around people in such a good mood so early in the day is simply unbearable."

When a hand suddenly touches my shoulder I flinch, jolt up from the hard bench and cannot believe my eyes. Standing right before my very eyes is Mascha beaming from ear to ear. I rub my eyes, my mouth wide open in disbelief. Logic tells me it cannot be. Then I hop around from one foot to another overjoyed and give Mascha the biggest hug ever. Any sign of sleepiness had dissipated in flash.

"How awesome!" I shout out. "What a surprise! And you didn't even let on that you were coming when we last Skyped. How mischievous of you, how sneaky!"

The surprise had been a resounding success! We drive back to our holiday home and have a sumptuous breakfast on the veranda overlooking the garden. I tell Mascha about the monkeys that attacked me. Today there is no sign of the vervets. Mascha und Deniz had brought along masses of chocolate evidently in response to my plea on Skype for someone to send me some decent chocolate in exile. My bad mood has all but disappeared as I devour an entire slab in one sitting.

The afternoon is spent together on Durban's promenade. Masses of people are making their way along it in pursuit of the water. Hun-

Little India in KwaZulu-Natal

Achoo. Achoo ... achool!

“They make my nose tickle,” Mascha laughs.

The aroma of Indian spices pervading the air is intense. Thronging all around us are men and women clad in long garments. Among the females in the crowd, some are completely concealed behind Hijabs or the head coverings worn in public by Muslim women – leaving only a small slit for the eyes! Men everywhere are dragging makeshift carts behind them. Ankle rattles complete the attire of young girls in bright dresses. The Indian temples are distinctive for the shoes piled up in front of the entrances – reverently removed before entry into these places of worship.

Downtown Durban and its beach are adorned with Christmas decorations at this time of year. The shops display ultra-kitsch plastic Christmas trees, while reindeer made of shiny silver plastic can be seen everywhere on the streets. The streets and shops are swarming with people carrying their Christmas shopping. Arduously making their way past us are men dressed in traditional Zulu gear, their rickshaws carrying tourists in tow.

Armed with ice creams Mascha and I walk along the beach promenade amusing ourselves at the sight of the garish decorations and especially the flashing Christmas trees.

“Fake but festive!” Mascha giggles inspecting the plastic needles with her fingers.

“And wait till you see the typically African Christmas decorations that go with them,” I venture laughing. “And what about the miniature baobabs that are all the rage?” Mum adds grinning.

“The Africanisation of the Christmas tree does not end there. This year my colleagues decided to decorate their miniature baobab with beadwork from the Ndebele instead of Christmas baubles on a fir tree. The beadwork is crafted in the shape of Zulu angels, dolls with black countenances and golden halos.” Dad cannot help rolling his eyes: “Stop telling our guests so much nonsense. At the end of the day most people still opt for the traditional fir tree as their Christmas tree.”

The magic of water

It is evening and we are lying on our beds. It is time for a small trip.

“Close your eyes and visualise before you a huge elephant making its way through the African veld. It is morning. Dawn is breaking. Indlovu the elephant is on his way to his watering hole. He takes the familiar tried and trusted path along thorn bushes towards the massive baobab tree. On arriving there the path splits and Indlovu lingers beneath the shade of the gigantic tree for a while. His trunk feels its way along the tree, high into the branches. He rummages among the foliage for the tender green leaves. Still chill from the night their fresh scent reaches his nostrils. He breathes in deeply, then out again. From his vantage point in the shade he observes the lowlands that stretch before him. The watering hole is already in sight. Both paths lead to it. The path on the right hand side is the long path of the Indlovus. It goes over the small hill ahead, then down again to the northerly side of the watering hole. The path on the left hand side is the shorter one. The one familiar to him! This is the path he would have taken on many occasions in his life before today. The path leads to the southern side of the watering hole where the zebra, springbok and elephants converge in the morning. He sets off, this time taking the new unfamiliar path. Step by step he carries along his heavy mass in the morning sunshine, his tried and trusted companion, the sunbeams illuminating his wrinkled hide. Crackling beneath the weight of his feet are dry branches obstructing the route! They are testimony to the road less travelled. A path not often frequented by the pachyderms. It leads up then down again, winding its way through the undulating bushes – at times narrower at times wider. Where it gets narrower, the thorns that are so widespread in this area brush against Indlovu, pricking him. He goes on relentlessly, on and on, on the uncharted path. He likes this path. It gives him a new perspective of the watering hole. From the top of the hill the water reflects the sun spectacularly. He sees the animals trekking towards the water from all directions. In some spots the sun has already dried the sand of the veld so much that their steps form small dust clouds. All that seems to matter to these animals without a care in the world is the borehole drawing them to it as if magically. As though this is what the world revolves around, it has a remarkable

A calling

Intermediary between the worlds
Here to guide the people
To protect nature
Preserve the peace

Resplendent with a turquoise aura
You are one of them
Melding cultures
A healer to humanity

Dear messenger from worlds divine
Show us the spiritual road less taken
In observance of God's laws
On nature's path

Implicitly trusting of the plethora of green
An invisible energy guiding you
Triumphant over the heavens
Beneath the African sun

Until it is time for you to return once again
Dear time traveller
Journeying from place to place
Facilitator to other dimensions

You are the harbinger of peace
Immersed in a golden hue
Carrier of light
The epitome of freedom

Intermediary between the worlds

Spending Christmas Zulu-style

“Durban’s history is a fascinating one,” Mum chirps full of enthusiasm. “How about I tell you more?” But even before I can raise an objection Mum launches herself into a history lesson. “In 1497 the Portuguese seafarer Vasco da Gama landed on the coast of South Africa en route to India, precisely at the point where Durban, South Africa’s most important harbour and KwaZulu-Natal’s provincial capital is located today. Since Vasco da Gama arrived here during the Christmas period he named the place ‘Rio de Natal’ after Natal the Portuguese word for Christmas. Once only a port of call for sailors and merchants, later on it evolved into a real settlement, coming to be known as Port Natal in 1823. Then in 1885 it was renamed Durban after the then Governor of the Cape Colony Sir Benjamin d’Urban.” Sometimes Mum comes across as a walking encyclopaedia. How on earth does she memorise so many facts?

We are spending Christmas Eve at Dad’s friend Siphoh. He lives some distance from the city. A hearty welcome awaits us after an hour’s drive. His entire family is gathered. Deniz is suitably impressed. Here at last is her chance to mingle with the locals.

Zipi, who is introduced to us as Siphoh’s third and youngest wife, comes towards us greeting us in English. Deniz looks at Mum with terror-stricken eyes as the woman invites us to join her in the kitchen. Here a number of women and young girls are already hard at work cooking. The men are nowhere to be seen.

“What’s happened to all the men?” asks Mascha.

“In our culture, tradition has it that the men look after the cattle, goats and sheep, while the women take care of the crops and till the land. They do the slaughtering, we do the cooking.”

“The original meaning of the word Zulu is the sky or the heavens,” Zipi goes on, stirring a saucepan as she talks. “We Zulus believe that we are the descendants of a tribal chieftain Zulu, who in turn is the descendent of the amaZulu people of the sky. We believe in the creator deity Unkulunkulu and worship the ancestors so that they can be benevolent towards us and bring us luck. Unkulunkulu is almighty and there are plenty of rituals that honour him.”

Breadbasket South Africa

Variety is the spice of life! This best describes Mum's mantra. After spending Christmas in Durban and ushering in the New Year in Cape Town, Mum and I find ourselves in a state of deep depression and homesickness now that Deniz and Mascha have left. South Africa tends to come to a standstill from December to mid-January. Everyone is away on holiday. Also Andrew is still in Namibia. Mum, not one to let circumstances get the better of her, secures us an invite to the Free State for an extended weekend.

Friends of Mum live on an expansive farm near the "fountain of flowers" or Bloemfontein as the "city of roses" is poetically known as. The farm is not far from the small town of Sannaspos and from the Rustfontain Nature Reserve, where we had once spent a vacation in the past already. The Free State is Afrikaner turf. Many farmers whose native language is mostly Afrikaans live here and they are the descendents of Dutch emigrants who settled here in the 15th century. They undertook a "great trek" with their ox wagons from Cape Town that lasted many decades conquering the South Africa interior to settle there. History simply refers to them as the settlers.

The table is covered with piles of plates, glasses everywhere and empty Savanna Dry bottles. Everyone is still sleeping as I step on to the veranda. It is hot, the air is dry. Out here on the farm is a place of many extremes: Heat and cold, drought and less frequently, rain.

I get in to the hammock staring into the distance lying down. From the veranda I have a direct view of the paddock. I notice Bo, the farmer's oldest son busy trying to break a foal. He throws a lasso at him. It makes a sling around the horse's neck. The foal begins to run relentlessly, hardly stopping for a moment dragging Bo through the sand of the veld. Big clouds of dust rise up from the ground. In no time Bo is up to his waist in the sand fog. What a sight. It takes a while for the horse to calm down. What a stupendous effort it makes to fight for its freedom!

Bo is still clinging to the lasso trying to subdue the horse. I swing back and forth in the hammock in the shade of the veranda. After a while the horse looks tamer. Next Bo tries to place a saddle on his back.

Gold rush

“I missed you,” Andrew says beaming from ear to ear. “It’s been terribly boring without you here.”

Andrew is genuinely happy to see me again.

“I’m also glad to be back, I was beginning to get used to having you around.”

“Today I want to tell you about South Africa’s early immigrants. Some two hundred years ago the discovery of gold in sizeable quantities lured people to South Africa from all over the world,” Mariella begins her lesson. “In 1886 a man by the name of George Harrison discovered a 30 cm vein of gold in the Transvaal while building a house on his property. The discovery erupted in a massive gold rush and my great grandparents soon also packed up their lives in England to settle in the Witwatersrand in what is today Johannesburg – the site of what were once the world’s biggest gold reserves. Shortly before the arrival of my family in around 1889, the chemist John Steward McArthur had announced that he had discovered a cyanide process with which the gold can be released from the rock more easily. This resulted in extraordinary success stories, so much so that other families soon followed suit and moved here. Soon Johannesburg evolved into an expansive city of tents.”

When Dad rings the doorbell to fetch me I can hardly believe it is home time already. Awaiting us at home are Malka, and Granny and Granddad who are finally coming to visit us again now that the holidays are over. I have meanwhile mastered some more Afrikaans and it is getting easier to converse with them. Granny and I take Malka for a walk on the beach promenade which is only a few minutes’ walk from our flat. We come across the regular dog owners, joggers and families with children on bicycles. We get on to a swing. My hair takes off. We swing back and forth, back and forth, me telling Granny about Mariella’s stories on the gold rush.

“Yes,” she says. “Some of our ancestors were also involved in the gold business.”

“Wow!” I exclaim enthusiastically. “That’s awesome! Andrew’s ancestors as well.”

My mother the good witch

It is all that Mum has been talking about since the beginning of the year. She had been to see a sangoma. For many people in South Africa the sangomas are everything. They are something like traditional doctors and are able to heal others, be it from illnesses and disease, pain or evil thoughts. There are different types of sangomas. Some read minds, interpret dreams, make contact with the afterlife or predict the future. They work with herbal concoctions, conjure up magic potions and help those with marital problems. Dad once told me that a cousin of his in Zimbabwe went to see a sangoma to cast a spell on the woman loved so that she would marry him! And in the end the wedding went ahead even though she had declined him at first.

“Keep your distance from the sangomas! They are in cahoots with evil and are dangerous. You as Europeans don’t realise that,” Dad warns us. But it is to no avail.

Mum insists she is a witch who practises white magic and of late has been attending courses with reputable sangomas on a regular basis. A few months ago she had a regression therapy performed on her in which she was to find out that she had already lived as a witch in medieval times. In another previous life in the 18th century she was a young lad who was killed in East Africa for his supernatural abilities.

“It now makes sense why we are spending some of the time of this life in Africa,” she explains beaming. “I am here to continue on the path of the Indlovus because I did not manage to complete it in the other lives. My purpose in this life is to regain the wisdom of way back when, to live with it and to use it for the benefit of other people.”

“Do you think that maybe I also lived in Africa on a previous occasion?” I ask Mum.

“I don’t know,” she answers. “What I do know is that we already know one another from quite a number of lives and we are on the same path. Let’s see: 1835 France. Don’t you recall, Mori-Joe?” Mum laughs.

Mum has decided to meet up with a renowned sangoma in Mpumalanga to be trained in aspects of the art of healing.

“Why don’t you come with me, Mori? It’s going to be really exciting. Besides, don’t you also want to be trained in the art of healing? After all

Dark forces and sacred powers

Caboom! Crash! A cacophony of sound breaks the silence of the night.

It is pitch black when Mum and I are torn from our sleep by a huge bang. The door to our hut is wide open. We both sit bolt upright in bed. My heart misses a beat then races like crazy throbbing with irregular palpitations. My whole body is trembling. As if paralysed we both stare out of the wide open door into the darkness. I feel a cool breeze on my cheeks. We stay where we are not moving. Then it occurs to me that I have not taken a breath for a while and I breathe in. Neither of us lets the door out of our sight, but all that we can see is darkness. An overwhelming sense of fear overcomes me, the tears well up in my eyes.

“It was only the wind,” Mum says climbing out of her sleeping bag to shut the door once again. I cannot get back to sleep and for Mum restlessly rolling from one side to the other it seems to be no different during this ominous night, and I secretly hope that come morning Mum will decide that it is time for us to leave again.

Far from it! Mum seems to have gained a new lease on life in the morning.

“You had a visitor in the night,” Irini says. “Magic is something that can also take one into intermediate worlds, into the world of the souls, and it can bring us into contact with good and evil forces. You need to be aware that the dark side also tries to win you over to it. You have to make a concerted decision to resist it anew every time and counter it with a strategy that will safeguard good prevailing over evil.”

Mum gulps.

“So it wasn’t the wind?” I ask worried.

“No, far from it,” Irini answers.

“Wow!” I say in awe.

“I hear and see more than most people. I also hear the thoughts of other people, as though they are voicing them out loud. There are different forms of mind reading. What might happen is that I see a person and hear their thoughts at the same time; while at other times my ancestors will make contact with me and tell me what is going on.”

Not for the uninitiated

Irini's abilities are incredible, eerie to say the least.

"Mori-Joe," she says in a neutral tone. "This shouldn't be weird for you. There is a reason why you are here. In your family there is a strong prevalence of white magic in your mother's bloodline. Your mother has recognised this and it's a good thing she's brought you along. If the truth be told, she has been going round in circles far too long to follow the path of the Indlovus. When you see the eye of the elephant, listen to the call and follow it. Don't doubt it. Trust him. The elephant is your closest confident who will show you the way. Take note of the small things in life that people you come across say to you. These are the pointers that bring you closer to your calling in life. But never forget, it is a calling that binds different worlds to one another."

"How do you know all this?"

"The path of the Indlovus is not for the uninitiated. I do not belong on it, but I know of it from the ancestors. They showed it to me so that I can help people who are on it, like you, to continue with their journey. The path of the Indlovus belongs to those that can move between time and space and change locations. This is also reflected in the life of your family. You have transitioned from Germany to Africa. You have overcome fear and doubt. You are able to master the transitional periods. You are able to rise above boundaries and conquer new places and you will still move from place to place many times during your lives. Since you are the ones who can bring people together, you do not feel alienated irrespective of where you are. You have the innate ability to adapt yet keep your own identity at the same time. The process is always about recognising that which is beautiful and creating something new. You are your own culture. You are no longer German or South African. Intrinsically you are who you are and at the same time you are also everyman – Citizen X!"

Ironically I had just gotten used to Irini when it is time to say good-bye.

"Mori, you are a seer on the path of the Indlovus. You are a mediator between worlds. You are spirituality incarnate. Your mother brought you to South Africa so that you would meet Andrew and so that you can

The Lost City's energy vortices

I stare at the screen, intently popcorn crunching between my teeth. The excitement is contagious! I hear Mum slurping away at her coca cola. Dad has already fallen asleep. I am in high spirits when we leave the movie theatre.

“What a great film,” I can hardly contain my excitement. Twilight is my favourite time of day.

We exit the mall complex and find ourselves standing on a bridge lined with the statues of elephants guarding it. The bridge takes you to the Valley of the Waves, an artificial beach setting complete with waves in the middle of the South African veld, surrounded by pizza and ice cream stalls.

“Wow! Sun City is amazing!” I think out loud while my feet are already wafting me in the direction of the wave pool. I hardly notice the pain as my soles make their way across red-hot ground scorched by the sun. The day is hot and dry and the mercury in the shade measures 36 degrees Celsius. The temperature is far too high for this time of year. We find ourselves a shady spot and I jump straight into the waves. The water engulfs me, soothing my skin burning from the merciless sun.

Sun City lies in North West province. Paradisiacal it is located in the Bushveld a two hour drive from Johannesburg and is the largest holiday resort in Southern Africa. During the apartheid era the province was still an independent state called Bophuthatswana. There was a time when the area here was only characterised by clay huts and heat, then platinum was found changing its face forever as prospectors began to conquer it. Today Sun City is a travel destination for tourists. It is a magical place. Very few people who go for a swim in the artificially constructed wave pool with its own beach know this. Who knows, maybe the multi-millionaire who built this dream resort complex had a notion that this was indeed the case.

The afternoon is spent in the water – swirling around tossed from one wave to the next submerged then carried along only to be brought back up ultimately to be hurled out on the beach – interspersed by intervals under the sunshade. By the time we get to our hotel in the Palace of the

The Kalahari – an unexpected treasure trove

It is June and the beginning of winter. The Murphys have offered to take me on a fortnight's trip to the Kalahari with them. Dad is unenthusiastic but Mum has the last word and lets me go.

“Make sure you look after yourself, Mori, and keep your eyes peeled. This is an important journey, which no doubt will not only take you into the Kalahari, but will also lead you on to the path of the Indlovus. Try to avoid places where the energy is too strong. You already know what can happen if you don't!”

I nod. We climb into the car, Andrew and I in the back seat posing as the picture perfect team that the past year had turned us into.

“The Northern Cape province borders the Kalahari, there where the country's diamonds have been discovered and still lie hidden,” Mr Murphy tells us.

“The province feels as though it goes on forever,” Mariella sighs dreamily as we leave Cape Town behind us. Winters in this area are barren and sparse. If the truth be told it is uninspiring to me.

“The Kalahari is a desert,” Mariella makes it her mission to explain to us. “You'll recall from our geography lessons that it comprises mainly of fine rust-red sand and stretches across South Africa's Northern Province, Botswana and Namibia ending up in Angola and Zambia. The South African author Laurens Van der Post already had a penchant for describing it more than 60 years ago.”

After many hours we arrive in Kimberley, once the town of the gold and diamond prospectors of the 19th century. We stay over in a small hotel right in the middle of the city centre.

“In 1866 the young Erasmus Jacobs arrived in the region and found a 21 carat diamond on the edge of the Orange River. His discovery would launch a diamond rush of unfathomable proportions. Hundreds more people would turn up in Kimberley on a daily basis. Before 1877 Kimberley was called New Rush and to this day you can still see the Big Hole, the biggest hole ever dug manually by human hands.”

Needless to say we are in total awe as we stand alongside the huge pit the next morning staring into the abyss. Today Kimberley's first houses,

Crossing the cultural divide to new frontiers

The eye of the elephant is transparent and translucent – a conduit. It mirrors me. My hair has gained in length but as before it still chooses to stand in all directions. Those not in the know might say that my hair has become a tangled maze, but only those who have no concept of chaos would come up with a comment like that.

I for one recognise a style of sorts it seems to have morphed into, a structure. Wild and unrestrained, but in every respect very different from how my hair was a year ago when it comes to: Shape, style and colour.

Could time have done this? Only a year?

“Impossible,” is what comes to mind. “This simply cannot be. Perhaps my hair has somehow adapted itself to the environment,” I try to come up with a feasible explanation. “Or could it be that perhaps I too have changed and the style my hair has patterned into has simply subjugated itself to my new thoughts. Or could it be that my hair has changed my thought patterns? After all my hair is integral to my head.”

“Perhaps your hair has now become wild in the African context and is no longer wild in German terms,” a voice speaks to me out of nowhere.

I chuckle to myself softly. I am turning into Dad. This is the kind of reasoning he would come up with. Thoughts like that would never have come into my head otherwise! Honestly, to think there are people who actually believe that people differ from one another based on their citizenship! I shake my head. The notion that something like that actually exists is inconceivable to me.

Then Andrew’s face appears in the eye of the elephant. How can that be?

“Hey Mori-Joe,” he grins from ear to ear.

Then a deep voice bellows: “Have you still not understood, Moriana Josephine Philine Ramona Lewin?”

“It has nothing to do with the country you or your parents are born in. You are because I am: ‘Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu’ – I am because you are. You become the person you are thanks to the people whom you are surrounded by, not by the place where you, your parents or

Epilogue

The eye of the elephant is transparent, a conduit for the chosen ones to embark on the path of the Indlovus. Those who take the path and accept the calling, follow an ancient tradition of African white magic. It is a tradition in which only the here and now exists and within it all time and every place are linked to one another.

The elephant moves through the veld, his swaying step in harmony with nature. Making his way on the path of the Indlovu unhurriedly, he is a dichotomy between strength and lightness. Those who choose to fall into line with him will overcome time and space. With every step the elephant conquers new territory, adapts to the landscape, figures out new paths. Those who follow him do so in peace and tranquillity and in total surrender, barefoot, the grass tangible beneath the soles of their feet. Enveloped in untold warmth, in tune with the veld they transcend the borders of other cultures and become the intermediaries between the worlds.

A brief user guide to this intercultural personality development reading companion

Storytelling serves as one of the most important teaching mechanisms and learning tools in the teaching and learning traditions of the world's different cultures. The learning process occurring in the course of this and the comprehension of the actual content of the story does not necessarily take place in the form of an explicit or direct expression of the learning content. Instead the learning process takes place through the narration of stories and the use of analogies and metaphors in an indirect, implicit manner that in actual fact unravels unconsciously, often with a lesser degree of cognisance. The reader or the audience has a "notion" of what is going on and understands the content intuitively.

This short reading companion to intercultural personality development is presented in the form of a biographical, in part autobiographical developmental story.

On the one hand it can simply be considered as precisely that: A biographical, perhaps autobiographical story in which the reader or audience accompanies the protagonist Mori-Joe on her journey through Germany and South Africa and experiences new spiritual worlds with her. The audience can let itself be swept away into the character's intellectual world of thought and into her outlook on Germany, South Africa and the world.

Alternatively, on a deeper level the story can be understood as the journey of a person evolving into an intercultural personality. This means that this narrative can be regarded as an intercultural learning process that can be traced to the protagonist in particular, however not only to her but also to the other characters. On the one hand, this learning process involves the maturation of existing intercultural communication skills. The pioneer of personality research in the area of intercultural studies, David S. Hoopes, (Hoopes, 1979: 21), has also defined this as "multiculturalism". What the development of the intercultural personality involves is a more fundamental approach, a "sense of personal development" (Adler, 1975: 22) where learning, self-awareness and personal growth takes place and is developed further.

In this story the protagonist goes through a continual process of intercultural learning, of self-reflection and reflecting on the roles of others

Hoopes' intercultural personality development model

In the past decades the developmental path that an individual takes to evolve into an intercultural personality has been researched manifold and by relying on a multiperspectavilism approach. In the context of experiences in multicultural and transcultural spaces, intercultural learning and developmental processes are stimulated which pass through different phases. According to David S. Hoopes personality development proceeds from ethnocentrism to an ethnorelative form of the multicultural personality.

Hoopes' model is fundamentally based on the assumption that every person is born with an ethnocentric basic attitude. This means that initially every person assumes that one's own culture happens to be the best at the same time. Hence our own evaluation criteria will always orientate themselves by the imprints of our cultural origin. This assumption learned at an early stage in life accordingly serves the purpose of developing a suitable survival mechanism for the environment we live in.

It is through the development of intercultural competencies that people become more capable of adjusting to other cultural systems and to adapt to unknown cultural environments unknown to them to begin with. They can learn to understand other cultures and accept them and no longer consider their own culture as the dominating ideal above others.

Hoopes (1979) introduced seven stages of intercultural development, which a person traverses on the path to the highest stage. These in turn are divided into four developmental possibilities. It concerns a model that represents an idealised form of the intercultural personality (refer to Mayer & Boness, 2004):