**Tender courage**

JUAN GARAY

We are all the same energy

Thandabantu

To my mother

All that is narrated is based on direct or indirect experiences of the author, although in many cases, names or locations are changed out of respect for confidentiality.

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# Vertigo towards the new millenium. New York, May 2000

Jonay was seated at the beechwood table, weathered by the breezes of many gatherings, in the kitchen of his new home at 421 Whyte Avenue, Brooklyn. It was the house that James, now sailing, had entrusted to them while they took care of it and his Labrador, Sam.

Before him, like a faithful lover awaiting his caresses, eagerly awaited the notebook made of melaleuca leaves and covered with jacaranda bark planted when Nour was born. It grew, defying drought and the darkness of a humanity suffocated by networks of greed, in their cherished Ukuzwana, the "space of love and harmony."

Through the window, he saw cherry blossoms. Three months ago, upon arriving from the southern summer to the northern winter, they found them covered in snow. The layer, as pure as it was cold and lifeless, like an insensitive beauty, Jonay had never seen before from his tropical life in the Canaries and Zimbabwe. From snow to blossom, from darkness to light, guided by the weightless white of a snowflake to a petal full of passion for life. Like the layers Aimsa saw as soul filters in her struggle for a New Humanity.

He read in a brief column on the inner pages of the New York Times a news item that caught his attention: the remains of the plane of the writer and aviator Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, author of The Little Prince, had been found southeast of Marseille. Jonay had enjoyed reading it so much in his childhood. Three years earlier, John Denver had also crashed in his plane, whose songs Jonay and his father often sang. These stories echoed the memories of Richard Bach's Jonathan Livingston Seagull and the message of free flight. Those flights, stories, ideas, songs, reminded him of his flights in the ultralight aircraft over kraals and savannas in Bulililamangwe, "where leopards cry."

Aimsa attended the endless sessions of her work at the United Nations, and Nour played with neighborhood children at a community childcare center.

In those three months, Jonay had transitioned from being a doctor in a remote community in one of the "poorest" regions of the world to being "who-knows-what" in the most powerful city. He did it because he felt that humanity needed the vision and courage of his soulmate, Aimsa, fighting from that jungle of power. He didn't regret that step in their lives, but when he tried to write his diary, his gaze clouded, and he couldn't finish the first line.

He chose to write to his parents in Gomera and to Patxi and NoLwasi in Ukuzwana.

Dear parents,

We received your letter with excitement a month ago. I have reread it several times, as if it were a work of art that you can never fully appreciate. I am constantly amazed at how you continue with such strength and light, leading the community and inspiring the values of your manifesto, Mom, in eco-villages around the world. I love reading about how Tomas continues with his boat, ferrying community members to the market, Fernando still leads the Valentía community, and Kadiatu fights fiercely for women's rights. Fernando told me that after years of living apart, he and Kadiatu decided to accept that their love was fading and chose different paths in life. In his words, I could sense that his mind said it was logical, but his heart still longed for the dream of that epic love that perhaps never became real. Give him all the love you feel for him. His loneliness saddens me.

Your surprise visit to Ukuzwana for our farewell from Africa still resonates in all my senses. I wear the sweater you kinitted for me, Mom, almost every day, and I resist putting it away now that spring is blooming. I try to be faithful to its two symbols, courage and tenderness, every day, with every step. I have also read, like sipping brief sips, not wanting it to ever end, your sailor's diary, Dad. I am trying to write a diary, but my soul is still bewildered in this jungle of concrete, cars, haste, glances that don't meet, and stores where neither the shopkeeper knows what they sell, nor the customer knows what they buy. But there is also much beauty in every soul when their armor melts, in every tree that resists asphalt, and, above all, in the gazes, hugs, and light radiated by my two princesses, Aimsa and Nour. One has dedicated her whole soul to fighting for the network of spiritual eco-villages that you inspired from our beloved community of tenderness. The other, shorter in stature but not in strength and passion, turns three today, more than a thousand days and nights of the most immense tenderness I could imagine. We will celebrate her party this evening with her little friends from the neighborhood, a beautiful kaleidoscope of cultures and languages.

My paralysis in writing my account of this new stage echoes my search for a place in this society, so different from Ternura and Ukuzwana. But I am sure I will find it. Meanwhile, I take care of my princesses, and they nourish me with their light.

I will send you some photos of our life here.

With all our love.

Next to his signature, he left space for Aimsa's and Nouri's signatures.

Following was this brief note:

NB: Let's see if you feel like using "email." I know it lacks the care and restraint, the "tempo piano" required for the gentle and serene flow of the most beautiful feelings of the soul, but we could communicate more often. You know that my email is jonayharris@hotmail.com.

He was about to write to Ukuzwana when he received a call on the house phone.

Good morning, who am I speaking with?

Among many other instincts acquired during his life among the Ndebele, he found the coldness of greetings in the "civilized" world challenging – so dry. With his Ndebele brothers, he would have asked, even without knowing the person – strangers, "friends yet unknown," he thought within his thoughts – about the family, the harvests, the rains, and the ancestors.

* Good day, my name is Nayra. I would like to speak with Aimsa Harris; she gave me this number last week at a meeting in Mexico City.

He felt a soft voice in harmony with the musical Mexican accent.

After three months in her position at the United Nations representing the network of spiritual eco-villages, Aimsa already had a frenetic schedule of almost one international trip per week, and when she was in New York, long days of countless meetings, debates, and document preparation.

* Good day Nayra, my name is Jonay, a pleasure to greet you, even if it's through this medium. My companion – saying it felt awkward, he never said "wife," but hearing himself say "my," he felt that she wasn't really "his" – is at work; perhaps you can call her on her mobile phone.
* Thank you, Jonay, I should have guessed. I wanted to talk to her without the rush and lack of privacy I suppose she has in her days at the United Nations, but I'll notify her on her mobile phone, which she also shared with me.

He remembered hearing Aimsa talk about Nayra, a woman advocating for women's and indigenous rights, linked to the ideology of the Mexican revolutionary Zapata and with sensitivity to listening and passion in speaking – something, as Aimsa said, not very common in diplomatic and international relations environments where her life now navigated.

As he spoke, he smelled something burning and hastily said goodbye to rush to the oven where he was preparing an apple pie for Nour's celebration. He was a terrible cook, and his dishes or pastries often turned out spoiled. He grated the overly toasted part and disguised it with a layer of homemade apricot jam, ceremoniously placing the candles on the cake. He recalled each year of his beautiful princess Nour with each candle:

The first candle he called the magic of life. It brought to his memory her birth in Ukuzwana surrounded by the extended family: Patxi and his big heart, NoLwasi and her ineffable magic, the older siblings Joseph, Thandiwe, and Nothando, orphans of AIDS adopted in love, Adam, his soul-brother, Rose, his faithful nurse, and Anwele, his companion in the brave fight against the epidemic. Thinking of Anwele, already weakened and with the fragile beauty of long lashes announcing the surrender of strength, his gaze clouded with emotion. Nour's first months were spent sitting on her proud father's shoulders during their evening stroll, responding to greetings of "Naka-Nouri, ¿banjani?" (Father of Nour, how are you?), and growing with the sweet nursing of her mother. Like a thief ashamed of his theft, Jonay remembered how he sometimes asked Aimsa to taste the milk from her breasts, claiming to better understand what Nour might be feeling. This reinforced the promotion of an even stronger natural bond, which, in the presence of so much AIDS, he questioned as more harmful than beneficial, something Jonay proved wrong in tropical conditions. During that first year, the three of them traveled in the ultralight, which the locals began calling inyoni-enkulu (big bird), through the western part of Zimbabwe, seeing from the discreet flight height the beautiful flora and free fauna in the magical rocks of Matopos. They crossed the vast Hwange savannas and saw the Victoria Falls enveloped in their "mosi-oa-tunya" (smoke that thunders). This journey was followed by a trip around the world through Madrid, London, San Francisco, Vancouver, Berkeley, and Gomera, where his future was forged away from his beloved Ukuzwana and the encounter with his grandparents in Gomera. Nothando, already fourteen, had taken a maternal affection, and she often carried her on her back wrapped in a cloth. From that wonderful throne, she greeted the entire Ukuzwana community, where she began to be a true princess.

The second candle inspired tenderness, like the community of her parents. It reminded him of how Nouri could barely walk and was already walking hand in hand with her inseparable Adam throughout the Ukuzwana mission. She learned from him to make toys with wires, sticks, leaves, and seeds, to play the mbira from a very young age, and, above all, to feel the passion for living. Adam, from a very young age, looked at everything and everyone with affection, and that sweetness was reflected in a fold in his lower eyelids that seemed to smile from the depths and invite those who looked to say, "yes, this *life is a tremendous adventure*." At just four years old, Adam had built, with Haka's help, a wooden cart with which he carried Nour to kraals in the surrounding areas. Nour grew up feeling the affection of all those humble people who, despite the pain of AIDS and the hardship of drought, smiled with luminous glances.

The third candle spoke to him about freedom. He thought of the fortune of having lived so surrounded by nature and community, the two keys to harmony. One day, some patients in the clinic told him that they had seen Adam and Nouri quite far away. They were taking Unai in the wooden cart, accompanied by other children and several goats. They were seen at post 42, that is, the lighting post number 42 from Ukuzwana towards the connection with Kezi. There were about 50 meters between each pole, which they had been putting in community work for five years. That meant they were walking more than two kilometers from where their parents and their home were in the mission. Jonay marveled at such freedom. Children in New York and generally in all cities barely moved a few meters from their parents and always under their watchful and almost fearful gaze. He had even seen parents walk with a ribbon from which their children were walking tied, for fear of losing them. Fear. What influence would those first years of magic, tenderness, and freedom have on the long life that Jonay hoped Nour would have ahead?

Jonay had written a diary for Nour with stories and drawings about how her parents invited her into life, what surrounded her before birth, how they spied on her with an ultrasound, the magical alignment of stars at her birth, the Zulu chants on that magical night, the suggestion of her name by the wise elders of the community, and her years of magic, tenderness, and freedom. He was inspired to see that Patxi did the same with Adam and continued to do so with Unai. He had it ready and wanted to give it to Nour, but Aimsa thought it would be better to keep it for when she became a teenager. She agreed, thinking that, in the turbulent river transition of hormones into adulthood, reading the sea of tenderness that invited her into life and bathed her in her early years would give her light and guidance.

Three o'clock arrived, and he went excitedly to pick up Nour from her community school. He had prepared a violin melody, the cake, and a drawing of her cute face framed by a sea of curls, along with stories about the magic, tenderness, and freedom surrounding her. Aimsa, after long working days, hadn't even had time to unpack her briefcase from her last trip. When she left for her day in the morning, she told them she would return home around five. Jonay took care of organizing how they would celebrate her birthday: they would invite friends from the neighborhood, play the song he had composed, sing together, draw memories of those months in New York, and eat the apple pie.

Jonay returned with Nour on his shoulders, and Sam running around Apipan Park. He refused to use a leash with any dog and had developed a very beautiful bond with Sam in a few months. Jonay heard himself being called:

* Jonay, bro! Nouri, princess!

Turning towards the bench from which the voice came, he saw Jerry, a homeless man from Virginia whom the city of power and haste had pushed to the brink, sinking him into alcohol, which had become both his downfall and his salvation. Jonay had met him during emergency shifts at Bellevue Hospital. Jerry came to the emergency room in February after a night of ten degrees below zero on a park bench, waking up with tremors, sweats, and coughs. Jonay diagnosed him with pneumonia and treated him at that hospital, the only one in the city that treated any patient in emergencies without sending hefty bills to those without health insurance. Jonay had become close to Jerry, who showed him the world of marginalized people in that powerful city. One day, he took him to Hart Island, where it was estimated that more than a hundred thousand people lay, those who, when dying alone, claimed to have no family or friends.

* Hi Jerry, don't forget about Nour's celebration this afternoon, okay?

Jonay made a song about Hart Island and began to sing it, looking into Jerry's eyes, as he said, almost no one did in that cold city.

Hart Island, where so many lay unknown

After lives deprived of love, they are spit off to the shores

Far away from heaven’s door

Where does all their deep grief go?

Are the echoes of their pain buried with no trace of morn?

And forgotten by the rest.

How can we keep moving on as if we did never know?

Of those lives without parole

blindly feed this shameful show…?

Oh, your lives my Hartian souls!

Are the ones I long to mourn.

Every one of you I love.

We will not forget, no more.

You will help us rise above this pathetic race for gold.

Our struggle is bestowed.

Those who killed you are my foes.

Oh, my Hartians let’s march on…

Thus*,* they echoed the last verse while Jonay crossed the park. Nour noticed that her father's voice broke, and his eyes became moist, but she said nothing.

They arrived home and began setting the table, making fruit juice, and wrapping some little drawings for each friend and neighbor who would come. Nour, already quite proud, wanted to wear one of her mother's saris, wrapping it around her hair and letting it cascade like a cloak in her favorite color, sky blue.

So*,* five o'clock arrived, and her little friends and some neighbors started to come. Jerry didn't show up. But what worried Jonay and Nour the most was that Aimsa hadn't arrived either. They looked out the window every now and then, and the evening fell that way. They finished handing out the gifts. Jonay played the violin melody he had composed for Nour. They lit the candles on the apple pie. Jonay encouraged everyone to close their eyes with hands joined in a circle. Thus, they celebrated Nour's third trip around the sun.

Friends and neighbors gradually left, and Jonay started washing the dishes while Nour opened the gifts they had received. Jonay realized that Nour was silently crying. There was no need to ask why.

Night fell. Jonay bathed her and put on her pajamas. He was already telling her a bedtime story when they heard the door opening.

* Nour, sweetheart!

Aimsa expressed with a tone between pain and guilt. She entered the room and embraced *both*.

* I suffered for not arriving on time for the celebration with friends and neighbors for your beautiful life, Nouri. We had a very important meeting to approve a global development goal for the health of all children in the world. Can you forgive me, Nour?

Aimsa had told Jonay how people from the diplomatic elite, living in luxury, decided on the goals of countries marginalized by the centers of political, financial, and commercial power in the world. In the preceding weeks, they had arbitrarily and shamelessly set goals to "halve infant mortality and two-thirds of maternal mortality" and control three diseases (AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis). Jonay wondered why not all unjust deaths and all diseases. Aimsa returned home saddened by the lack of the slightest evidence, logic, and ethics in how a handful of privileged people decided with so little knowledge and empathy the supposed course of the world. Even such capricious words often remained mere speeches. The world still lay in the hands of financial networks.

Jonay thought: Had Aimsa, and with her Nour and him, fallen into a web of empty words dominated by a few powerful individuals making sure that nothing really changed? Did all these coarse debates deserve Nour's tears? He quickly dismissed that thought, which he concluded was born out of the selfish desire for her presence in that special family celebration.

* Yes, mommy, we left you a piece of the apple pie that daddy made. But it got a little burnt.

This made all three of them laugh, and it somewhat dissipated the silent pain that hung in the air for not being together at such a special moment.

They sang "Sunshine" by John Denver, as they did every night. When Nour fell asleep, they had a mint tea from the backyard.

* I'm sorry, Jonay. I strongly argued for including all diseases and unjust deaths, but no one listened to me. They told me that "prioritizing" was necessary.
* I understand, Aimsa. I encouraged you to come here precisely to fight for those noble ideas. Although I didn't know that this world of words would absorb you so strongly. In the last month, we haven't had dinner together a single day.
* I know, Jonay. I'm sorry. I hope we approve the Millennium Declaration at the General Assembly in September, and I can find more harmony in that fight while sharing tenderness with my family, you, whom I love so much.

Jonay had his gaze lost in a sky too brightened by artificial lights to see the stars. In any case, there in the far north, they couldn't see their beloved Southern Cross. Aimsa took his hands and continued speaking.

By the way, they want me to give a lecture in July at the AIDS world congress in Durban. Nadine has talked to Mandela about my call for access to treatments, still under patents. Marta is also going; we would go together. I told her Anwele's story, and she is coordinating with colleagues in South Africa for a child named Nkosi, with AIDS, to speak to all attendees.

But there's something that worries me even more: it's about our brothers in Ukuzwana and the millions of people in Africa and the world who need medication for AIDS. It seemed to shine with hope. Do you remember how, after our struggle in Seattle, Doctors Without Borders was awarded the Nobel Prize?

Of course. With those funds, they supported the South African government to manufacture and import generic drugs from India and Brazil, which we learned from David Ho in Vancouver. Juan is already using them and tells me how they save the lives of hundreds of patients who were until recently dying in Ukuzwana.

Well, forty pharmaceutical companies are pressuring South Africa not to import generics and to maintain their patent business. That would mean the death sentence again for millions of people. Nadine is in contact with Mandela to confront Al Gore, sent by Clinton to support the blood business. I feel nauseated by his speeches of supposed solidarity. I talked about it with Anna, and through a friend of hers from Ghana, I was able to reach Kofi Annan's office today and explain this drama caused by the greed of a few. He called Mike Moore, a New Zealand socialist and unionist who heads the World Trade Organization, in front of me, to ask him to speed up the meeting to create exceptions to the patent monopoly – TRIPS – that kills millions to enrich a few. He promised to hold it in Doha next year. I have had Anwele's promise and the tension all day in mind.

Jonay didn't say anything. He was looking forward to going to support Ukuzwana in the summer. He secretly counted the days left. But now Aimsa seemed to have her own plans and a full agenda. He feared she might be falling into the vanity of events and power. He felt that many of these meetings, like the one he witnessed four years ago in Vancouver and some of those he attended at the United Nations as a spectator, were expensive, full of rhetoric, and often dances of vanities. Besides, the tickets were too expensive, and he didn't want to depend on the salary that the United Nations gave Aimsa, even though she gave almost everything to the network of eco-villages. He would wait until the following year if he could have any income. Aimsa told him she was exhausted and would go to bed. Jonay said he wanted to write a letter to Patxi before going to sleep.

My dearest Aita (father in Basque, as he felt him to be),

I don't know how to begin to tell you how much I have thought about you and the entire Ukuzwana family every day. My wish is that you are well and continue to inspire so many people and communities around the world with your light.

We are well, healthy, and reinventing hopes in the magical adventure of life. Aimsa is deeply involved in the United Nations alongside Marta at UNICEF, with hundreds of allies from social movements, achieving recognition for the network of spiritual eco-villages and presenting, with the serene strength you know, arguments for justice in the world. Nour already has little friends in the neighborhood and at the community school. Both of them become more precious every day. It often gives me a strange sense of guilt for deserving this privilege.

I have tried to integrate into the emergency department of Bellevue Hospital, which treats homeless people without charging them. But after a few shifts in February, they asked me to regulate my registration in the United States medical registry, and the process will be lengthy. In just over a month, I treated more than two hundred socially disenfranchised and ill patients. I see them on the streets and treat them as best I can. I meet with them to understand the injustice of this jungle of power. Here, poverty amid so much wealth hurts more, Patxi. I carry a backpack with bandages, antiseptics, painkillers, vitamins, and little else, as they don't even let me prescribe medications. I walk through parks and subway stations. I bring them hot soup. I wish I could bring them all home. The other day, I dreamt that I arrived with them in Ukuzwana.

Tell me how my soulmate NoLwasi is doing, how Nothando is overcoming the grief for our dear fighter Anwele, how Juan and Cristina are integrating, if the antiretrovirals have arrived, how our thousands of brothers condemned to agony are recovering, how Joseph is with his inventions, Thandiwe helping at the hospital, Buhleve and his studies in Egoli, Haka and Helen with their struggles... We keep you all in our hearts, remember you every day with the deepest affection, and count the days to return in summer, to, if I tell you the truth, be myself again.

A hug with all our love,

Jonay

He chose not to show the letter to Aimsa because he knew the last line would sadden her. Deep down, it was unfair because he knew what he gave up by leaving Ukuzwana. After all, he had the love of a beautiful and brave woman, the tenderness of a daughter voraciously discovering the universe, and a Canarian and Ndebele family that sent him a wonderful light whispering, "How magical is this adventure of living with love!"

# Reinventing dreams.Ukuzwana, Zimbabwe, september 2001

Juan strolled with his daughters at sunset through the dry Kalahari savannah that surrounded the Ukuzwana mission. Adam and Unai attended primary school, receiving teachings from their parents about the world of harmony inspired by Patxi and the deep spirituality of their mother, NoLwasi. They grew up with an unimaginable freedom in the cities and a tremendous eagerness to sow kindness in the magical adventure of life. They spoke English at school, Ndebele with their mother, a bit of Basque with their father Patxi and uncle Haka, and Spanish with Jonay before and now with Juan and his family. They had traveled with Joseph in the *inyoni-enkulu*, flying over Matopos, with the old mission pickup exploring the eco-villages of Sibithanda in Matabeleland. A couple of times a year, they went to Bulawayo, where they loved watching trains at the old railway station, gathering at Helen and Haka's house, and seeing their older brother Joseph's inventions in the "dream factory."

Every Christmas, the extended family gathered at the Black Eagle house in Matopos, where eight years ago, Aimsa was welcomed, and where NoLwasi announced Adam's arrival to Patxi. Well, to this life.

*Adam was a source of indescribable goodness*. He observed everything with attention and spoke little. His gaze was deep, accompanied by a sweet smile most of the time. When he spoke, it was in the third person - "Adam is hungry..." With Joseph's help, he had built a bicycle from old parts, attaching a cart behind to carry little Unai and Daniela, or to distribute guavas, watermelons, and mangoes from the mission's garden to the teachers, workers, and patients in the small hospital.

Unai, at just three years old, explored the mission and its surroundings with his brother, fascinated by the rocks of the *kopjes*, where he enjoyed climbing and gazing into the distant horizon. He missed Nour a lot and always said that maybe, from the top, he could look far and see Nour returning to the mission.

Ángeles and Daniela had spent almost two years in that distant corner, so far in distance and way of life from their native Madrid. Their father, Juan, had replaced Jonay as the hospital's doctor, while their mother, Cristina, collaborated in the laboratory. Ángeles attended the primary school in Ukuzwana, where she already spoke fluent Ndebele, and little Daniela happily ran around the mission with Unai.

Harmony seemed to reign in the mission, but some *storms rained inward* without being seen, and some thunders drowned in the soul without knowing how to understand or express them.

Upon returning from their walk, Ángeles and Daniela went with their mother Cristina, while Juan went with Patxi and Adam to say, as every night, good night - "*Mandiro*" - to the admitted patients. Adam was fascinated by that moment of the day and distributed hugs that Juan believed cured more than his medications and surgeries.

Upon returning home, the old brick hermitage that Jonay had rehabilitated fifteen years earlier was already where the girls lay, and Cristina awaited him inside. They sat at the table for dinner together after another long day of work and emotions.

* Thanks for preparing dinner, dear. How was your afternoon?
* Well, like every afternoon, AIDS tests, tuberculosis preparations, hematocrits with anemia... always the same.

For a few months now, Juan had sensed a certain weariness in Cristina. From the initial enthusiasm of coming to the mission, living more simply, and giving her work to the neediest, Cristina had entered a phase where almost every day she felt uneasy about something. Sometimes it was the risk to the girls amidst so much AIDS (she didn't allow Ángeles to go with Adam to say good night to the patients), other times it was about the rural school and the missed opportunities for her daughters to learn about other worlds. And on nights like that, she felt demotivated by her routine work with just a dozen possible analyses in the humble laboratory. She also complained about the limited variety of food, almost always sadza with a handful of possible vegetables. But above all, she was affected by Juan's full dedication to his patients and the lack of intimate time, just a moment, like that moment during dinner. Juan tried to cheer her up with his enthusiasm for epic stories of his patients or his imagination to invent ointments for dermatitis, traction for fractures, or combinations of the few medicines they had with the herbal treatments shared by NoLwasi. But he couldn't bring a smile to her face anymore.

* Have you seen how wonderful the Southern Cross looks tonight, dear?

Juan said, trying to cheer her up, looking at the clear and starry sky.

* I don't want you to look at the stars tonight, Juan. I want you to look into my eyes. Let's go to the porch; I don't want the girls to hear us.

They went to the porch, and Juan looked at her with a smile that faded as he felt a strange vertigo, announcing the gravity of the moment.

* What do you see?

The most beautiful eyes of the woman I love.

* Look deeper.

Juan couldn't pretend anymore. He saw a sad, lifeless gaze, like a *scream stifled in the soul*.

* I see a shadow of sadness that I haven't understood for a long time, dear.
* I think you don't want to hear it, and that's why you can't understand it, Juan. Every day, I see you vibrate with enthusiasm for your dedication to the patients, for seeing how many with AIDS are responding to antiretrovirals, for the babies born healthy after a cesarean, for your evening walks with the girls and saying good night to your patients with Patxi and Adam. Even when you feel the pain for the malnourished children who die or the elderly with pneumonia or women who arrive too late with ectopic pregnancies, you also feel your commitment to be here, to give yourself to these people.
* Yes, that's why we came to this place, to take over from Jonay and Aimsa, to be a family with Patxi and NoLwasi, the little ones, the youth, the community. I am very happy, Cristina, - saying her name felt strange - and I don't understand your disillusionment.
* You don't understand because, from your enthusiasm, you don't listen to me. I spent time with Helen and Haka in Bulawayo, in case it was the feeling of isolation in the mission that was drowning me, but I still don't feel serene. I could tell you that I worry that Ángeles speaks Ndebele better than Spanish, and we might be limiting her opportunities, or that she and Daniela might get infected with wounds from AIDS patients when they go with Thandiwe to do treatments in the wards. Or that I have no way to progress with just a few tests that I repeat every afternoon when there are reagents. I feel lonely and frustrated; I'm not from here. I miss my city, walks in Retiro Park, supermarkets full of food, meals with family and friends, outings to the cinema or theater, and even just strolling the streets looking at shop windows. I dare not tell you for fear of your judgment, of not being supportive, of returning to the world of consumption, of thinking about our daughters and not equally about all Ndebele children. But I must tell you because I fear falling into depression: I can't continue here, Juan, *I want to go back home*.

Juan felt as if a dagger had been thrust into his chest. He was happy. Finally, he gave meaning to his profession and even to his life. He couldn't imagine returning to European hospitals with their white coats and ties, with hundreds of tests and automatic medicine. He feared conversations with many colleagues about conferences paid for by laboratories that caused so much pain with their patents or boasting about what they had published in ego-filled scientific journals, what TV or car they had bought, or where they would go on vacation. He had managed to escape from that world that suffocated him, with the love of his life. But he realized it was a crossroads. They were at the same moment and place, but he wanted to give more and more to those people. He felt that this simple way of life was a noble reference of values for his daughters, while she longed to return to the world of progress, comforts, security, and opportunities to know more, have more, and "be" more.

* Juan, I've talked to Patxi. He understands me and has asked me to talk to you. If you want, we can talk together with him.
* We've only been here for two years, Cristina. I think about how Jonay not only followed Aimsa but encouraged her to leave her beloved Ukuzwana to expand her strength in the network of eco-villages. But they had spent eight years together here, and Jonay double that, passionately devoted to these people who need him so much. Even without medication to treat AIDS, they gave themselves with such passion...
* You say that each person is a world, Juan. Don't compare, don't compare yourself. We came here from a very urban life, where our daughters were born and raised. I can no longer hide my sadness from you.

They looked at each other, this time with depth. Both had tears in their eyes. The *crossroads of love cannot retain the different paths chosen by the souls*. They embraced. When Juan moved closer for a kiss, she pulled away and entered the house. Juan stayed outside, deep in thought. If he insisted on continuing to live in Ukuzwana, his marriage would suffer, perhaps already wounded. If they left Ukuzwana, he would move away from what his ideas, now clearer than ever, told him he should do, and he wouldn't be able to look in the mirror and feel honest with his thoughts, with his life.

He approached the parsonage where Patxi and NoLwasi lived, with little Adam and Unai, and the already adolescent Nothando and Thandiwe, AIDS orphans, and, as Patxi said, angels for the New Humanity. Patxi was reading a letter by the light of a kerosene lamp.

* Hello, Aita.

As Jonay and many people in the mission did, she called him father in Basque, and that's how he felt to her. Patxi had spent over sixty years of age, breathing passion for his life, along with NoLwasi, devoted to others. Juan felt ashamed to tell him that they would have to leave the mission when they hadn't even been there for two years.

* Hello, Juan, Linjani. (How are you?)
* I am very happy here, Aita.
* I know, Juan. I see you, and I see Jonay. You are the same spirit of enthusiasm and passion. Just look at how you embrace the patients, how we say goodnight, how you sing the Zulu mmmm. You are very loved here. They call me sindisabantu (saves the people), and they called Jonay ulibona (watches over us). Do you know what they call you?
* Have they given me a name?"
* Yes, *they call you Thandabantu* (the one who loves people) for your affection to everyone. Since you are associated with the medications we finally got for AIDS, which bring people back to life from that terrible disease that still devastates Matabeleland, Africa, and the world, they also call you 'ulilapa' (the one who heals us).
* I prefer thandabantu. Call me Thanda from now on, okay?"
* That's how I baptize you."

He jokingly made the sign of the cross.

* But in all this, Cristina doesn't feel the same.
* I know, Thanda. She's been like a shadow in the mission for a while, without joy. She came to talk to me a few days ago. She needs to go back to Madrid.
* Yes, she has told me. I don't know what to do. If I go back with her, I will feel good for easing her anguish, but it won't be me who takes that flight; it will be a shadow of me. My spirit wants to be here. For the first time, I feel noble in my endeavors. My thoughts and my life are in harmony. Perhaps they never were before.
* It's difficult, Thanda. You've already tried spending time in Bulawayo to see if she could feel more comfortable and secure. But she longs too much for the life you both came from, Thanda. You shouldn't blame her for that.
* But I don't want to and shouldn't leave you alone. I committed to Jonay, to you, to these people in great need.
* We will find a solution, Thanda. Surely, you can find ways to collaborate with those in need in Madrid. Happiness has no coordinates, and the ways to give the best of each soul adapt wherever we are. Moreover, I'll tell you something: where everything seems secure, where everyone runs and competes without making eye contact, that's where it is most needed to pour out kindness and love. I feel it in the letters Jonay sends me. Try to keep your family together, Thanda.

Patxi said it with sadness as he had developed with Thanda a bond like the paternal affection he felt and feels for Jonay. The resemblance between those two souls was astonishing. Learning from Jonay, he had already thought of a way to make Thanda's departure easier, even though it broke his heart:

* I've taken the initiative and talked to Buhleve. She's finishing her surgery specialty in Johannesburg and says she's ready to return to Ukuzwana. She can start replacing you if you accompany her for a couple of months, just as Jonay did with you.

Thanda thanked him and gave him an emotional hug. He returned home with a broken heart, where Cristina and the girls were already sleeping together. He felt the *tearing apart of surrendering his ideas* and way of life to adapt to the needs of his partner. Yes, it was a generous sacrifice. But he wondered: can I be happy without being myself? Can I be myself without being happy? Can I love without being either myself or happy?

Patxi had just read another letter from Jonay in which he expressed his disillusionment with the jungle of New York and how that world of rush and words seemed to have kidnapped Aimsa's spirit. As he watched Thanda walk away with a disillusioned step towards his family, not being himself, he felt the vertigo of an imminent farewell, another one, of another kindred soul. On his small radio, he heard the news that two passenger planes had crashed into the Twin Towers of New York, causing thousands of deaths, while another crashed into the Pentagon. The attacks had been claimed by the Islamic terrorism of al-Qaeda. Just when it seemed like the world was starting to be sown with lights from eco-villages, terror returned, announcing a XXIst century still full of shadows due to power interests.

He thought of his parents, his uncle Patxi, thought of Tulani and Anwele, thought of the Church chained to its hierarchies, thought of Jonay lost in that concrete jungle, surely assisting the wounded on the streets after the attack, and now Thanda, whom he already feared seeing leave. *Life was truly a constant reassembling of broken dreams*. At the bottom of the soul lay the pieces of those dreams that we delicately picked up and reinvented into new dreams. The new dreams often broke again, and the pieces became smaller each time, almost turning into dust over time and flowing into the universe. Perhaps that stardust from which they said we came transformed into the dust of so many broken dreams that magically filtered light and rains into rainbows inspiring more and more dreams... eternal, infinite... all connected?

# Pain enters paradise. Comunity of tenderness, Gomera, Jauary 2002

John listened to the radio on the porch of the central house of the Tenderness community. His eyesight had been deteriorating, and he was diagnosed with cataracts at the La Gomera hospital. His numerous travels around the world and his work, mostly under the sun, had hardened his eye lenses, and they were now almost opaque, preventing him from focusing or reading, which he loved to do with books and, above all, his son Jonay's letters. He would have to undergo surgery in Tenerife to prevent his retinas from atrophying, as they were barely receiving any light. Meanwhile, he heard news about the creation of the Euro currency and the signing of peace in Sierra Leone. Saidu had returned there to contribute to peace talks.

John anxiously noticed a letter with the sender identified as the "President of the Island Council of La Gomera."

Since the foundation of the community in Cabrito, *Tenderness*, John had always insisted on maintaining legal registration with the Island Council (representing the government on the island), paying property taxes and income taxes from visitors to the community or those earned from the sales of crafts made from polished branches of fallen heather and juniper branches. Within the community and in other eco-villages in the network, there were those who opposed this, arguing that they didn't want their efforts to contribute to armies, monarchies, slaughterhouses, bullfighting events, or polluting industries. Many of them were children of the hippie movements of the '60s and enjoyed the effects of marijuana or hallucinogenic mushrooms, which they considered messages from nature. Others were associated with anti-globalization movements, sometimes with somewhat violent positions against institutions. They referred to those living in society as "sheeple" and this irritated John, who sternly told them:

Every person in the world is a *'hero of their own story'* and deserves respect.

He thought they were right in rejecting religions and governments worldwide that allowed, and even promoted, the destruction of other forms of life, feeling that human life, especially the powerful, was superior to others. Believing to possess the truth or being on a higher moral scale would be, according to John, the seed of their self-destruction. *Nothing was wiser than humility*.

The dilemma, which John had discussed since the first meetings five years ago in Findhorn, was that they could neither live nor should they isolate themselves from the rest of humanity. Moreover, they couldn't turn a blind eye to natural and animal suffering elsewhere and only live in their "paradise," denouncing others' harm while refusing to be contaminated by any other ideas, hierarchies, or people. On the other hand, they couldn't be self-sufficient in everything and renounce any benefit of progress, from the roads connecting the interior of the island, the radio John was currently listening to, the computer they used to communicate with the world, the solar energy silica plates, to the iron for working the land. Striking a fair balance between benefiting from the sweat and progress of others and previous generations, they had to contribute with taxes, ideas, proposals, and, above all, empathy, and appreciation for those who didn't think like them. As discussed in the statutes presented by Aimsa at the United Nations: "The communities in the network of eco-spiritual communities (inspired by the Umbela Decalogue) are autonomous in their ways of life and have access to public goods and social services in collaboration with neighboring communities and governments."

John had always insisted that they shouldn't be owners of anything natural: neither land, nor water, nor mountains, nor plants, nor animals. They were guardians of nature's health, Pachamama, as Lisy called it from indigenous knowledge, in harmony with it. Thus, in 1982, they reached a usufruct agreement, as was done in Cuba, according to Fernando's stories, for twenty years with the Island Council, and he encouraged other eco-villages to do the same. Ownership, whether collective or individual, of land, objects, money, people, or knowledge, was the seed of greed, struggles, and pain in humanity, he often said.

Now, his own condition of vision loss was even more revealing: how could he request treatment and the surgery he needed from a healthcare service to which he had never contributed taxes throughout his life?

John pondered these questions when Umbela approached with a stew made from sunflower seeds, almonds, and spinach, all from the gardens on the slopes of the Tenderness valley, rich in vitamin E to prevent further deterioration of his eyesight. John thanked her for her ever-present generosity, and after they finished eating, he put the letter in his pocket and asked her to take a walk up to Roque del Sombrero, from where there was a beautiful view of Mount Teide at sunset.

* Umbela, I haven't told you what has been happening to me this past week, not to worry you. But I must tell you because I believe it can affect our lives.
* Tell me, John. I thought you were with Fernando in San Sebastian fixing his sailboat.
* Yes, that's correct. Tuesday night, we went to dinner at the house of the hospital internist, Luis. He is from Madrid, has worked in Ghana, and treats patients with great care. He wants to promote a humanist movement in La Gomera, one that respects nature and advocates for a property-free island. A week ago, he and his family spent a few days with Fernando at Arguamul beach, eating from the garden, climbing rocks with their children, and helping the Valor community raise masts from shipwrecks. Talking about all these ideas, it became midnight.
* Yes, I've heard about him in the market. Some people love him for his humanity, while others criticize him for not sending them on trips paid for by the health service to Tenerife. They had gotten used to abusing public funds there, often going for shopping."
* It turns out that Luis, like Jonay, has lived in hospitals with limited resources and can hardly evacuate patients by helicopter. He tells me that since the company charges a hundred thousand pesetas for each evacuation, now we have to calculate in Euros. He's pressured to send more patients to Tenerife. You know who owns the company: Don Juan Manuel, the influential figure who pursued you. He's also building the airport on Santiago beach, several hotels in Valle Gran Rey, and, with the owners of the ferries Fred Olsen, they want to build a large restaurant in the middle of Garajonay.
* Yes, Juan Manuel de Bethancourt was the one who harassed me in high school. When I, a poor peasant from Hermigua, rejected him, his father, already the owner of the banana plantations in Hermigua, fired my father.
* We were discussing these matters on the rooftop of the house Luis rents on Calle Real, in front of the church when we heard someone with an American accent shout, 'Dr. Luis!'
* As they walked towards Roque del Sombrero, John continued telling the story:

Luis went down to the street, and after 10 minutes, he came up looking worried, saying, 'John, Fernando, I have to leave you.

The American calling him, James, had a boat in the harbor and told him that someone on a neighboring sailboat was unconscious and didn't want to go to the hospital. He said, 'I don't know why. Something's strange. I'm going quickly to see what's happening.'"

As we walked down the street, the three of us, I asked Luis, 'Tell me, Luis, is James from Brooklyn? With a boat called New Morning, sailing alone with his cat Dylan?'"

John recounted what happened next:

Luis, amazed at how I could know about that sailor, replied to me: “Yes, why? I treated him for leg neuropathy. I think he's developing diabetes and will need to stay in La Gomera for a while."

I told him “He's the one who has lent his house to Jonay and Aimsa in New York and has been helping us careen the boat with Fernando. Let us go with you, Luis; everything seems very strange”.

We went down the street and greeted James, and walked with James to the nautical port. As we crossed Las Américas square, James provided some context: the young man who seemed to be unconscious was from Germany. He arrived with three other young people on a sailboat from Madeira. Since they docked, he noticed they were stoned. That night they went into town and came back about an hour earlier. Thirty minutes later, they told James that one of them seemed to be in a coma. They asked him if he knew a doctor. He went to look for Luis.

We reached the nautical port's pier to a sailboat moored next to New Morning. It was named Edelweiss, and on it were three young men in shorts, looking frightened on the deck. James discreetly went to his sailboat. I stayed with two of the young men while Luis went down to the cabin with the third young man and Fernando. He noticed a plate with matches and lemon, and a tourniquet. On a bunk lay a young man of about twenty. Luis noticed that his pupils were pinprick, with signs of punctures in the arm veins. He had a weak pulse and didn't respond to any stimulus. It was clearly a heroin overdose.

Luis had a first aid backpack. He administered an intravenous injection of naloxone, a heroin antidote, and another of adrenaline. He intubated and began ventilating his lungs with a bag-valve mask. He asked Fernando to continue ventilating while he performed chest compressions for a minute as he saw the pulse fading. After ten minutes, spontaneous breathing began to return, and they removed the endotracheal tube. The pulse started to become stronger, and the pupils began to dilate. Luis noticed that perfusion was returning to the fingers. When he was stable, they spoke to his friend in English.

* What's your name? What happened?"
* Thank you, doctor. My name is Erich, and my friend is called Johannes. We come from Hamburg. I won't lie to you. Tonight, Johannes injected a dose of heroin that we bought in the village.
* In the island? Fernando asked, surprised. It was the first time we heard that heroin was being sold on the island. Some youngsters brought marihuana from Morocco, and it seemed like some were already cultivating it on the terraces of Alajeró. I noticed Fernando and Luis exchange uneasy glances. They knew that heroin could destroy many young lives on the island, along with many families.

The young man then said:

* Doctor, if Johannes is admitted and the police are notified, they'll seize the boat, and we'll be arrested.

Luis went to the deck with Fernando while the other young men went down to the cabin to be with their recovering friend. Luis and Fernando explained what happened to me and we went to the pier.

* What do you think, Fernando? Should we alert the civil guard?

Luis said.

Fernando replied:

* On the one hand, it could help them track down the drug trafficking. On the other hand, it's true that the boy would be imprisoned, maybe the others too, and that would harm him. Although they deserve punishment, they would sink even deeper into drugs. Prisons, where drugs circulate, are the worst place to overcome addiction. Besides, I doubt if the civil guard would pursue that crime. I'm tired of filing complaints about how the Bethancourts and others are ravaging the island while they label eco-villages as 'dirty hippies.' They do nothing against the power players.

At that moment, I said:

* Let's do something: we tell them that we won't say anything, and they leave the island tomorrow. We advise them to stop by El Cabrito, where we have methadone doses for about fifteen days because a member of the Tenderness community came from France to treat his addiction. Let them sail back to Germany and find a way to detox there. But all on the condition that they tell us who and where they bought the drugs.

That way, we found out that the drugs arrived on Mondays and Thursdays on the ferry Benchijigua and were taken to “La Promesa” bar on the road to Chejelipes.

* That's a very high risk on this island, dear," Umbela said.
* We continued to careen Fernando's boat, and on Thursday, we met Luis to go, before the ferry arrived, to keep watch outside that bar. It turned out we saw the son of Juan Manuel get out of his black Mercedes and enter the bar. Shortly after, a van arrived, parked in front, and two young men came out. He came out, and they exchanged a leather bag for an envelope. It seems highly probable that drug trafficking is taking place there.
* On Friday, I went to talk to the president of the Island Council. He was very polite when we offered to transfer the El Cabrito estate to the council, having it in usufruct for agroecological activities in exchange for reduced taxes and subsidies for rural tourism, which never materialized. He started off very courteous and said it was time to renew the usufruct. When I mentioned my suspicion of drug trafficking and the Bethancourt family's possible involvement, his attitude changed. He responded angrily that there were no drugs in La Gomera, that accusing such a respectable family dedicated to the well-being of La Gomera was very serious, and that, in any case, he would inform the Civil Guard.
* That's why I fear, Umbela, that this letter may not bring good news.
* You did what you had to do, John. Drugs on the island can destroy many lives, many families. And I'm not surprised that the Bethancourts are involved. You know that my mother, already very weak and without the will to live since my father's death, says that this richman bully didn't let her live in peace and felt harassed her whole life.

They opened the letter, and Umbela read it to John, who could barely fix his gaze due to the cataracts.

Dear Mr. Harris,

I regret to inform you that, due to changes in the urban development plans on the island, the usufruct of the La Ternura estate, located in the El Cabrito ravine, with agricultural and rural hotel usage permits, will not be renewed next March, after twenty years of its concession. I kindly request that you vacate the premises before the next month of June and, if desired, provide an inventory of the investments that cannot be relocated and their estimated value for consideration of reimbursement.

Yours sincerely,

Don Cayo Rubelo

President of the Island Council of La Gomera

Umbela looked at John, who was gazing at the sunset behind El Teide.

* Don't worry, my love. They underestimate the power of tenderness.

# Justice defies Love. Johannesburgo, June 2002

Embroidered in light blue thread on the upper right pocket of her white coat were the words that read her name – Buhleve. She conducted rounds with patients admitted to the surgery section of the Charlotte Maxeke Hospital, named after the first black South African female university graduate, in Parktown, Johannesburg.

Buhleve resided in Nadine's house, the journalist who was a friend of her parents and Mandela. Nadine tirelessly wrote about injustices in South Africa. Buhleve had celebrated Mandela's release at the beginning of her career. In the last country to abandon legal racism, apartheid still cast a deep divide between wealthy whites and the predominantly impoverished blacks.

For ten years, Buhleve had been working in that hospital – first as a student and later as a surgical resident. Ever since Haka rescued her at the age of fifteen, adopting her along with Helen and introducing her to a world of harmony and love in Ukuzwana, she had aspired to become a doctor. She wanted to alleviate the pain of so many people she had seen suffer and succumb to AIDS, including her parents, in her native Matabeleland. Despite the profound trauma of being held captive for over a year by a child trafficking network in Soweto, she completed her high school in Bulawayo. She collaborated with the organization Sibithanda and spent every weekend assisting Jonay at the hospital. She learned from Patxi to heal resentment with love. He used to tell her, "Nothing will purify your soul and bring more peace than *loving everyone, even those who hurt you*, though it may seem difficult and unfair." With this sentiment, she transformed into a physically slender and delicate woman, with a sweet yet timid expression and an iron determination to study, become a doctor, and alleviate the pain of the injustices she had known firsthand.

One day in Ukuzwana's operating room, she witnessed Jonay dealing with an intestinal perforation caused by typhoid fever. Upon opening the abdomen, they discovered a significant portion of the small intestine was necrotic. Intestinal resection would have been too risky with the resources available there. They decided to close the abdomen and administer chloramphenicol, the only antibiotic they had, hoping it would cure her. But the infection was too advanced. The patient, a twenty-eight-year-old woman – the same age as Buhleve at that time – perished, leaving three orphaned children with their father in Egoli, much like many in the kraals of Matabeleland, under the care of their grandparents. Buhleve often recalled that moment, wondering what might have become of that woman if they had performed a complex intestinal resection – a skill beyond the means of Ukuzwana and the experience of Jonay. Therefore, after graduating with honors, she decided to specialize in surgery, with the goal of returning to Ukuzwana one day and turning the small operating room initiated by Jonay sixteen years ago into the best in all of Matabeleland.

She always carried John Gray's manual in her coat – a gift from Jonay before he left for New York. She had filled it with notes updating medications or techniques. She used a fine red marker to note treatments that might not be available at the humble hospital in Ukuzwana, her soul's destiny.

Since returning to Johannesburg, she had avoided passing through the Soweto areas where she had been abducted. When Buhleve was in her third year of medical school, she learned – with a strange sense of relief tinged with guilt – that Jason, who had held her captive with beatings and drugs for five months, had died of AIDS in prison. Godfrey, Dasy, and the other accomplices in the child trafficking scheme were still incarcerated. In the early years, she constantly asked Nadine if they had been released, looked back frequently while walking through the city, and had nightmares in which they reappeared, chasing her.

Neither Haka nor any of the friends who had bravely risked their lives for her freedom ever asked her if she had been raped in Dasy's brothel, where she was rescued from. She never spoke of it. It was like a lacuna she imposed on her memory. Life paused in a dimension her mind wanted to erase. But memory sometimes invoked, albeit in a haze, what happened that night in Dasy's brothel room where she was confined.

Dasy was a woman around forty at that time, plump, with shiny glycerin-coated hair, ostentatiously painted lips, and eyelids, always smoking with a long holder in a pathetic attempt at sophistication. Buhleve remembered with terror her mocking laughter at the terror of the kidnapped girls. According to a macabre belief, people with sexually transmitted diseases could be cured by having sex with a virgin girl. They paid up to two hundred dollars to Dasy for this macabre act. She handed most of it to Jason, and he, in turn, to Godfrey. Thus, when the new group of Ndebele girls arrived, Dasy took them to separate rooms, pushing them with blows. Buhleve remembered how, after a few hours locked up that night, Dasy returned, locked the door from the inside, and told her in Zulu, a language Buhleve understood due to its similarity to Ndebele, that she was going to receive a visit from a very distinguished client who would demand anything from her. Terrified, Buhleve cried in a chair in a corner, repeating, "Obaba, omama, ungapi yini...?" (Father, mother, where are you?). Dasy told her to put on a very short red dress and gave her a glass of brandy to drink, in which, she would later find out, several sedatives were diluted. After a while, she fell asleep. Later, Dasy came in with a white man around forty years old, vaguely remembered with a thick reddish mustache, two golden incisor teeth, very obese, and limping on his right leg. The man, without uttering a word, began undressing. He revealed a tattoo on his right shoulder with a heart and "Love or die" underneath. Buhleve began to tremble and curl up. When the man lay down beside her, Buhleve resisted, screaming that she had been abducted. Upon the screams, Dasy entered and began beating her... She remembered nothing more. She woke up the next morning with terrible pain and bleeding between her legs.

Upon arriving at Ukuzwana, Jonay had recommended that she take an HIV test, which miraculously came back negative. The first to embrace her with the result was Anwele, displaying marvelous courage and generosity. In her final years of medical school, she consulted a gynecologist at the hospital, who examined her. He informed her that the tear caused that night had possibly left her infertile, and she would require a complex operation to be able to enjoy or even bear with sexual relations.

On a June morning, while on duty in the emergency room, a man in his sixties entered with severe abdominal pain. She barely noticed his features, but upon examining his abdomen, she observed signs of an "acute abdomen," indicating a likely intestinal perforation. She recalled her decision to become a surgeon to save lives, much like in this case. Instructing the man to undress and cover himself with a sheet for examination, she went to fetch an IV drip, an intravenous catheter, and a needle for infusion to prepare him for surgery. Upon returning to the examination table, she noticed the golden teeth and the tattoo of the man who had shattered her life as a woman, a memory that had haunted her for many years. Her sweet gaze and affectionate tone toward all patients shattered. She left the room and went to the nurses' station. She couldn't speak, but her colleagues saw the terror in her expression and her labored breathing. She asked one of the on-duty nurses to administer the IV and sought a colleague surgeon who could replace her. Her hands trembled, her heart pounded, her vision was blurred, but, above all, a voice from deep within cried out for vengeance. There was no other surgeon on duty; she didn't want to explain her story to anyone and remembered Patxi's words: "Nothing will purify your soul and bring more peace than loving everyone, even those who hurt you, though it may seem *difficult and unfair*." Most likely, that man would have paid a fine or nothing at all, and his terrible harm would have gone unpunished.

Summoning strength and composure and unable to look him in the face, she explained that they needed to operate. She went to the family waiting room to explain the situation and the necessary operation.

* Family of Joseph Smuts?

A woman, Nancy Smuts, of a similar age to Buhleve, responded as the patient's daughter. She was white, elegantly dressed, styled hair, and exuded the scent of expensive perfume – an unbearable odor for Buhleve.

Buhleve explained the urgency and performed the operation like a senseless robot, without speaking to anyone, communicating through gestures, and expelling any images from the past from her mind. She identified a perforation caused by an advanced tumor in the descending colon. She resected as much of the tumor and adjacent lymph nodes as possible, leaving a colostomy.

After finishing the operation, she changed and put on her coat, went to the waiting room, and called Nancy Smuts. She asked her to accompany her to a private room where they could talk confidentially.

* Mrs. Smuts, we've operated on your father, and he's now in the recovery room; his vital signs are stable. He had a perforation in the colon.

The woman noticed the name embroidered on the coat and said, "Dr. Beloki," emphasizing her surprise at the surname.

* Do you have the title of a specialist surgeon? My father is a very important person in South Africa, and I demand the best treatment.
* Ms. Smuts, I am a final-year surgical resident. I am qualified for emergency responsibilities like the one your father experienced, and I have acted as the lead surgeon in over fifty similar operations. Your father, like any patient in this hospital and any South African, regardless of race or status, has received the best treatment we can provide.

Buhleve said these words, looking at her sternly and not bowing her head as many still did in the face of white arrogance after generations of white supremacy. Her defiant and firm attitude subdued Mrs. Smuts' haughty disdain.

* I don't doubt your ability; I just wanted to make sure my father's rights are respected.

Rights. Buhleve pondered. For that "important" white man to have gone to a public hospital, he must have lost the privileges of times when hospitals, schools, citizen service windows, church banks, street water taps, sidewalks... were not shared between whites and blacks and could be fined for it. She also recalled that the union of a white person with a black or "colored" woman was considered a crime, stipulated by the Immoral Act. Now, they claimed their rights equally. When that man had torn her tender entrails when she didn't yet know, and perhaps never would know, what it meant to be a woman.

Buhleve then thought that, while vengeance destroyed the soul of the avenger, and she had already saved the life of the one who had shattered it, it was fair that his family knew the truth, and that man faced his deeds by the jury that would best handle him throughout the life that remained, thanks to Buhleve's forgiveness. To forgive, but not forget. Clemency, but justice. She would no longer be the only one burdened with the echo of the deepest pain in her soul.

* Mrs. Smuts, I must inform you of two conditions your father has. The first is the less severe: your father has colon cancer. We have resected it to the best of our ability and have left a colostomy for when he overcomes peritonitis due to his perforation, and it can be closed through an anastomosis. My oncology colleagues will follow up with him to monitor its development and provide the best possible treatment.

- My God, cancer..."

Exclaimed the woman.

* But it will be cured, won't it? And what is the second condition my father suffers from?
* The second condition has no cure. Only truth and repentance can alleviate it, but the damage done has left a mark that nothing and no one can erase. It is now thirteen years since your father went to a brothel in Soweto to rape a virgin girl thinking that this would treat his venereal diseases.

The woman was petrified. She knew of her father's unfaithful life and his abuse as a police captain during apartheid. But it was a big secret disguised as an honorable man, medals and diplomas of honor, weekly mass and even contributions to the Salvation Army.

* That night a fifteen-year-old girl was violently abused by her father and the damage has scarred her body and soul for life. Despite such pain, that girl, rescued from the Matabeleland orphan trafficking mafia, was adopted by a loving family, finished her studies, decided to become a doctor to help alleviate the pain of others and is about to finish her specialty in surgery.

At that moment Buhleve pointed to the name embroidered on her gown pocket. The woman could not hold his gaze and averted it to the floor. Buhleve continued.

* The family that rescued me from that horror inspired me with values of love for all people, generosity to those who need it most, and forgiveness. But even though today I gave your father my best to save his life, justice is also necessary for peace. Surely your father got off scot-free in that raid or barely paid a fine under the law of immoral acts. Today it is necessary and just that you, to whom he surely gave care and love during his life, know what your father caused to the one who speaks to you today without vengeance, but with the need for the truth to be known. You will be his jury and his guilt and shame for his horrible acts, will be your most severe verdict.

Buhleve, her eyes bathed in tears of pain, left the room and went up to the roof of the hospital. Looking up at the stars, she felt the relief of a weight she had carried for half her life. The damage was now only physical, and she would overcome it with the courage inspired by her Ukuzwana family and, she was sure, her parents and grandparents, already from another dimension that now shone on the Southern Cross.

A month later, as every summer, she would return to Ukuzwana to work in the consulting rooms, in the wards, in the operating room and to visit patients in the kraals. This year he would also meet again with Jonay, his teacher and reference of values in medicine, who was returning from New York.

She remembered that this trip was the reverse of the one made by many young people hypnotized by "egoli" (where the gold is) and by money and material comforts, and the one she also made with her kidnappers who hypnotized her grandparents with a future for their granddaughter far from the dry sands and the souls exhausted by pain and despair. The return journey, like the one she would make now, many made in a wooden box. But she was coming back full of life to feed in Ukuzwana on hope, harmony, and illusion. Love or die... She felt *strangely free at last to love, to live*...

# . Soul shreds in a glow relay. Ukuzwana, September 2002

Buhleve arrived in Bulawayo at the end of July, where she embraced her adoptive parents, Haka and Helen. A few days later, she joined Ukuzwana and set out to assist Thanda. To her surprise, Cristina and their daughters were no longer there. Having arrived the previous night, they had been together in consultations, wards, and the operating room, with little time to discuss anything personal. Buhleve noticed that Thanda would go for solitary walks around the kraals at dusk, appearing contemplative. Patxi was engaged in community meetings promoting sorghum crops. Buhleve spent a pleasant evening in heartfelt conversation with NoLwasi. As night fell, she saw Thanda on the porch of his tiny old parish and aproached to speak with him.

* Salibonani Baba. (we see you, father)
* Salibonani udade wami. (I see you, my sister)
* ¿Abantu banjani…? (How are your people…?). Where are Cristina and the girls, Thanda? Did they go to Bulawayo?
* No, Buhleve, I didn't want to tell you in a letter. At the beginning of the year, Cristina decided to return to Madrid, taking the girls with her. Ángeles and Daniela were deeply affected by their farewell to the mission, especially as they were leaving Adam and Unai, who were like brothers to them.
* And what happened, Thanda? You seemed so happy here as a family…
* I thought so too, but maybe I wanted to see a reality that was more my dream. Buhleve, I saw in Jonay and everyone here a way of living and working intertwined with love and commitment to those who need it most. I have never felt happier. Everything fascinated me: family gatherings, consultations, wards, the operating room, walks around the kraals, movie Fridays on the blanket, Patxi's ecumenical Sundays, trips to Bulawayo… everything. Here, I feel joyful, Buhleve; I don't watch the clock, and I don't know what day of the week it is. According to Japanese philosophy, I feel "*ichigo-ichie*," living in the moment, knowing it is a unique opportunity to leave our imprint of love on others. For the first time in my life, my work is as valuable and joyful as family life. I am just Thanda. In Spain, I was Juan at home, secure and somewhat isolated from the world, and Juan at work, following all the unspoken codes to be accepted and climb the ladder.
* I understand, Thanda. I see it in Johannesburg's life too. But it seems Cristina didn't feel the same way?
* No. Maybe I should have been more attentive. I didn't realize, or didn't want to understand, that all the plans and, above all, all expressions of enthusiasm for the day, tasks to do, adventures to discover, the beauty of the sunset or the stars, came only from me. Cristina's apathy was an expression of her sadness. And my enthusiasm overwhelmed her. She felt run over by a train she couldn't jump off, heading in a direction she didn't desire…
* Why didn't you go with her, Thanda?
* I discussed it with Patxi. I couldn't leave. Without you here yet, and with only a monthly visit from the Cuban doctors in Brunapeg, the hospital would have closed, salaries and medication shipments canceled, and many patients would suffer at home without the means to go to Brunapeg or Bulawayo. Cristina and I decided that she would go first, and I would join her when I can hand over to you, Buhleve.

Buhleve desired nothing more than to return to Ukuzwana, to take care of the small hospital built by Jonay, to draw inspiration from NoLwasi's spirituality, Patxi's generosity, to encourage Thandiwe, now 17, to follow in his footsteps in medicine, and to embrace all those wonderful beings once again.

- But I still have to finish my specialization, Thanda. I will continue until December in Johannesburg. This separation from your family must be very painful.

- Yes, I miss my daughters a lot. I imagine them playing around the mission, walking by my side in the evenings, and going to bed with the light of the stars. To be honest, with Cristina, it's good that we have a bit of space. I feel like we're walking in different directions. It's good that she can shape her world in Madrid as she wishes, without my shadow or judgment. When I return, we'll see if love can unite us again on a shared path.

- *Amandla*! (strength!)

Buhleve bid a painful farewell to his friend and colleague, seeing him so downcast. Love could be so challenging, she thought. Although she had cut off her wings from loving until now, Buhleve sensed that it was the most beautiful thing in life if it came in balance, without lovers or beloved, without winners or losers, without chains or possessions, like the most *wonderful beauties of life*: children's smiles, the flow of water, the freshness of rain, shadows at sunset, the caresses of the wind, starry nights. *None of them had owners or codes*.

They flowed freely. Beauty and freedom, freedom and love, love and beauty. *Love or die*. That echo from the worst moment of her life seemed to be calling her now to new ways of merging fearlessly with life. She was looking forward to Patxi's return and telling him first everything that had happened, following his advice to "love those who hurt you," and then going together to tell Haka and Helen, her adoptive parents, in Bulawayo.

Thanda had scheduled surgeries every afternoon in August to assist Buhleve, now an expert surgeon. In total, she had a list of twelve patients with complicated hernias, four needing cholecystectomies, five hysterectomies, six patients with stomach cancer, three with giant goiters, four with lymphedema – elephantiasis, three needing facial reconstructions for cancrum oris, and several suffering from genu valgum and tendon retractions due to polio.

Thanda taught her the protocols for antiretrovirals still received through the Doctors Without Borders project, for preventing HIV transmission during pregnancy with nevirapine. He shared his discoveries for treating tuberculosis with less toxic drugs than those prescribed by the government, how to medicate patients with sleeping sickness and bilharziasis, and how they were preventing and treating malaria. He also confided in her plans for a new community health diagnosis, like the one done by Jonay, NoLwasi, and Anwele thirteen years ago.

On the third day, Patxi arrived one afternoon while Thanda was on his sunset walk. Buhleve ran to meet him, embracing him like a daughter eager for the secure warmth only a father's arms can provide.

* Aita, I have so much to tell you.
* What joy to see you, Buhleve, umntane wami (my daughter). We all look forward to summer to see you. I suppose you are immersed in all the surgeries that awaited you, and Thanda has filled you in on everything.
* Yes, he's a good person. And he's suffering. His soul is free and wants to flow here, but his family is calling him back to Spain.
* Yes, Buhleve, it's not easy to tune ideas and synchronize times while flowing freely and without chains.
* I need to tell you something very difficult and at the same time profound, just to you, and then to my parents, something that happened to me a month ago in Egoli.
* Tell me, my daughter.
* Do you remember when you always told me, "Nothing will purify your soul more and bring you more peace than loving everyone, and even though it may seem difficult and unfair, also those who hurt you"?
* Yes, and many times, I wondered if it was fair to tell you with the enormous harm, they had done to you. I suppose there are situations that corner the soul so much in pain that they require a loud and clear cry for justice to bring peace.
* I followed your advice, Aita. A month ago, I found myself as a patient with the man who violently shattered my innocence and my sense of being a woman. I thought of your words and saved his life in surgery.

Patxi looked at her astonished. Buhleve was becoming like NoLwasi, in graceful beauty, in serene wisdom, and in infinite kindness. He felt ashamed of proclaiming what he had not been able to do, for example, when the bishop harassed him for so many years until closing the mission. He had indeed wished to be sent back to Europe or to retire to a convent to pray and thus not see him anymore. He thought to himself that anger and resentment were also human. As Haka told him, although he couldn't agree, there were times when violence was necessary to prevent much more suffering of the innocent. Was pacifism somewhat cowardly? Was it ethical to always turn the other cheek? He had his doubts.

He was thinking about all this when Buhleve continued:

* After taking love to the extreme, as you advised me so many times, Patxi, I felt the need for justice as well through its first premise: truth. I understood that the terrible act I suffered in that horrible brothel had been hidden in my mind for thirteen years due to modesty and pain, and that, although the leaders of the network were arrested and convicted thanks to Haka, the man who abused me was free, and his family did not know the profound damage he caused. It wasn't revenge, Patxi, it was a deep need to release the truth so that I could finally have peace. I told his daughter what happened, and he will have to feel the judgment for his actions in her gaze as long as he lives. Only his repentance from the truth will free him from such a heavy burden in his life, much heavier than mine.

Patxi looked at Buhleve, amazed by so much honesty, wisdom, and courage. He embraced her with the deep love of a father, like Joseph, Thandiwe, and Nothando. Truly, that generation of AIDS orphans had overcome pain with forgiveness, fear with love, and darkness with their wonderful light.

* That night, Patxi opened a letter that had been brought from Bulawayo: Jonay and Nouri were returning to Ukuzwana for a couple of months. Aimsa was attending the "Earth Summit" in Johannesburg, going to conferences throughout South Africa, and would then join them in Ukuzwana a few days before they all returned to New York. Nour asked them not to say anything to Adam and Unai, their soul brothers, whom she wanted to surprise.

Two weeks later, the Bulawayo pickup arrived with Patxi, Haka, and Helen, with little Nour in front, and Thandiwe and Nothando behind in the "bathtub" with Jonay standing behind the cabin, with the wind on his face as he liked, responding to everyone who crossed their path, shouting for joy: "*ulibona ubuyile*" (Ulibona has arrived – the one who looks at us), and he responded, full of joy, "*yebo, abatu wami, ngipendukhile ekhaya, ngiyataba*!" (Yes, my people, I have returned home, I am happy).

Upon reaching the mission, the sun was already setting. Thanda had gone for a walk with Buhleve and with Adam and Unai. As he used to do every afternoon, Unai climbed the rocky formations with only four years old and looked to the horizon "in case he saw Nour coming." Thanda knew that this time he would indeed see his little sister arriving on the horizon. Adam walked hand in hand with Thanda and Buhleve, while Unai, so brave, climbed a nearby kopje. He saw the old pickup approaching in a cloud of dust on the road.

* Adam, come! Dad is arriving!
* Adam climbed the rock where his little brother was. Thanda and Buhleve waited by the side of the road. Adam and Unai saw someone waving from behind the cabin, and their hearts skipped a beat:
* Uncle Jonay!

They ran towards him. He jumped out of the car and embraced them tightly. At that moment, the front door opened, and Nour joined the embrace. Adam, Nour, and Unai were back together, a bond that distance could not tame in its strength, and time could not erase from their hearts. They all got into the tub and reached the mission where NoLwasi had prepared a stew with the sorghum from the communities that Patxi was promoting.

Everyone asked about Aimsa, and Jonay explained that she was in Egoli fighting for the health of the planet. Buhleve looked at NoLwasi and Haka, and they shared a conspiratorial thought: that black hole of horror from which they rescued her stood as a pulpit for the health of the planet.

Jonay and Nour spent the months of August and September in Ukuzwana. The jacaranda tree was already six meters high, one for each year of Nour. NoLwasi had taken care of it with water and Ndebele songs.

Nour played all day with her soul brothers. She went back to distant kraals with them, without traffic or traffic lights, without the fears of the violence of supposed progress, without anonymous glances and faces without the glow of illusion.

Jonay resumed consultations in Ndebele. Hundreds of patients came to see ulibona again, although everyone told them that his brother "ulilapa" took care of them with the same affection. The three of them operated in the afternoons with Buhleve. Jonay and Thanda marveled at Buhleve's skill and her humble and serene commitment. Both knew that for love, their lives were moving away from that place where effort went to those in need, and there were neither salaries nor schedules to pour the love from their souls. And they watched with fascination as Buhleve embodied, as an AIDS orphan and a victim of terror networks, the courage to rise, the generosity to give, the greatness to trust, despite everything, in humanity.

One night, after finishing the day, Jonay and Thanda sat on the porch of the small hermitage-home where their families had lived.

* And tell me, Thanda, do you regret coming to Ukuzwana? I see it has been tough for the family.
* Not at all, Jonay. This place, as I could already glimpse through your ideas and how you live them, has awakened in my soul areas that were dormant in the urban and competitive world. I feel a passion for my profession that I never felt before. *I see meaning in my life*, Jonay.
* I'm glad, my friend. Twenty years have passed since we studied with passion in La Laguna. How wise and generous life that has brought us together in this remote corner that shines with so much light.
* Tell me, Jonay, how have you been integrating into New York? How does your passion for helping and alleviating suffering flow now?
* It's not easy, Thanda. I follow Patxi's advice to seek empathy in every corner. I often think that behind the expressionless faces and the lost looks in the cities, there is a cry for love. I started working in the emergency room at Bellevue Hospital, but within a few weeks, the hospital management said I couldn't work as a volunteer; they needed a contract, insurance, registration. They asked for certified medical board certificates, references from supervisors, and do you know what else? A "good conduct" certificate from the Medical Board of Tenerife, now chaired by Dr. Delgado. When I have those certificates and those from the Ministry of Health in Zimbabwe, I'll have to take some exams, then pay a medical liability insurance that is at least a thousand dollars a month. I feel outside the system and have no desire to be a part of it, Thanda. I will try to come back here, "ekhaya," home, at least every two years. Without being a doctor like here, devoted to others without reservation, I don't know who I am.
* I understand you, Jonay. I fear returning to that spiral in Madrid. Besides, there's an icy vertigo inside my body. I don't know what Cristina I will find when I return to Madrid. I fear for my family, Jonay. It's my deepest dream, more important even than becoming a doctor. I want to give our daughters a home filled with love, Jonay. How can I do that without giving up who I am?
* Yes. That is the question. I left knowing that I was giving up my place as a doctor, the place where I felt most loved, most appreciated. I did it because I felt that Aimsa needs to lead with her strength and intelligence a change in the world, the path to a New Humanity through the networks of spiritual eco-villages, by brave souls from around the world who refuse to be slaves to destructive production and alienated consumption.

Aimsa continued her relentless fight against what she called the "WGC" (world greed casino) and its "PCA" (perversion complex analysis), in constant dialogue with Haka and Nadine. In Seattle, she advocated for the protection of life and the right to health as exceptions to the imposition of abusive patent monopolies, against which she had been fighting for twenty years. Médecins Sans Frontières invited her, with funds from the Nobel Prize, to join their "Access to Medicines" campaign to speak at the world AIDS congress in Durban. There, through Nadine, a friend of Gail, her adoptive mother, she met Nkosi Johnson, the 12-year-old boy with AIDS who spoke to the more than sixty thousand participants in the conference and said:

* Take care of us and accept us. We are all human beings. We are normal. We have hands. We have feet. We can walk, we can talk, we have needs like everyone else - don't be afraid of us - we are all equal!"

The entire auditorium, including Mandela, rose to applaud the little Nkosi ("king"). Those words and Aimsa's statement on behalf of Médecins Sans Frontières allied with the network of eco-villages influenced the United States, led by Vice President Al Gore, to pressure South Africa not to allow the so-called "unfair" competition of cheap generics that saved the lives of the poor, compared to their pharmaceutical companies, many of which funded his election campaign, which he later lost to Bush and Cheney (who also funded them).

The following year, and in part due to her dialogues with Kofi Annan and Mike More, the flexibilization of patent monopolies when people's lives were at risk was adopted in Doha. Although initially, it only mentioned AIDS, Aimsa pressed for it to also include all diseases, acute and chronic, for which millions of people were dying amid the obscene profits of those companies.

For all that struggle, Médecins Sans Frontières invited her again to the 2002 world AIDS congress, this time in Barcelona. She stayed at Anna's house and went from the El Carmelo neighborhood to the congress palace on her red Vespa. Ten years ago, they had canceled her invitation to speak at a debate in Barcelona after her challenge to the British royalty in London. But in those ten years, social movements had already cornered the hypocrisy of power.

Her friend Zachie, very weak but now in treatment thanks to the victory of the TAC (Treatment Access Campaign) over the pharmaceutical multinationals, the so-called big pharma, and the United States, spoke via video conference. Aimsa planned what to say at the round table she shared with the former President Clinton and his brand-new Foundation, supposedly leading the fight against AIDS. Before that, she talked to a fellow fighter in Seattle, John, who gave her an idea to corner Clinton and Gates in their defense of the "genocidal business":

Mr. Clinton, how can we believe in the intentions of your Foundation when a few months ago you were pressuring the government of South Africa and many more to maintain the privileges of the monopoly of pharmaceutical companies that have already generated twenty billion in profits and twenty million deaths? Why, despite the agreement to protect the right to health against those monopolies, agreed upon at the World Trade Organization half a year ago in Doha, does your country, as your government did when you were president, continue to blackmail and pressure any government that wants to avail itself of such a right, which it is, Mr. Clinton, to life? Your country helped Europe end Nazi imperialism thanks to a patent pool so that many manufacturers could increase the fleet of planes. This is a new war, Mr. Clinton. It is time to put knowledge in favor of life and not of the obscene profits of a few.

Again, evasive answers, defense of freedom and innovation, and progress of humanity. Big lies.

On the same panel was Gates with his also recent and brand-new Foundation, with an endowment of half of his fortune in funds invested in oil and drug businesses, and from whose interests he did charity projects and was already beginning to dominate "global health policies." Gates recalled Aimsa's challenge six years earlier, looked at her severely, and whispered something to an assistant behind him. After leaving the room, Gates and Clinton's team approached representatives from the Gilead laboratory, formerly led by the current Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, representatives from the powerful IPFMA to which the most powerful pharmaceutical corporations belonged, others from the World Bank, and a certain Dr. Fronz from the European Commission. They also called John, Ellen, Judit, Thiru, and other representatives of civil society. A "patent pool" was proposed at that meeting.

Aimsa knew of American pride and therefore alluded to their fight during World War II and how the United States had already created a patent pool to access aeronautical patents, increase its air fleet, bomb Berlin, and defeat Nazi Germany. Through the same mechanism, pharmaceutical companies would license production and distribution only to certain poor countries and under payment of royalties. It was a concession to their de facto monopoly that was imposed on countries that submitted to Wall Street, but it could save millions of lives. Meanwhile, she would continue working to end those blood monopolies.

Thereafter, she traveled to Johannesburg. Nkosi had just passed away a month earlier, and Aimsa went with Nadine and Gail to meditate and feel her soul in front of his grave at Westpark Cemetery. She felt Nkosi embraced by Anwele. AIDS continued to advance worldwide, and only a few islands of hope in Africa, like the Ukuzwana mission, offered treatments that could prevent the million deaths each year caused, as Aimsa insisted, by the greed of a few.

Now she had attended the Earth Summit. Thirty years earlier, the first Earth Summit held in Stockholm urgently called for the care of nature. It coincided that the following year, the "oil crisis" occurred due to the embargo on oil sales by Arab countries to Western countries, due to their support for Israel in its Zionist invasion of Palestine and areas of Syria and Lebanon. Except for a slight decrease in oil burning during the following year, fuel consumption had continued to grow worldwide. Twenty years later, the second Earth Summit took place in Rio de Janeiro, with the presence of almost every country in the world. At least there, agreements were made on biological diversity and climate change. From this arose the Kyoto Conference, which Aimsa had already attended representing the network of spiritual eco-villages five years ago.

She felt a deep disappointment in the political and economic interests disguised as rhetoric and hypocrisy. Now, she formally represented the "network of spiritual eco-villages" as an organization recognized by the United Nations and had the right to speak after the turn of almost two hundred countries and their endless speeches about how much each one was doing. The world that Aimsa had seen flying over Greenland in accelerated thaw, where she compared the human species, sickening it like the AIDS virus, to humans destroying themselves through greed, continued to be destroyed by human avarice.

Aimsa was about to speak at the Sandton Convention Center. Ten years earlier, all heads of government who spoke in Rio de Janeiro warned of the climate disaster. In the following ten years, deforestation and carbon emissions continued to increase worldwide, along with subsidies to the oil and automobile industries and lifestyles that, as Fidel Castro said from a Cuba amid the "Special Period" after the collapse of the Soviet Union, worshipped "alienating consumption." Five years earlier, the Kyoto conference, where Aimsa raised her voice, established very unambitious goals to reduce emissions and stop the climate disaster, which the evidence was increasingly clear about. Some countries, like the United States, the main polluter, did not even sign, and the rest of the world continued to pollute without restraint and without fulfilling their words.

Aimsa addressed the summit representatives with these words:

I only have three minutes to convey our feelings, in the name of the more than five thousand communities and two million people that make up the network of spiritual eco-villages. Tens of thousands of politicians, hundreds of thousands of words, and millions of dollars have been spent at the Earth Summits over the last 40 years. All of you, summit after summit, talk about your countries' efforts. And nothing has changed. Nothing. Humanity continues its frantic race of destroying nature, deforesting, destroying other forms of life, poisoning the seas, and suffocating the air. Each of us has emitted more than a ton of carbon to come to this meeting. From our network, we understand that only a profound transformation of the way of life that denounces the absurd economic growth of the Gross Domestic Product, which measures purchases and sales, mostly among speculative intermediaries, can make a difference. A humanity that stops emitting carbon by burning fossils that our Mother Earth has sedimented for billions of years in just a few decades. Let's all abandon the obsession with global trade that fuels this cruel burning of life and produce and consume, as we do in our eco-villages, what the Earth gives us for food, shelter, and warmth. Let's have the courage to ban with all bravery and determination the cancer of financial speculation, that great world casino where every day a bet is made between the greed of a few rich and the death of the many poor, with the latter always losing. I come from meditating on Nkosi Johnson, who died two months ago at thirteen in this city and who, two years earlier, alerted the world to how the greed of a few was ending the lives of millions, like him, infected with AIDS and without access to treatment. He died in front of a deaf world that has continued to offer eloquent speeches while the criminal pharmaceutical companies continue to enrich themselves. Today, the planet is dying, and with it, she, our Pachamama, Mother Earth, the future of our children. Speeches, not even mine now, change nothing. Let's return to life in community and in nature, leave the cities, black holes of life destruction, stop consuming what comes from afar, and we don't even know what was destroyed to come to our plates or our closets. Let's stop being puppets of the financial system that plays with our salaries, purchases, and savings, to continue this terrible destruction. We still have time, brothers, 'abantu wami,' as my fellow countryman Mahatma Gandhi said, 'let's be the change we want to see in the world.' Amandla!"

She finished with tears. There were many applauses and also many skeptical looks in fashion suits, fueled by the agro-industry and concerned about their actions on Wall Street.

Upon leaving the room, Mans Nilson, a Swede from the Stockholm Resilience Institute, approached her and spoke to her about "planetary boundaries," inviting her to a meeting about a global movement of awareness of ethical thresholds.

* Mans, I appreciate your kindness, but not even for such noble causes should we continue to pollute with our travels and abandon what really matters: our gardens and orchards, our communities, and, above all, our families.

She felt a deep desire to reach Ukuzwana and embrace Jonay and Nour, and that wonderful family that did not live by speeches and words but by real love and dedication to those who needed it most.

# The deepest rip of the heart. Madrid, Xmas 2002

Thanda had been delaying his return to Madrid since February when Cristina decided to leave Ukuzwana and go back to Madrid with her daughters, Ángeles and Daniela.

They requested a replacement from the health ministry, but no doctor in the country wanted to go to such a remote and isolated place. The Trastébere congregation near Rome sought volunteer doctors but couldn't find anyone willing to take on the responsibility of being alone and far from other reference centers.

Jonay had to return to New York in September with Aimsa. They had a beautiful reunion in Ukuzwana where Aimsa recognized how the world of words was abducting her from the most sacred part of her life, her family. They returned very close, although once again, leaving part of their hearts and tears of emotion when saying goodbye. Tears that seemed to give magical life to Nour's jacaranda tree, which continued to grow there, as if wanting to witness the return of the princess of Ukuzwana, just as Unai did from the kopjes.

In their farewell and facing uncertain futures, Thanda and Jonay promised to return in two years to repeat the beautiful health diagnosis of the community they had published as "the Anwele method."

But the best possible replacement arrived: Buhleve convinced her hospital bosses in Johannesburg and was able to finish her residency a month earlier, arriving in Ukuzwana at the end of November to fulfill her dream of being the doctor where she felt her life mission.

They shared only a couple of weeks, and Thanda began his return to Madrid, just two years after arriving in that magical place with a dry landscape and a population tormented by malnutrition and diseases. However, it was a place where he had regained the sense of being a doctor and a commitment to those who suffer.

Patxi took him to the Bulawayo airport. Thanda could barely speak due to a lump in his throat. He was eager to see his daughters but feared the re-encounter Cristina. His love letters received very cold responses, with little interest in the mission. Cristina was busy as a microbiologist at Gregorio Marañón Hospital, furnishing a rented apartment in front of Retiro Park, enrolling her daughters in the school of Santa María del Pilar, preparing for the Epiphany Day purchases, finding prawns for the family dinner, watching TV series, and renting a beach apartment for the summer. Thanda did not want to return to that life so embedded in undeniable consumption, a constant race to maintain or increase social status, medical conferences, traffic, expensive dinners, empty conversations... As he thought about it during the journey, he felt guilty because to him, those endeavors seemed empty, but they were filled with her enthusiasm, tenderness, spaces of generosity, and care for the close ones. Wasn't the smile of her daughters worth a lifetime of sacrifice and renunciation?

* What are you thinking, Thanda?
* About what I'm leaving behind, Aita. About what awaits me...
* Hey

Patxi's Basque bravado came out.

* You're not going to war or prison. Three beautiful princesses, your parents, your profession are waiting for you, and here you leave, Ulilapha, thousands of friends waiting for you. Think, Thanda, that sometimes, in wanting everything our way, we become arrogant and selfish. *The one who gives is the one who gains*, and the one who yields finds peace.
* You're right, Patxi. I know it won't be easy for me to compare frivolous spending with the needs here, the ladder of competition and possession with the generosity of sharing. But you're right; I have three beautiful reasons to be tolerant and to continue being myself, with the ideas that I have resurrected from the depths of my soul in these two years.

Haka, Joseph, and Nothando joined them in Bulawayo. Thandiwe had already started medical school in Johannesburg in September, taking over from Buhleve, who introduced her to life in Egoli. Theybid fare thy well, and Thanda continued his way to Harare and then to Madrid via London.

Upon arriving at Barajas airport, Thanda could see Cristina with Ángeles, now eleven years old, and Daniela, five years old. While his daughters were brimming with joy and welcoming him with Ndebele signs saying, "Amhlope Baba Thanda!", Cristina looked at him with a certain tenderness tinted with a distant coldness. When he went to kiss her on the lips... she turned her cheek.

On the way home, the girls kept asking about Adam and Unai, also about Nothando, Thandiwe, and Joseph, about that lovely family and their schoolmates. Thanda enthusiastically recounted how those months had been and how he counted the days to see them again. They then talked about their new house, the school, the dresses they had bought for Christmas celebrations, and even about a little dog, Ricky, that their maternal grandparents had given them upon their return, heartbroken, from Zimbabwe.

They arrived at a building on Ibiza Street, and Cristina parked the black Ford Escort, which they had bought with family savings, in an underground garage. They went up to the fifth floor, the apartment Cristina had rented upon her return. Thanda entered and sensed a warm atmosphere, low lights, soft-colored upholstery, the television in front of the sofa, not far from the dining table. Like most homes in Spain, he thought. The white marble kitchen was sparkling. They proceeded towards the bedrooms. The girls quickly took him to their room, filled with dolls on the bunk bed, a bookshelf with schoolbooks and stories, a large stuffed lion, posters of trendy singers, and two study tables, each with an iPad they proudly showed him. He barely saw a photo of them with Adam and Unai in a frame on the bookshelf and two drawings they sent them for their birthdays from the mission.

Thanda took out from his backpack, having learned to live with very little, a diary from the year he spent away from them on the mission, with stories, adventures, memories, and drawings. While the girls stared at it, Cristina showed him the bedroom with a double bed and white knitted blankets. He didn't see any photos of the two of them. He left his backpack in a discreet corner, but something told him that wasn't his place. Later, Cristina showed him with more enthusiasm the "guest room," where there was a photo of him in Ukuzwana.

The four of them had a tasty potato omelet and ham croquettes for dinner, with bread and soda. It was Thursday, and they first watched the news and then the series "Cuéntame." Thanda kept telling them stories, but the three seemed more attentive to the television. After clearing the table and cleaning the dishes, Thanda wanted to show them on a CD on Cristina's laptop the photos and videos of the mission he had been collecting for such an anticipated moment. Ten minutes later, he noticed they were falling asleep. When none of them was awake anymore, a video of a beautiful sunset from a humble kraal started playing. As the sun set, he felt a shiver, as if a phase of his life had ended, entering a mysterious night.

He took his daughters to their beds and tucked them in, giving them a goodnight kiss. He returned to the living room, and Cristina had awakened and was heading towards the bedroom. He saw her coming down the hallway and felt drawn to a beautiful woman, now, like him, in her forties, slender, almost haughty in her walk, with lovely honey-colored eyes that seemed to pierce through him... almost as if ignoring his presence. As he went to meet her in the bedroom, she took out of the room his backpack and said:

* Juan, we'll talk later; I need time.

Thanda joked with his daughters when taking them to school, telling them that he slept in the guest room because he snored too much and didn't let mommy rest. Sometimes, when he heard them go to the bathroom at night, he mimicked some snoring. They pretended to be normal, but something was deeply damaged in their union.

Thanda met with his parents at their family home on the outskirts of Madrid, secured a shift contract in the emergency department of Gregorio Marañón Hospital, where Cristina was already an adjunct microbiology doctor managing a complex laboratory with over a hundred types of tests, serologies, cultures, and “PCRs”. The girls attended the nearby Pilar school, strolling along the beautiful Retiro Park. They had everything: salaries, status, a "well-located" apartment, two healthy and studious girls in a "private school," and even stories from Africa to tell their friends and colleagues. They watched the news every night, the series "Cuéntame" on Thursdays, invited hospital friends over on Saturdays to play cards and have pizza while watching a movie. On Sundays, they went to the Church of the Blessed Sacrament, bought pastries at "Mallorca," had a family lunch, and in the afternoon visited their in-laws in an apartment in the Salamanca neighborhood, where he watched football, she gossiped with her mother about her school friends, and the girls entertained themselves with their iPad games. All of this was sprinkled with birthdays of schoolmates and cousins and occasional trips to the zoo and amusement park. In the eyes of society, they had everything to be happy.

After attending the Midnight Mass at the local parish of the Sacred Heart, they spent Christmas Eve at his in-laws' house. He excused himself for not eating prawns or lamb since he had adapted, out of necessity and principles, to a vegetarian diet during his time in Ukuzwana. He brought pumpkin soup and a spinach pie in case anyone wanted to try, but it had little success. After the sumptuous dinner, they watched the King's speech on television. He chose not to express his anti’monarchic sentiments and disagreement with hereditary hierarchies, which he viewed as unjust and out-dated, as it would have provoked the wrath of his in-laws and siblings-in-law, who were royalists, Catholics, and Real Madrid supporters. They moved on to the gifts, and there was a catharsis of at least thirty gift packages among the seven grandchildren and their parents and grandparents. Thanda noticed that almost all of them were toys likely manufactured in China, possibly involving child labour, and causing environmental harm. When they returned home, well into the night, Cristina and the girls went to bed. Thanda wanted to clean up all the gift wrappings that same night and take them down to the overflowing trash room, filled with boxes and plastic bags from the consumption frenzy.

He had concealed a lump in his throat all night, smiling at his daughters' excitement with each gift, thanking his in-laws for dinner, and watching the King's speech. He felt breathless. He went up to the house, and in "his" guest room, he wrote a note to Cristina:

* Cristina, I need to take a walk in Retiro. Don't worry if I come back late. Good night.

As he walked down Ibiza Street towards El Retiro, he felt a deep, suppressed cry emerging from his soul, choked since he had returned a month ago to Madrid. He couldn't stop thinking about how they would be celebrating Christmas in Ukuzwana. They would have had a community gathering in what they now called the harmony forum, walked under the stars and the Southern Cross, Unai would have climbed a kopje to see if Nour returned, shared a simple meal of sadza or sorghum with vegetables from the garden, exchanged handmade gifts, wished the patients goodnight in the wards with Adam's tender hugs, and thanked life for having a place to live simply and give to those who needed it most.

As he walked towards the park, he noticed a man searching for food remnants in some containers. He realized it was a patient he had treated the previous week in the emergency room for bronchopneumonia. He remembered his name:

* Pascual, do you remember me?
* Doctor! Of course, I remember you. You treated me with kindness, something very uncommon in my "condition."
* And how are you? Did your cough get better?
* Bit by bit, doctor. With these cold temperatures and being homeless, it's not easy.

Thanda's heart broke upon hearing that he slept on the street. He felt the urge to take him to his home, give him his bed, offer him a hot shower and a family dinner, something Pascual might not have had in a long time.

* Where do you sleep, Pascual?

In that ATM office across the street, sharing with two other homeless people. That is when we are not kicked out by the young people getting money for their nightly revelries.

Thanda looked at Pascual. He was about sixty years old, tall and strong but with a stooped and evasive attitude. His hair was gray, greasy, and with a yellowish tint. His skin was cracked with deep wrinkles that spoke more of anguish than joy. He had a swollen and bruised eye, an unevenly trimmed beard, and an expression that inspired Thanda with sadness, resignation, and fear. Thanda noticed a bar still open, well past midnight, and invited Pascual to have something together.

After sharing a beer and a potatoe omelet skewer with olives, they took a walk through El Retiro Park, lonely at that late hour on such a special day. Pascual began telling his story to Thanda. He was born in a farmhouse in the town of Villafranca de Ordizia in the Basque Country. He helped with the farm work and studied carpentry to later work in the village furniture factory. He met Pilar, a young woman from San Sebastián who spent time in a family mansion. Pilar was attracted to Pascual's strength and nobility in his pelota games at the *fronton*, and Pascual was captivated by Pilar's beauty and elegance. They married, not without tension with Pilar's noble parents. They lived in Pascual's family farmhouse, and their three children were born there in the first five years. Pilar spent increasing amounts of time with their children in San Sebastián in an apartment her parents bought for her, in the luxurious "Concha" bay of San Sebastián. Pascual worked in the factory and became known in the village for his kindness and generosity, leading to his appointment as the "justice of peace." He sent all the money for Pilar's expenses in San Sebastián, which were always more than his humble salary could satisfy.

In the mid-eighties, ETA threatened the factory owner and ended up kidnapping one of their sons. In a union meeting, Pascual condemned armed struggle, extortion, and kidnappings. Shortly after, he received a letter telling him to stop speaking against the freedom of the Basque people or he´d face consequences. The letter mentioned the address where Pilar and the children lived, bu then almost all the time. At first, he didn't give it much importance. He even spoke with a former ETA member, Yoyes, who had sought reintegration. Pascual and Yoyes had known each other since childhood at school. Pascual liked her and would go with any excuse to the market's delicatessen where Yoyes helped her grandfather. Sometimes, he walked with her to her farmhouse in Goitine. They grew apart when he saw that as a teenager, Yoyes approached the ETA in their fight against the Franco dictatorship. At just sixteen, she disappeared from the town. She was connected to attempted terrorist acts, and in one of them, her boyfriend José died while handling a sticky bomb.

When Franco died, Yoyes opposed armed struggle and advocated for political dialogue, which ETA did not accept. She left the group, went to Mexico, remarried, and had a child whom she would bring to the town. The armed group considered her a traitor and made several threatening graffiti in the town and on her farmhouse that said, "Yoyes txibata," (Yoyes traitor). Yoyes spoke with Pascual as the justice of peace. Pascual told Pilar about it, and she, who almost no longer lived in Ordizia, decided to move permanently with the children to San Sebastián for safety. Pascual spoke on the radio and in newspapers in defense of Yoyes and against violence. A few days later, during the local festivities, Euskal Jaia, ETA assassinated Yoyes in front of Akaitz, her three-year-old son.

At the funeral, Pascual said that her murderers had lost all reason. Pascual received threats. The factory owner, whom he had defended, advised him to leave the Basque Country for a while and provided him with an early retirement. With that money, he rented an apartment on the outskirts of Madrid in Villalba, where he moved with Pilar and the children. The passion in the marriage had faded, and Pilar lived that exile with anger, accusing Pascual of ruining her life and that of their children. She spent all the family savings at the Torrelodones casino and left with the owner of a used car sales business to a villa in Molino de la Hoz. The teenage children returned to the Basque Country with their maternal uncles. Pascual fell into depression. At fifty, with Spain in economic crisis, he couldn't find work. His family had turned their backs on him.

Thanda shared with him about his comfortable life, his studies in the Canary Islands, his work in Madrid hospitals, and how he had just returned from the most beautiful stage of his existence, living, and sharing in a remote mission in a southern African country. He also confided in Pascual that he felt that this way of life had illuminated a path of happiness for him, different from the one his children's mother was following. Following his path would mean breaking up his family; following his wife's path would mean breaking his soul. That night of Christmas consumption, so far from the spirit of Jesus' life, had revealed to him more clearly that he could no longer continue pretending.

Dawn was breaking after a night of confidences and growing trust between them. They had hot chocolate and churros at a cafe that remained open in the Atocha roundabout.

* Thanda, your wife and your daughters will be worried about you.
* Don't worry, Pascual. I left her a note, and I'm sure she'll understand. Besides, I need to talk to her about our paths. And you have no idea how good it did me to spend the night sharing with you, Pascual.

He looked into Pascual's emotional eyes and continued,

* I want to insist to my wife that you stay at our house this Christmas. We'll find a mattress, and you can sleep in the room where I'm staying.
* No way, Thanda. You're in a fragile condition, and you should talk to your wife in the intimacy of the family and home.

At that moment, Thanda remembered how Fernando, the Cuban doctor from La Gomera and Jonay's teacher, with whom he maintained pleasant correspondence, had talked to him about the San Juan de Dios shelters. Before his return to Madrid, Fernando had sent him a contact, which he had kept in a note in his wallet: Father Joaquín, Missions Office, San Rafael Shelter, Madrid.

* Pascual, I feel bad going back to my house with its comforts and family warmth, while you stay on the street. Allow me to at least give you what my in-laws spent on unnecessary toys for my daughters. Let me help you, Pascual.
* Thanda, you've treated me with dignity, you've listened to me, you've shared your feelings. This friendship that can be born today is worth more to me than all the money in the world.

They hugged, and Pascual jokingly told Thanda:

* Now you know where my 'offices' are.

It was already seven in the morning. Thanda bought more hot “churros” and returned home, wondering if it really was "his" home. Upon entering, he noticed that everyone was still asleep. It seemed that no one had noticed his absence. His note to Cristina was still on the dining table. He called Father Joaquín.

* Good morning. And Merry Christmas. Can I speak to Father Joaquín?
* Yes, it's me. Who's calling?
* I'm Thanda. I'm a doctor. I just returned from working on a mission in Zimbabwe. A friend who worked on the mission they have in Sierra Leone gave me your number. I'd like to talk to you whenever you have a moment, please.
* Delighted, Thanda. This afternoon, we can have a coffee here at the shelter if you want.

When Cristina and the daughters woke up, he had prepared hot chocolate for them and offered breakfast with churros. He convinced them to take a walk in Retiro Park and, after lunch, go see the Nativity scene at San Rafael Hospital, where the shelter was annexed. During the walk in Retiro Park, while Ángeles and Daniela rode their bikes, Daniela still with training wheels, Thanda told Cristina about his encounter and conversation with Pascual. Cristina paid little attention, focusing on ensuring the girls didn't fall. Hardly reacting to the emotion with which Thanda recounted that magical encounter, significant for him, she told him they had to start thinking about the gifts for Epiphany Day.

Upon reaching San Rafael Hospital on Concha Espina Street, Cristina and the girls went to see the Nativity scene, famous throughout Madrid for covering about a hundred square meters and having more than five hundred figures representing the time of Jesus' birth. As they had agreed, Thanda would talk to Father Joaquín and join them later.

He entered the shelter, noticing a guard booth and a dog's kennel. He went to the reception and asked for the Father. After five minutes, a man about seventy years old, with white hair, thin brown shell glasses like those his father wore, a look between serene and joyful, and a well-shaved beard, arrived. He wore a white robe that revealed a priest's collar. He greeted him and led him down a basement corridor to a door that read: "San Juan de Dios Missions Office." Upon entering, he saw a waiting room with a National Geographic world map on a bulletin board, with pins in about twenty countries where that office supported missions worldwide.

* Well, Thanda, tell me how I can help you.
* Thank you, Father Joaquín. The first thing I wanted to ask is if I can be of assistance, as a volunteer doctor in the shelter or in your work supporting missions in the distance.
* Of course, Thanda. We always need more hands here. We have a small first aid kit for the shelter residents, and it's been a while since anyone organized it. You could then offer consultations to the residents. Also, from the mission’s office, we send containers with medicines to Africa that could use proper sorting.
* Count me in.

He remembered that his daughters attended music and dance extracurricular activities three afternoons a week.

* Would it be alright if I come three afternoons a week, two for consultations and one to organize medicines?
* Very well. Very kind of you, Thanda.
* I also have a question, more like advice or a favor to ask. Yesterday, I met a homeless person. His name is Pascual. He's a kind-hearted person whom life has turned its back on. He sleeps in an ATM booth and wanders the streets. I think he'd appreciate meeting you.
* Yes, Thanda, every person on the street has an epic story. If you want, come with Pascual next time you come, and I'll talk to him to see how we can help.

He reunited with Cristina and the girls and went home, crossing the Castellana with its beautiful Christmas lights. Thanda saw his daughters happy. Daniela played with a doll, and Ángeles listened to music on her Sony Walkman. Thanda began to feel that he could find a way to continue his commitment to the needy in this consumerist jungle. He looked to his side and saw Cristina gazing into the horizon. She was a beautiful, intelligent woman, and together they could be happy and provide a home filled with love and excitement for their daughters, as well as instill values of justice and solidarity they had experienced in Ukuzwana. He had read in a book that Patxi left him before returning that *the greatest source of happiness is the responsibility to help others*. Patxi half-jokingly said, "which turns generosity into an act of selfishness." He needed to ignite in Cristina the passion that had taken them excitedly to Ukuzwana two years ago. He was sure she was sinking into the whirlwind of competition and consumption. He had to talk to her.

That night, when the girls were already asleep, Thanda spoke to Cristina:

* Cristina, I've been back for a month now. I don't want us to keep living, just sharing a roof. I love you, and I want us to be partners in everything again. For the girls, and for us.
* Something in me has broken, Juan.

She still called him Juan, symbolizing a lack of understanding of the depths of his soul.

* A year ago, I had to follow my path and protect our daughters from a world of risks, where we were keeping them away from opportunities in our society.
* But you agreed to go on the mission. I don't understand what made you change.
* Juan, I was nobody in Ukuzwana. I spent my days in front of a broken microscope, in a laboratory without reagents or stains. While you shone in consultations, in the wards, in the operating room, on walks... *Thandabantu, ulilapha* they said... and who was I? Thandabantu's wife. Or Ángeles and Daniela's mother, "*Naka-okasana isikiwa*" (the mother of the white girls). I endured for a year; it wasn't the integration I had hoped for, I'm sorry. Also, our daughters were at risk of getting infected every day by AIDS and other diseases, barely progressing in their Spanish grammar, lagging in math, losing touch with society, values, and the culture to which they belong. I told you, with words and with silences. But you were too enthralled in your world.
* I know, and I'm sorry, love. (It had been a long time since they exchanged affectionate words.) The work in Ukuzwana awakened my deepest values, my deepest generosity; it brought out the best in me. And I forgot about you and your feelings. I thought you would feel the same, in your way, the profound happiness of giving to those in need.
* You say it as if I were insensitive or selfish. Remember that while you were treating patients all day, I took care of the house, the chores, in Ndebele! I handled the school, kept everything clean and safe for our daughters, and gave them additional Spanish lessons so they wouldn't fall behind. But you came home and only talked about your work, your patients, about this or that kraal, and about NoLwasi and her healing magic. I felt dispensable, secondary. And the enthusiasm in me slowly died.
* I'm sorry, dear, I realize now that my enthusiasm made me selfish.

At that moment, he thought about Patxi's reflection: *Is generosity selfish?*

* I know, Juan. There was no malice in you then, and there isn't now. But you hurt me. I moved on with my life, found a job, rented this house, furnished it, found the girls' school, helped them integrate upon their return, appreciate their world of friends, learning, traditions, and landscapes. Yes, consumeristic, urban, routine, but theirs. Where their world awaits, secure, to draw their dreams and be happy.

Thanda thought to himself that security was not synonymous with happiness and that what is not right, like blind consumption in the face of others' suffering, was not ethical. But he had no right to question the world that Cristina had carved out with effort and the desire to give their daughters security and a "future" while he stayed on the mission.

* And do you think we can restart our bond by combining your desires and mine? At the San Rafael shelter, I can start a clinic for the homeless. I believe Pascual can help me.
* I'm sorry, Juan. I've met someone who has been by my side.

Thanda felt the deepest rip in his soul.

# Lies and greed rule the world. New York, March 2003.

Jonay and Aimsa listened with clenched fists and eyes moist with anger as the radio narrated the United States' bombing of Iraq. Since the Al-Qaeda attack on the Twin Towers a year and a half ago, the United States government had sought revenge. Like all war drums, theirs stemmed from fear. Fear of not being in control of the world, fear of not dominating a global market at their feet, fear of not flooding their system with oil. Fear blinded all logical reasoning, all empathy, and all sensitivity to others' suffering. It pathetically disguised itself as supposed values of freedom and justice.

A month earlier, Aimsa had attended a session of the Security Council where Secretary of State Colin Powell argued the need to invade Iraq and overthrow its president, Saddam Hussein, citing the presence of biological and chemical weapons of mass destruction and nuclear ambitions. There was no evidence of such weapons in Iraq, unlike many other countries, including the ally and accomplice in everything, Israel. The real reason was a vendetta for the war that Bush senior could not finish ten years earlier, and for the greed to control the oil routes in the Arabian Gulf, half of the world's oil, the powerhouse of the capitalist system. Aimsa noticed that Powell was lying, knew he was deceitful, and was ashamed of doing so. She had managed to get close to Lawrence, his chief of staff, who had confessed that the true architects of U.S. foreign policy were Vice President Cheney and Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, who had reappeared since the 1970s in every Republican government and plotted the most sinister strategies of Washington.

Eighteen months earlier, while Jonay, Aimsa, and Nour were having breakfast in their Brooklyn home, they felt the thunder that shook the glasses on their kitchen table. Jonay asked Aimsa to stay with Nour at home, grabbed his medical emergency backpack, and went out to the street. All transportation was interrupted. He could see that a tower of the World Trade Center, about 4 kilometers from his house, was on fire. Hundreds of sirens were blaring simultaneously. He ran to the Williamsburg Bridge and crossed it against the direction of thousands of people fleeing in the opposite direction. Once in Manhattan, he took Forsyth, where he liked to go jogging through its wide park avenue. He turned onto Canal Street and continued to Sixth Avenue, where he could now see the building up close, collapsing, and a column of black smoke suffocating the air. At that moment, he saw several people falling from the high, burning floors. Firefighter trucks circulated with their sirens on Sixth Avenue. He kept moving forward with a water-soaked cloth covering his mouth and nose. Some onlookers stared in shock, others ran terrified, and Jonay came across some injured people lying on the street.

When he was about to attend to an Asian man with injuries to his face and hands, he heard the whistle of a low-flying plane. The second suicide plane hit the south tower. The few curious onlookers about three hundred meters away watching the disaster ran in terror. Jonay was examining the patient, who was semi-conscious and identified himself as Yang. He checked that there were no serious brain injuries, cleaned his wounds, approximated the edges of a large gap, sutured them, and did the same with wounds on the arms and one on the chest, after confirming he was breathing well. As he was attending to him in the middle of the street, a firefighter asked him to clear the way for ambulances and firefighters. He left Yang on a sidewalk bench.

* My name is Jonay. I am a doctor. Tell me how I can be helpful.

The firefighter seemed somewhat confused. The assistance to the wounded on the street was left to the paramedics, and almost no one dared to help for fear of later being accused of improper treatments.

* Thank you, Jonay. My name is Peter, come with us.

He got on the fire truck, and they advanced on Sixth Avenue until crossing Liberty Street and entering the "Ground Zero." The fire, smoke, and human drama made it almost impossible to maintain sight, breath, and calm. There were several ambulances with paramedics. He introduced himself and assisted patients in an improvised hospital where firefighters brought the most critical injuries. Over the next eight hours, he treated about a hundred patients with incised and contused wounds that he cleaned and sutured, fractures that he immobilized, several pneumothoraxes that he decompressed, and even a subdural hematoma that he drained.

In most cases, he inserted intravenous lines and saline drips to maintain circulation, and in some, he intubated the airways for ventilation, referring them to emergency services. He couldn't revive about twenty people in cardiac arrest despite chest compressions and ventilation. There were hundreds of disfigured corpses around him. Jonay felt a deep sadness for so much pain. He had never witnessed human violence at this level. At most, some machete wounds in neighborhood disputes in Matabeleland. The violence he had seen was that of injustice, poverty, and greed. More subtle but equally dramatic in stealing human lives, many more, albeit with less intensity than what surrounded him now.

As he bid farewell to the paramedics and firefighters, he felt a brotherly camaraderie with those risking their lives to save others. Jonay developed a profound respect for firefighters, with whom he would always greet, in his own way, with a fist to the temple.

When he returned home, physically, and emotionally exhausted, Aimsa and Nour were anxiously waiting at the kitchen table. He told them what he had witnessed. They had been in meditation for peace and looked sad but serene.

* Daddy, what happened?

Nour asked.

* A plane crashed into a building, sweetheart. Daddy has been helping the sick, like in Ukuzwana.
* Will they get better, Daddy?

Many will, sweetheart. I fear others won't...

Nour, still at her tender seven years of age, was very aware of death. She had often seen it at the mission, in children her age, and in the parents of schoolmates, often due to AIDS. Attending funerals and mourning the departures of children and adults was normal for her.

* Mommy and I have been meditating to bring light to their journey to another life, Daddy.

Nour said, her voice choked, never letting go of her embrace.

* Now go to sleep, sweetheart. We will dream of their souls to give our love to all of them and to all the people suffering in the world, okay?

While Aimsa put Nour to bed, Jonay showered and cleaned off the dust, smoke, blood, and sweat. He tried, without soap being able to, to wash away his pain. Then he went to the room, and they sang "Sunshine" to Nour, as they did every night.

* It has been very tough, Aimsa.

They embraced in the kitchen as water heated for their infusion, this time with rosemary and linden from the garden. Since they returned from Ukuzwana the previous summer, they felt deeply connected again. Aimsa limited her time in rhetorical meetings, knowing they only served the vanity of those delivering speeches without changing the situations of injustice. They began to share daily walks, discussions, and meditations.

Aimsa strongly advocated for the rights of the spiritual eco-village network. She had been inspired by the book "The One-Straw Revolution" by an elderly Japanese sage named Fukuoka. She had also allied herself with an agroecology network called "*La Vía Campesina*." She felt that capitalism, based on the myths of property and money, was the root of great injustices. The most revolutionary act toward a just and respectful world for people and nature, in her opinion, was to not consume or accumulate savings in the clutches of financial speculation. Cultivating, sharing, and consuming food while caring for the land were the cornerstones of the necessary revolution in the world.

Al-Qaeda has claimed responsibility for the attacks, Jonay. This attack is a horrible act of blind violence. The root cause is the oppression of the West on the Middle East for decades, breeding hatred. They directed all their pain in the form of suicidal revenge towards the symbol of the center of global power, the Global Trade Center.

* Right now, I can only think of each of the patients I couldn't save, Aimsa. In their pain and that of their families.
* I understand, Jonay. Nothing justifies violence, nothing.

In the following months, the United States targeted Al-Qaeda-related objectives in Afghanistan, interrogated eight thousand people in the United States, sometimes merely based on their origin, last name, or attire. Aimsa was interrogated for wearing her sari. Over a thousand, mostly Muslims, were detained. The government declared the "war on terror." Vice President Cheney, facing a weak Bush Jr., clearly took control. They passed the Patriot Act in Congress, allowing the government to spy on any citizen. They listed almost two thousand potential terrorist targets, which later increased to over three hundred thousand in the country, including popcorn stands. They repealed their laws and international commitments against torture and exercised it in the most terrible ways following the Kubark manual, the cruelest treatise of imaginable cruelty.

Jonay read 1984 by Orwell and saw parallels with the endless war described there. Thirty-five years before 1984, George Orwell wrote that story, imagining a future of perpetual war and omnipresent government control that pursued any free thought. The protagonists, Winston, and Julia, planned, in the complicity of forbidden love, to rebel against the oppressive system. In the novel, Winston bought a diary from an antique shop in which he wrote critical thoughts about power. Jonay thought of his melaleuca leaf journal, which still awaited him. Orwell's novel was the antithesis of the island described in Utopia four centuries earlier by Thomas More, one of Jonay's favorite books. In Orwell's dystopia, Winston and Julia betray each other and return to submission to the system. "*Only love rescues us from the clutches of power, fear, and violence,*" Jonay thought.

Buds were starting to appear on the cherry trees in front of the house. But the springtime miracle of nature arrived at the beat of war drums from a mad humanity. During the previous year, the U.S. government had been constructing a web of lies to justify the invasion of Iraq, alleging supposed arsenals of weapons of mass destruction. For anyone moderately interested and informed, it was all a big excuse for revenge to supposedly alleviate the pain of the Twin Towers attack, but above all, to control half of the world's oil in the Arabian Gulf. Cheney and Rumsfeld managed to ally themselves in the Senate with Democrat Joe Biden, chairman of the foreign relations committee, who even pushed for such genocide.

They paved the way for Bush Jr., with little knowledge of the world or history beyond Texas, to press the "red button," and his army bombed Baghdad on the night of March 10, 2003.

Aimsa, this government and this system of economic and military power, intimately intertwined in the United States, are increasingly resembling Orwell's dystopia: Cheney manipulating Bush, the "Big Brother," government lies as "doublethink," pacifism as "thoughtcrime" unpatriotic, false political rhetoric as "newspeak," legalized torture and media brainwashing as "room 101," the internet controlled by economic and political power as "telescreen," the denial of history (genocidal, enslaving, imperialistic, and nuclear) as the "memory hole," and the shameless lie of power as "2 + 2 equals five."

Jonay and Aimsa continued to watch the news, overwhelmed with sadness and helplessness, as the bombing carefully avoided showing civilian casualties. Capitalism not only devoured lives through extreme unjust inequalities but also destroyed other forms of life in the name of supposed human supremacy, aligning itself unapologetically with lies and terror. It was no coincidence that Bush lowered taxes for the rich, exacerbated unjust inequalities, and reignited the nuclear arms race.

* Aimsa, tell me: how is it possible that almost no one questions a United Nations hijacked by the veto power of a few powerful nations, the same ones with nuclear weapons, the same ones imposing that others cannot have them, the same ones that have sown and continue to sow terror worldwide?
* Jonay, it's not just the United States. It's not even just capitalism. Since we lost empathy, which we're trying to revive in the eco-villages, societies have been anchored in hierarchies that rely on myths like nations, gods, property, or money to manipulate anyone who questions them with fear.

The fight against injustice united them day by day. Aimsa attended offices and empty-word meetings less and less. They worked together from home, where they mapped out all the connections of power that Aimsa had been studying for almost twenty years, merging them with Haka's graphics.

Aimsa recalled her struggle fifteen years earlier against Wellcome and its greed in limiting the then only treatment, AZT, to the rich who could pay exorbitant prices. The previous year in Barcelona, she had already exposed Clinton and his Foundation's machinations in the service of business interests, which had funded part of his election campaign. Their envoy to protect those benefits, Al Gore, now gave lectures on private jet trips about climate change. Power allied with greed washed its face and left government in the form of philanthropic foundations, aspiring heroes of humanity, and Nobel prizes from the center of a criminal system's power. A perfect representation of Orwell's newspeak acclaimed by the masses.

The fundamental cause of poverty was the excessive accumulation of wealth by a few, a mathematically clear and sharp relationship. How was it that everyone applauded millionaires giving crumbs to the poor while safeguarding their privileges?

The then Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, an ally of the almighty Cheney since the 1970s and now co-responsible for thousands of deaths in Iraq based on a lie disguised as interest, had been a leader at Searle and its cancer-causing sweeteners. Searle later became Pharmacia and was eventually sold to Monsanto. That company, against life and the one Haka dedicated his final battles to, was the major source of toxins for the planet's destructive agriculture. Cheney later became a leader at Gilead, one of the corporations that, for twenty years, held billion-dollar patents against the lives of millions of AIDS deaths in Africa. Through bombs, chemicals, and barriers to treatments, that man and his allies suffocated the lives of millions of people and other forms of life on the planet.

Since the AIDS meeting in Barcelona, where they managed to create the patent pool, medications for AIDS were being distributed at lower prices in poor countries, and patients, like those in Matabeleland, began to escape the fate of twenty million brothers infected by the virus and condemned by greed. Meanwhile, Gilead and other major pharmaceutical corporations maintained their businesses in wealthy countries.

New businesses were needed, much like what happened with AIDS during the patents, even if they had to be invented. In that year, some cases of flu were detected in Vietnam and Hong Kong, related to a virus, H5N1, found in chickens. Gilead reached an agreement with Roche, to whom they had sold the patent for an antiviral extracted from Chinese star anise and of questionable effectiveness, oseltamivir. They named it Tamiflu and began mass production.

The United States fueled global alarm. The first response was the sacrifice of a hundred million chickens in a single day in Hong Kong. Shortly after, Hong Kong's Minister of Health, Margaret Chan, with the support of the United States, was elected Director-General of the World Health Organization. The U.S. government and many European governments purchased hundreds of millions of doses of Tamiflu, which, with only a few dozen deaths in humans, expired in health ministry warehouses while Roche and Gilead shareholders, including Rumsfeld, saw their pockets swell again.

Injustice stemming from greed took the form of bombs or political intrigues to benefit a few who, with blood-soaked hands, amassed their fortunes and spoke of "freedom" and "democracy."

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#  The poisoned seeds of power. Gomera island, November 2003

Almost two years had passed since the Ternura community received the notice of the end of usufruct. They managed only a six-month postponement and then had to leave that beautiful valley, their buildings, and green terraces after twenty years of effort and love for the land in community.

The more reactionary groups opposed to collaboration with institutions accused John of selling their lives with the usufruct agreement and allowing them to destroy that beautiful valley cared for over so many years. About fifty people rested there among the roots of a beautiful sabina forest. They left their sweat and dreams, now shattered.

In the following weeks, a defamatory campaign broke out on local television, radio, and newspapers controlled by those in power. They accused the eco-villages, specifically Ternura, of being alienating cults practicing free love, drug trafficking, and even pedophilia.

They were threatened with revoking residence permits for half of the community members without Spanish passports, withdrawing health cards and access to health services, arresting them for illegal occupation, and closing the rest of the eco-villages on the island.

John reached an agreement with the government delegate for El Cabrito valley to be declared a natural park, preventing the destruction of buildings, terraces, the sabina forest, and the port. It was also agreed that if the lands were ever classified as "urbanizable," the auction would be public, and they could reclaim the land.

John addressed everyone with these words at what seemed like the end of a dream:

Today, those who believe they own Mother Earth expel us for the interests of greed and power. We have opposed with writings, demonstrations, and even songs in front of the Cabildo. Our brothers from the eco-villages in La Gomera have accompanied us. We are already a fifth of all who inhabit this beautiful island. Leaving does not mean bowing our heads, accepting injustice, submitting to sovereign power, or giving up on our principles. We will continue to fight. We will do it on our radio chain, in local newspapers willing to give us space, talking to neighbors, at markets, every step of the way. I am sure that Ternura will overcome, and we will return, without violence, to our valley. This is a tough test not to cling to any property, not even the memories, not even our sweat, not even the security of a place and time. We will carry this valley in our hearts, and it will be our home, our unity, our noblest struggle.

That night, John cried while playing his harmonica by the sea. Returning to the house he shared with Umbela and where Jonay's room was, he felt so much pain that he struck one of the stone walls in contained rage. He felt the pain as a bone in his hand broke beneath a hematoma, leaving a mark on the wall and his knuckles bloodied, but the greater pain was the tearing of his soul for leaving the home and community where they had put so much effort and hope. What he had said to the community was inspired by Aimsa's principle of non-violence, which he had read about in Gandhi's diary from prison. But at that moment, he could understand and almost justify violent resistance.

The nearly five hundred members of the Ternura community were welcomed into the other sixteen spiritual eco-villages scattered throughout the valleys of that beautiful island. Only the eco-village of Valentía, founded by Fernando, had also given up its property, in this case to the Vallehermoso City Council, and reached a usufruct agreement.

The Government Delegate, a puppet of the Cabildo president, and the seven families, one of them the Bethancourt family owning 80% of the island's land and businesses, had tried to pressure the mayor of Vallehermoso. This mayor, a patient of Fernando, defended the eco-village of Valentía and opposed the pressure from the bosses. They took away his subsidies and budget, but he resisted.

John, Umbela, and thirty other members of Ternura (they liked to call themselves "ternureros") joined Fernando in Valentía. Tomas stayed in *El Cabrito* because his native house was not included in the usufruct. He would make sure the powerful did not take over the valley until "*La Ternura*" could return. Aimsa tried to present the case at the national level, but she had not received any response from the Spanish government.

It had been more than a year since the sad "exile" of Ternura. Luis was on duty in the emergency room of the island hospital in San Sebastián. It was two in the morning, and he was lying on a stretcher. The on-duty nurse informed him of an emergency.

In one of the ambulances covering the island, Red Cross volunteers brought in a young man around twenty years old. He was unconscious with signs of venipuncture on the veins of his arms and neck.

Since the incident with the German sailor, Luis had already seen three cases of overdoses and one of endocarditis where the HIV test came back positive. He and John had tried several times to speak with the government delegate, the Cabildo president, and directly with the Civil Guard sergeant. They were never received. They sent articles to the local newspaper La Isla, but they were not published.

Luis examined the patient with all his senses: pale, sweaty skin; a thready and weak pulse; very low perfusion checked in the nail matrix; rapid and salvos-like breathing, unresponsive to painful stimuli. The pupils were tightly closed, like pinpricks, and his breath smelled of acetone. On auscultation, Luis found a very slow heartbeat with a profuse systolic murmur, and the lung bases had crackles. The liver was greatly enlarged, and the abdomen was distended, showing signs of a wave, indicating peritoneal fluid. He checked for the absence of cranial trauma, neurological focalities, pyramid signs, or meningeal signs. His pulse was 98 beats per minute, blood pressure 60/40, and oxygen saturation 85%.

Luis concluded that the young man was suffering from opioid overdose with several associated infections, possibly endocarditis, pneumonia, hepatitis, and perhaps even HIV. He administered naloxone via subclavian route as all peripheral veins were cauterized by the drug.

At that moment, two people, a man and a woman in their fifties, dressed in expensive suits and dresses as if coming from a formal event, burst in. Luis sensed an air of superiority about them. The woman rushed to embrace the unconscious young man, sobbing. The man, a few steps away, addressed Luis imperatively:

* Doctor, my son is in critical condition. I demand an immediate helicopter evacuation to Tenerife.

Through the emergency room door, Luis could see the black Mercedes car parked next to the Red Cross ambulance, the same one he had seen with John and Fernando trafficking drugs outside the "*La Promesa*" bar the previous year.

* I am Dr. Luis García. May I know who I am speaking to, please?
* I am Don Juan Manuel Bethancourt, Marquis of Adeje and Count of La Gomera.
* May I kindly ask you to wait in the waiting room; we are treating your son. I will inform you of his condition and treatment as soon as possible.

One of the Red Cross volunteers accompanied them outside while the woman sobbed the name of the young man, "Juan Antonio, son!" Luis heard the man say, "Who does that little provincial doctor think he is?"

Since the patient did not recover his breathing within the next five minutes after the naloxone injection, Luis, with the help of the on-duty nurse, Soledad, intubated the young man and began ventilating him with a bag-valve mask connected to eight liters per minute of oxygen.

For such treatments, he should have called the anesthetist, Horacio Fernández. He was an alcoholic and unreachable at those hours, a comrade of the surgeon and a business partner of the marquis in hotel and golf course construction, an activity to which they devoted all their time and effort. Luis chose not to call him.

After ten minutes, the young man began to improve his blood pressure and oxygen saturation, his pupils began to return to normal diameter, he moved his arms toward the endotracheal tube, and he began to have spontaneous breathing.

Luis extubated him, checked that he was breathing normally, and regaining consciousness. He administered five milligrams of intravenous diazepam as he would soon enter withdrawal syndrome due to the abrupt drop in heroin levels in his blood caused by naloxone.

He left the young man in Soledad's care and went out to talk to his parents. He asked them to follow him to a room where he could speak with them confidentially.

* What is happening to my son, Doctor?

The man asked, with a tone between demanding and concerned.

* Your son is experiencing an opioid overdose, possibly from heroin. Given the venipuncture marks and chronic phlebitis in his arms, he must have been injecting himself daily for at least a year. I've observed signs of lung, liver, and possibly endocardial infections. We also need to rule out an HIV infection.
* Given its severity, I demand that you immediately call for a medical helicopter service. If you don't, I will do it right now.

Luis knew that the marquis owned the helicopter company, as well as half the island. That's why the Cabildo president had allowed his dirty dealings with drugs, his son's excesses, and, in retaliation, had defamed and expelled the Ternura community for John's insinuation about a year and a half ago.

* First, Mr. Bethancourt, it's raining, and it's nighttime; the helicopter cannot safely fly in these conditions. Second, your son has a critical respiratory condition, and pressure changes are a risk to him. I believe we can treat him here until he stabilizes and goes for some diagnostic tests in Tenerife. To do that, I'll have to fill out the protocol for cases related to substance abuse and inform the court, and the one for suspected HIV. But the important thing is for Juan Antonio to recover from this overdose that could have ended his life, overcome the addiction, and treat the related infections.

The man was disarmed by these arguments and did not know how to maintain his supposed moral and social superiority from his "noble pulpit." At that moment, he turned to his wife accusingly:

* I've told you many times that we needed to straighten him out! This happened because you allowed him so much!

He tried to call his business and drinking buddy, the anesthetist Horacio, but found that his mobile phone had no battery.

* I'll go find Horacio and come back to fix this!

When the marquis left, his wife looked at Luis embarrassed and said:

* Doctor, will my son make it through this?
* Yes, Mrs...?
* Call me Dolores. I am a simple daughter of magicians from Valle Gran Rey. In essence, I am ashamed of my noble title for marrying the father of my son.

The woman burst into tears. Luis could see a left facial hematoma that makeup tried to conceal. He suspected she was a victim of domestic violence.

* Dolores, we will save your son from this situation. And we will treat the infections he has acquired through his veins. But he will need a lot of love and support to overcome his addiction. I recommend that he not be evacuated to La Candelaria Hospital in Tenerife right now, where an investigation will be opened, and he will likely end up arrested and held for drug possession and trafficking.

Luis realized that he was trying to protect the young man, just as they protected the German sailor the previous year. The combination of addiction and criminal confinement was the end for many young people in Spain. Luis had done his internal medicine residency at Gregorio Marañón Hospital in Madrid in the nineties, where they attended many overdoses daily, and young people from marginalized neighborhoods in southern Madrid filled the internal medicine wards where he worked. He teamed up with the communist priest Enrique de Castro, a rebellious son of a Francoist general, even going on hunger strikes, to change laws and allow home treatment for hundreds of young addicts infected with HIV who shuffled their agonizing lives between Carabanchel prison and the hospital.

As Juan Antonio regained consciousness, already admitted to one of the twelve rooms in that small hospital, Luis approached him. He remembered from when he worked in Ghana how a manual of medicine in situations of limited resources, "the aid worker's manual," by someone named John Gray, had taught him to sit with respectful proximity on the edge of the bed and to remove the table in the consultation room as a barrier between doctor and patient.

Juan Antonio's mother did not leave his side. His father had not returned.

* Hello, Juan Antonio, my name is Luis, I am your doctor.
* Go to hell with your damn mother! Let me go, I need a "fix," not all this crap.

His mother scolded him:

* Son don't talk to the doctor like that. He saved your life.
* I understand your anxiety, Juan Antonio. You're going through withdrawal because we've eliminated the drug's effects in your body.
* You got me into this "withdrawal," you bastard! Let me go!
* Juan Antonio, you can leave, but I must inform the court about the overdose diagnosis. Even if your father protects you, and you continue injecting drugs, your life will slip away dose by dose and due to the associated infections. It's your decision, Juan Antonio. I have treated many young people like you, and I know what you need to overcome withdrawal, treat the infections, and, most importantly, overcome this addiction and start a new life.

At that moment, Juan Antonio began to cry and asked them to leave him alone.

Luis went out with his mother, and they found a discreet corner in the hallway to talk.

* Doctor, I'll tell you the truth: I've known about my son's addiction for about six months. And I know he's involved in a drug trafficking scheme with people from Tenerife. I agree that if he goes back to the streets or if you refer him to Tenerife, even if under his father's influence, he escapes justice, he will end up in an overdose that another doctor will arrive too late to prevent. I've tried to talk to his father about it, and he reacts with violence, to his son and to me.

Luis sensed in that woman the deepest pain of a mother seeing her son's life unravel and lose all dignity. He observed her helplessness from a loveless golden cage. Luis, who had heard from John about the tycoon harassing Umbela, wondered how Umbela's life would have been if she had yielded, like Dolores, to the pressure of that power-drunk and arrogant tycoon, destroying his wife's life, his son's life, and the island.

In the following days, Luis gradually broke down Juan Antonio's aggressive shield. From his days as a resident in Madrid, he kept a journal in which he noted hundreds of experiences with patients. He would give it to his younger son, Enrique, who might want to pursue a career in healthcare in some way. About Juan Antonio, he wrote this story:

Juan Antonio was a young man from La Gomera, who grew up in a privileged home surrounded by luxury. Abundance and a secure future through the inheritance from a father who owned half the island were his worst enemies. They stole his reason to strive for a living, to learn a trade, to dedicate himself to others, to dream of a future detached from the trap of property, as my friend John calls it.

One rainy night, he arrived at the emergency room with a heroin overdose. We had known about a drug trafficking network on the island for a year and had reported it. The authorities not only covered it up but retaliated against John and his Ternura community, expelling them and defaming the eco-village movement, the hope of an island destroyed by the greed of its tycoons. Juan Antonio was like the island: his body was destroyed by the damages of assaults and toxins.

His father's excavators across the island caused the same harm as the needles in Juan Antonio's body. His soul was possessed by the need to consume drugs, just as the island was surrendered to the quick money businesses of passing tourism. Like many addicted patients in Madrid, Juan Antonio reacted aggressively against me and against the nurses and assistants in the first days.

Gradually, I broke through his armor of aggressive distance. I did it with a genuine interest in learning about his life and understanding his pain. I let him speak. He opened up in long conversations after my workday, in the evenings, sitting on the edge of his bed. He had grown up with all sorts of luxuries and whims but without love. His father was a proud, conceited, and abusive person. He only spoke to him about inheriting the marquis title and earning respect from the "commoners," as he called the rest of mortals on that island. He couldn't remember ever receiving a hug from his father. His mother had been abused since he could remember, and she drank alcohol to try to forget how she left her simple and loving life in her humble home in Valle Gran Rey for a palace of gold and pain, of privileges and loneliness.

He dropped out of high school, and they sent him to an expensive boarding school in southern England, where, along with other young people, he started using marijuana. With the baccalaureate purchased with his father's money, he began studying business in La Laguna, living in a Santa Cruz apartment owned by the family. From marijuana, he moved on to cocaine, which he consumed at parties with other wealthy young people and Nordic tourists.

He spent some time in Lanzarote working in a hotel owned by his father, although he lived at night in parties and drugs and slept during the day. One day, another young man introduced him to heroin. He met the heroin traffickers in Tenerife, and when the money his father sent was insufficient for his parties and addiction, he got involved in drug trafficking. He proposed to introduce it to La Gomera, and they chose couriers on the Fred Olsen Ferry and in various bars on the island.

He abandoned the farce of studying, in which he never put in any effort, and returned to the island, supposedly to work in his father's businesses. Without interest in his father's speculative ventures of hotels, apartments, and golf courses planned for the island, he let himself be carried away by drugs and the drug trafficking business on the island. Several times, his father had been warned about his son's activities. He reacted by beating his son and threatening anyone who reported him. That's how he ended up on the brink of death that March night in 2003.

His mother, in a dark well of despair, was my great ally in getting her son out of that slow suicide. He gradually improved and continued his detoxification with two young people who managed to recover from addictions in the Ternura community. After Ternura's expulsion, they lived in the eco-village of "Renacer," around "Casas Blancas," a high point from where they could see the El Cabrito ravine, where nature had invaded the terraces and courtyards of what used to be the Ternura community.

Juan Antonio continued to recover, finding meaning in his life through the simple harmony with nature and a community that shared love without the barriers of fear, hierarchy, and power that had surrounded his childhood. His mother separated from his father and went to live in the same eco-village.

Eight months after Luis treated Juan Antonio, he and other members of the "Renacer" eco-village witnessed four enormous Caterpillar excavators with the brand-new emblem of "Bethancourt Construction: Leading La Gomera into the Future" advancing on the road to "Degollada de Peraza." At first, they thought these machines were extending the construction of the golf course that his father owned in Playa Santiago, surrounded by his luxury hotels. After ten minutes, they saw the excavators descend a path on the southern slope of the ravine towards Playa de El Cabrito.

They alerted all the eco-villages on the island using the whistle system between ravines, and Juan Antonio ran with eight other members of Renacer towards El Cabrito and the houses of what used to be the Ternura Community. They ran downhill aided by canary palm pole-vaults. When they reached the port, Tomas welcomed them, already alerted by the noise of the excavators. Juan Antonio and his friends climbed the rocky path on the southern slope and encountered the four excavators two kilometers away. Initially, they tried to block their path, but the excavators advanced almost running them over. They cut through a meander by jumping again with their pole-vaults, and this time, they lay down on the path. The excavators stopped. The drivers got out and tried to kick them aside. One of them alerted them:

* Stop, that's the marquess' son!

The leader of the excavator convoy called on his mobile phone:

* Don Juan Manuel, your son is lying on the road to El Cabrito with some hippies, and we can't advance towards the demolition you've commissioned.
* Wait for me there; I'm coming right away with the Civil Guard and the president of the Cabildo. Those "hippies" will find out.

An hour later, the marquess arrived in his black Mercedes car, two Civil Guard Nissan vans, and an Audi with the president of the Cabildo. By then, about three hundred people from the Renacer community and others nearby had arrived. They all lay down on the road, one every three meters, from where the excavators were to the port of El Cabrito. Silvia, a friend of Nadine, a journalist from the television, was visiting one of the eco-villages filming a documentary. She approached the marquess and the Cabildo president while being filmed with a camera and asked them:

* What do you intend to do with these excavators?
* Destroy that colony of drugs and diseases and build a hotel that provides employment and wealth to the island - said the marquess.
* Do you have the permits for that? We understand that the ravine is designated as a natural park.

At that moment, the marquess looked at Don Cayo, the president of the Cabildo, and the camera turned to him. Don Cayo, seeing the RTVE label, covered the camera with his hand and spoke to the journalist:

* I kindly request you not to film, miss.
* I won't if you explain your plans.

Don Cayo addressed the marquess:

* Don Juan Manuel, we don't really have the approval from the environmental councilor for reclassification yet.
* Well, you thanked me for the half-million euros for your campaign, bastard!

Hundreds of community members from all over the island kept arriving. Among them was Dolores, who hadn't seen her son's father for six months. She addressed the journalist:

* Silvia, please record this interview. I know well everything that has happened on this island for the past twenty years.

Unable to avoid it, Don Cayo and Juan Manuel witnessed the end of their reign of abuses, in front of hundreds of eyewitnesses and what would be a documentary on the weekly TV news *El Informe Semanal* a few weeks later, titled "The Caciques of La Gomera" and watched by half of Spain:

My son's father inherited the title of marquess and half of the lands on this island. With thousands of islanders at his mercy and bribing the authorities, he has been destroying it, changing the terraces of the magicians' sweat, like my late father, into cement blocks and luxury hotels for tourists who only come to bathe in sun and cheap alcohol. A year and a half ago, they expelled a community of harmony between people and nature, a reference for the global network of spiritual eco-villages, the Ternura community, from this ravine. A human virtue that this poor man, consumed by his ambition for power, has never known. They did it because their leader, John Harris, reported a drug trafficking network that almost ended my son's life. If it weren't for these good people, he would be underground today. I publicly demand that they be prosecuted for these crimes against people and nature.

The journalist turned to Don Cayo and Juan Manuel, surrounded by the people who had started getting up from the road and were now surrounding the excavators and the caciques' cars:

* If you don't immediately withdraw these excavators, I will send this recording right now to RTVE and half a dozen press agencies.
* You don't know who I am! All of this is slander from these hippies who have only come to soil the traditions and morals of this island!

The community members, now more than a thousand, lay across the entire road to Tomas' port. The Civil Guard sergeant requested reinforcements to forcibly remove them as the excavators advanced meter by meter.

Half an hour later, the Civil Guard sergeant received a call and responded, "At your service."

Don Cayo Rubelo, Juan Manuel Bethancourt, you are under arrest.

In the following days, the usufruct of the El Cabrito ravine was renewed for the benefit of the Ternura eco-village.

During those days, John underwent cataract surgery in an improvised operating room at the health center, performed by an ophthalmologist named Nacho, whom Fernando had met while cooperating in Sierra Leone. They decided to keep him in the dark about the final struggle to recover Ternura. Before removing the blindfold, they told him that he had to see again from a very special perspective. Fernando, Umbela, and Luis joined him on the journey from San Sebastián to El Sombrero Rock, where a year and a half earlier, the odyssey of his exile had begun. They removed the blindfold, and he realized where he was.

He first looked into Umbela's eyes and felt a profound connection. Then he looked towards his valley. The Ternura community greeted him, returning to the harmony of that magical and inspiring place for the world, rescued from the clutches of greed. John felt profound peace.

# Men also suffer. Madrid, may 2004

Thanda was devastated when Cristina revealed her relationship with another man during Christmas of 2002.

* Now I understand your coldness for months. There was no sign of affection in your letters from the mission or upon my return. How long have you had feelings for him?
* Long before I met him, Juan. My love for you had been fading. You left me alone with my frustration in Ukuzwana, upon my return to Madrid, searching for a home and school, seeking a job, and creating a home. You only spoke of the mission, your patients, your walks, your ideas, and your world. I was your companion, not your partner.
* You know well I couldn't abandon the sick and marginalized communities. We went with a commitment, Cristina, and you broke it. And now you blame me for it? Besides, Angeles and Daniela were also happy there. Yes, a simple life without "opportunities" to get rich but full of love, values, solidarity, and spirituality. What do we have here? A car in a garage, an apartment on the fifth floor, a nine-to-five job with piles of paperwork and distant patient interactions in a system more akin to a production line than a humane and caring act, TV series, supermarket food, heaps of gifts, and a bombardment of ads to buy more and more.
* Enough, Juan! This is my world. And in this world, we met. And here we grew up, our parents instilled values in us, our daughters were born, and in our routine, devoid of the epic you claim to champion, we try to live with honesty and care in the small details. If you want to demonize it, fine, we can improve it, but not go against it and not drag us into your crusade. Ukuzwana's world isn't perfect either.

Cristina was crying, and her hands were trembling. Thanda approached and tried to embrace her, but she pushed him away.

* Darling, I'm still in love with you, and I regret putting my dedication to patients and the world's marginalized people ahead of you. We can be a family again. I can balance the hospital with the San Rafael shelter and spend some summers in Ukuzwana, contributing more to everything at home. I love you. Seeing our daughters grow is the greatest treasure of my life.

At that moment, Cristina looked at him sternly. There was no trace of tenderness in her gaze. Thanda felt a chill. The echo of what he had just said - "the treasure of seeing our daughters grow" - was shattered with pain by that cold look that said it all.

In the following days, communication between them broke down. Cristina asked him to find another place to live while they attended therapy. In sessions with a local psychologist, a friend of Cristina's parents, she insisted on a mutual separation with cold calendars and schedules for their daughters and calculations of what he should contribute to the household. He, still in love and dreaming of being together as a family of four, insisted on taking time to regain empathy, complicity, and love. Each session ended with more pain. A month later, he received a court letter from Plaza de Castilla requesting separation. In the absence of mutual agreement, civil law treated family disagreements as disputes where one party, the applicant, had to accuse the other for separation or divorce to be granted.

The temporary contract as an emergency room doctor ended with Christmas. Thanda went to drop his daughters at school, hiding his deep anguish and singing them the song of the wizard Merlin from the Solera group. Upon his return, he went through El Retiro Park to walk and read the dreaded separation lawsuit. He sat on a bench in front of the Fountain of the Fallen Angel, as if it were a premonition of a love already broken and irrecoverable.

The lawsuit was filled with defamation, probably written by a lawyer who knew nothing about his life, love, and values. First, he skimmed it diagonally and saw, without the composure to examine details, accusations of being a bad father, abandonment, a bad spouse, work obsession, and even a bad son. It included attachments with a calendar of his absences, bills from the house and school, and even a letter from his mother saying he should prioritize his daughters' safety in that place, referring to San Jose, "so remote and unhygienic." In the end, he focused on the numbers. The lawsuit restricted visits to his daughters once a week due to his alleged lack of attention and care. It ended by providing an extensive account of all household expenses and school fees, requesting an amount that was double what he earned as an emergency room doctor, a salary he no longer had.

He felt a mixture of deep sadness for the emotional rupture, vertigo at the imminent separation from his beloved daughters, and anger at such an unjust system that allowed lawyers to thrive on the defamation of people they didn't know and lead them into dark pits of pain.

Since that day, a kind of painful cold settled in his chest, rising through his throat. It almost never left him.

That afternoon, he excused himself with Father Joaquín and took a train to visit his parents on the outskirts of Madrid. They lived in a lovely apartment thanks to their lifelong savings.

They had worked since adolescence, combining work and studies in the harsh post-war era. Thanda had been raised by them with Christian values, paying little attention to the Catholicism that surrounded Spanish society, strongly allied with Francoism.

His mother was the daughter of an idealistic man from Salamanca who was captured in the war and a brave Basque mother who cared for her mother and sisters. His father was the son of a Basque photographer from Valladolid and a Castilian woman who gave birth to nine children and raised them with noble principles.

Thanda and his sisters had been given a home full of tenderness and security, the best opportunities in education, periods of work and life in the Canary Islands and the Netherlands, and now the family home on the outskirts of Madrid where he always received unconditional love, listening, and affection upon his return. His father had been very proud of his dedication to those in need in Zimbabwe, while his mother felt a bit more fear for his safety and especially for that of the girls. That evening, he explained the separation process and the request he had to face to them. They listened with deep love and advised him to tell the truth and work to give the best to his daughters without betraying his noble and admirable ideals.

When he returned home that night, his daughters were already in bed. His wife was reading a book by Vargas Llosa in the living room. There was nothing for dinner. Signs were growing that this was no longer his home.

* Cristina, I received the separation lawsuit. I thought we were trying to reach an agreement through therapy sessions.
* They are worthless, Juan. You keep dreaming of a united family. You even repeat it to the girls constantly. That's impossible now. It's better for us to separate, and each one tries to rebuild their life.
* You already have it well sorted: a stable job, house and the girls' school in the same neighborhood, your partner ready to take my place, and a lawyer defaming me in the cruelest way so that I pay for that life and barely see my daughters for a minimal part of the time.
* Our daughters, Juan. And it's the best for them. They need stability, and you only cause them more distress with your eagerness to recover what is already broken and alienate them from me by telling them that I'm the one who wants to separate!
* What's wrong with telling the truth?
* They are still children, Juan. They need a happy mother and a happy father, even if they are no longer together. No righteous or guilty, no winners or losers.
* And that's why you hire a lawyer, partly with my effort from the joint account, and accuse me in a lawsuit of all kinds of evils? And you ask me to see our daughters for a minimal part of the time and maintain this home where soon another man will take my place as a husband and father? Don't you think that's sentencing me guilty and declaring me defeated? It's the greatest pain I've ever felt in my life!

At that moment, Angeles came into the room crying.

* Please, Daddy, Mommy, stop arguing...

Both got up to hug her and reassure her.

Thanda prepared to respond legally to these defamatory accusations with the help of his father's brother, who was a lawyer. He also tried to find work. There were no job openings as an internist. He signed up for a list to cover sporadic emergency room shifts in different towns in the Madrid community.

Through a nurse friend from his residency, he learned about a position for a doctor with the fire department. He also prepared for internist exams on the island of La Gomera, as informed by Jonay. He studied, worked wherever he could, received more lawsuits and accusations, assisted homeless people at the San Rafael shelter, and continued to fight for access to AIDS treatment, again blocked in Ukuzwana and almost all of Africa due to obscure interests of the same laboratories that funded trips to conferences for his colleagues in Spain.

Thanda also presented several studies at the first national tropical medicine congress held in Chinchón, gave some classes on AIDS in Africa in international cooperation courses in Madrid and Barcelona, and co-founded the Spanish Association of Cooperating Doctors. But his most valuable time was spent taking his daughters to school every morning and picking them up in the afternoon. He gave them all his love, hoping that, by some miracle, their mother would relent in breaking up the family. He tried to run in Retiro Park and stay healthy, but he ended that fateful year with eyelid tremors, constant palpitations, and dreams interrupted by a nightmare that repeated itself over and over: his daughters *drifting away in a fragile boat*, and he couldn't follow them in a stormy sea.

Soon after, he received a lawsuit for "extremely provisional" measures, giving him a week to find another place as Cristina declared "negative cohabitation for the development of the girls." Thanda defended himself by requesting that Angeles testify, who was already thirteen years old and to whom he had explained the situation. With serene maturity, she testified before the judge that she loved her mother and father and wished, like her sister, to be with both. Faced with lawyers' tactics accusing him of parental alienation and psychological harm, it led to the sentence of impossibility of marital cohabitation.

Cristina was granted the request for urgent measures - "extremely provisional" - and Thanda was required to leave the family home within two weeks.

His father, an example of composure and perseverance, and his mother, of courage and rectitude, advised him to leave calmly and with his head held high, always offering love and truth. They encouraged him to surround his daughters with joy and hope in life, even though it was no longer about being "together as a family," as he used to say.

One afternoon, after finishing sorting medications with Pascual in a container at the San Juan de Dios mission office destined for a mission hospital in Cameroon, he began searching in the second-hand newspaper for rental apartments in the same neighborhood, most of which were unaffordable on his unstable income.

Pascual, deeply moved by what was happening to his friend, said:

* Thanda, I understand what you're going through. I also suffered the heartbreak of lovelessness and the distance from my children. There is a profound and silent injustice in society: that of fathers whom justice separates from their children by the decision of their mothers. They accuse you mercilessly and without truth, take away most of your income, and tear you apart from your purest and cleanest union, the love for your children. I understand your pain, Thanda. I suffered it for a while. I joined the association of separated parents. There are tens of thousands in deep depression. Ten people commit suicide every day in Spain. Eight are men. Ten times more than due to physical, gender-based violence. Many, due to lovelessness, fall into despair. Women are physically weaker and are abused in that regard, which is abominable and must be denounced, along with any form of violence. But men are often psychologically weaker and often suffer abuses of a different kind. Hence that great daily *pain that no one talks about*. It's a taboo, Thanda. Men cannot complain.
* It's very sad. I thought the pain was in Africa with hunger, poverty, and disease. But here, too, there is tremendous suffering from loneliness and lack of love. I don't want my daughters to suffer, Pascual.
* You just gave the key: as your parents told you, your effort, love, and truth for your daughters. Let them feel no resentment or despair in you: their smiles will continue to illuminate your life so that you have the strength to reinvent it.
* Thank you, Pascual, your friendship is a blessing to me.
* Yours is to me too, Thanda. I wanted to tell you something: I'm leaving this shelter. It's for transient people. I have nowhere to go back to, Thanda. I can't find a job, I don't have family, I don't know where my children are, and I wouldn't want to embarrass them with a wandering father. But I found a place that I think could be my home. It's the shelter of Santa Maria de la Paz.
* That's great, Pascual, tell me about that place.
* It was founded by a brother of San Juan de Dios, Brother Antonio Zarzosa. He lived in this shelter, and one day he noticed something moving in the doghouse at the entrance. He discovered it was a man who slept there, curled up with the dog every night. His name was Carlos. He explained that transit shelters, whether from the municipality or religious orders, had a maximum stay of two weeks, and most of the homeless had been there for years, unable to reintegrate into a society that despised them. Carlos showed Antonio that reality of hundreds of people in doorways, subway entrances, bridges, and parks. Antonio managed to get the Calasanz Fathers to give him a soccer field adjacent to a spiritual retreat house on the Burgos Road. There, without even permits, he has been building a home for a hundred people who have nowhere else to go. I want to go help him, Thanda, he is a good person.
* Can I go with you, Pascual?

That was how Thanda ended up living in the shelter of Santa Maria de la Paz, where he set up a first aid kit and a clinic. He saw cases of terrible neglect. He even had to cut off socks with scissors because they had adhered to people's feet for years without being changed. Half of the hundred homeless people who found a new home there were alcoholics, and Thanda learned that almost none of them had a "hope horizon" to detoxify. Alcohol, like insulin in diabetics, was for them the medicine that prevented "delirium tremens," and he administered it in the clinic in the smallest possible doses. Others had chronic bronchitis from smoking or from living amidst the smoke-filled streets for many years, and he managed to install several oxygen tanks next to the beds of those in worse condition.

He often went to his emergency room shifts in different hospitals with fellow residents from the shelter with medical complications. Other colleagues mocked him for "bringing his patients to the ER."

He recruited one of the shelter residents to help him in the clinic with treatments and medications. They called him "Chanquete." He was short, toothless, walked hunched over, and yet always had a cheerful and affectionate attitude. Thanda gave him fifty euros a month that he spent with a prostitute on Montera Street every first Saturday of the month. On that day, he would wear *Baron Dandy* cologne and go to meet "his girlfriend" with a bunch of flowers he picked from the roadside ditches. Thanda saw in that emotion something purer than the respectable weddings of high society in cathedrals blessed by bishops, like the one that, in those days, was capturing all the attention between King Felipe and Letizia, a divorced journalist.

Thanda felt aversion to anachronistic monarchies, to obscene luxury, and above all, to the glory given to them by a submissive society. But he couldn't share that feeling with his parents, especially with his mother, scared of any anarchist reflection inherited from her grandfather, and even less with his conservative and monarchist in-laws.

Those people had almost nothing in life; they were scorned by society, had no families to give them affection, and almost all suffered from chronic diseases. In contrast to the worlds of luxury and fame applauded by society, his shelter companions showed him, with love and humor, how much Thanda should feel gratitude for life: he had good parents, a profession he was passionate about, a mother of his daughters dedicated to their care, beautiful daughters who loved him, a lovely family in Ukuzwana, ideas to fight for, and the strength to reinvent himself with love and even humor, bringing smiles to those around him whenever he could.

Thus, Thanda found, among the humblest, the strength to reinvent his torn life from daily coexistence with his daughters, accused with unfounded defamations by unscrupulous lawyers, and maintaining his fight, in a different way than the one that illuminated his soul in the Ukuzwana mission, towards the neediest.

With Anna and a group of fellow aid workers he met through tropical medicine courses and meetings in NGOs such as Doctors of the World, Medicus Mundi, Doctors Without Borders, and others, they founded the Spanish Association of Aid Health Workers (“cooperants”), bringing together more than two hundred doctors with a calling for a fairer world. Among them, he built a deep complicity and friendship with Fernando, a retired orthopedic surgeon after thirty years passionately devoted to health in Africa, with whom he had heartfelt discussions in his apartment in Colmenarejo, and with Joan, a Catalan pediatrician who, after his time in Equatorial Guinea, felt almost as much devotion for cooperation as for the children and mothers he attended to, especially with his patient listening and understanding.

With such will and living in a small room in that mission of harmony amidst the jungle of asphalt, cement, and haste in Madrid, he passed the exam to become a doctor with the fire department. He chose not to take the one in La Gomera when Jonay told him about Luis, a good doctor dedicated to noble causes there. After a year of working at the Lozoyuela fire station, attending hundreds of accidents, rescues in the mountains of Madrid, and critically ill patients in the towns of the northern Sierra, he received a letter from Beatriz, Patxi's sister, a European Union official. She informed him of a job opportunity for international health cooperation. She insisted that from that position, he could strongly advocate for justice in the world and for access to medicines and the right to health. His parents encouraged him. Thus, from his life in the shelter, his shifts at the fire station, and his walks with his daughters in Retiro Park, he also studied for the exam for "Principal Administrator of the European Commission in International and Humanitarian Cooperation for Health."

With the strength to fight for more justice in the world and remembering the children he had seen die in Ukuzwana, he studied and became the only Spanish candidate to pass the exam in June of that 2004. He still had a faint hope that Cristina, whom he still loved and knew had quarreled with her new partner, would want to come to Brussels with the girls and restart a family life. But that magic, once dissipated, could not be resurrected by anyone or anything. He proposed, through a mediator, a system of conversations via the new "Skype" program every evening, taking care of them for an extended weekend each month and two-thirds of the vacations. He also considered that, if the girls requested it, they could spend an academic year with him in Brussels each July. Thus, he prepared to begin another stage of his life, joining forces with his kindred spirits in Ukuzwana, Gomera, and New York, for a fairer world.

His last emergency medical shift with the firefighters was on March 11, the day when Al-Qaeda terrorism, as Jonay had described in a letter two and a half years earlier in New York, killed nearly two hundred people and injured more than two thousand. Jonay told him how he had attended to people torn apart by the blindest violence. Thanda felt that he had to commit even more to fight for a just world and denounce and *oppose what bred hatred, despair, and pain*. In so many ways... He had to confront the roots of so much pain and, at the same time, enter a new way of being a father, teaching his daughters when time allowed that *life was an epic adventure to pour out the soul with courage and tenderness*.

#  Decoding the jungle of European power. Brussels, July 2004

After the four exams, both oral and written, of the competition and upon being notified of his selection, Thanda waited for a few weeks to be informed about the next steps. He had not read the detailed instructions for the European Union civil servant public competition. He assumed that after being selected, he would receive an invitation to take up his "position." But no. To his surprise, when he called a human resources information phone of the European Commission, they told him he "*had to lobby*." Out of embarrassment, he did not ask what that meant and looked it up in his parents' dictionary. Lobby: a group that "exerts pressure." His well-educated father, humble in every way, told him that, in individual terms, it meant "selling oneself."

This initial impression of the European Union disappointed him. He had demonstrated his worth for the position through highly selective exams. "Lobbying" seemed to depend on having friends, networks, and diplomatic ways of making bosses feel important. It struck him as dishonest and servile. He was beginning to intuit that his path in the jungle of power to influence a fairer world *was not going to be easy*. However, he was determined to fight.

Through Beatriz's intervention, he was able to go, in the next three months after passing his exam, to interview several "unit heads." Finally, in an interview with the head of the health and social policies unit, Dr. Fronz, from the Development Directorate, he was selected in a somewhat peculiar way:

* Dr. Garay, tell us about your professional background. What do you feel most and least positive about?
* I graduated in medicine and surgery from the University of La Laguna, on the island of Tenerife. I then served as a medical lieutenant in Las Palmas during my military service and specialized in internal medicine at the Jiménez Díaz Hospital in Madrid, where I later became an associate physician in infectious diseases and initiated the HIV/AIDS unit. I conducted several studies with antiretrovirals and presented them at various international congresses. I did not like getting to know the drug market system. What I am most proud of is my work as a rural doctor at the Ukuzwana hospital in the Matabeleland South district of Zimbabwe, in the years 2001 and 2002. Afterward, I returned to Spain, worked as an emergency and rescue doctor, and applied for this competition to contribute to a fairer world with access to health for everyone.
* Thank you, Dr. Garay. Tell me, what do you think of the Global Fund for AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis?

Thanda had read in the cooperation newsletters he found in the European Union office in Madrid that the European Commission collaborated with that "Global Fund." Hundreds of millions of euros were allocated to projects worldwide to fight against these three diseases. Thanda did not understand how only three diseases could be selected, ignoring the rest. The "lobbies" - now understanding the meaning - of homosexuals in the United States, led by ACT-UP, and the pressure from movements like the Treatment Access Campaign (TAC), which fought for access to vital treatments in South Africa, along with celebrities revealing their infected status, gradually elevated the political importance of AIDS. These groups pressured the United Nations to make reversing the AIDS epidemic one of the eight millennium development goals. The fight against malaria, the perennial pending subject of the World Health Organization since its foundation, was added. Exciting years followed the beginning of the century: the exceptions to monopolies agreed upon in Doha, the Barcelona conference, and the patent pool agreement.

And right then, the Global Fund was created, also including tuberculosis, with a deluge of millions from cooperation agencies and philanthropists and foundations from "rich" countries. Thanda, Jonay, and Buhleve had talked about it: it was not fair to give so much attention to one, or three, diseases and ignore the rest. No one was more sensitive than them, in the epicenter of the AIDS epidemic in Ukuzwana, aware of the impact of that disease's tragedy. But even there, AIDS accounted for less than one in three deaths, and the rest were ignored, simply because they lacked lobbies to speak for them. In the Ukuzwana mission, they went to the extreme of having expensive AIDS medications and lacking antibiotics, a hundred times cheaper, for pneumonia, or rehydration solutions, or folic acid, a thousand times less expensive, for pregnancies. Health could not address isolated diseases; it could not function with isolated projects in time and place, dictated by the whimsical distribution of cooperation "lobbies." Moreover, these funds were crumbs compared to what big pharmaceutical companies earned from their patents. This perpetuated the power of the market, and its "guardians" washed their faces with a *semblance of solidarity* and philanthropy. Thanda didn't like it at all. Even at the risk of not getting the position he fought for in the competition, he preferred, as his father advised him, to "*always say what he thought, albeit with respect and humility*":

* With all due respect, I don't understand why only a few diseases that currently attract a significant portion of international cooperation are selected. Parallel forms of projects with NGOs flourish, while public systems are suffocated by the World Bank's loan conditions and can hardly pay salaries to their doctors and nurses or provide essential medicines. I do not think it is fair or in line with the principle of universal health rights.

Dr. Fronz furrowed her brow and displayed a smile of superiority. Thanda knew, through Beatriz, that she had worked for the Institute of Tropical Medicine in Antwerp, studying the AIDS virus in Kenya in the eighties. She had created the "AIDS Task Force" in the European Union and later encouraged, with the World Bank, the creation of the Global Fund, which became her obsession.

Thanda thought that with that honest answer, he had lost the chance that, despite passing the competition, he would be given a position for advocating the right to health within the largest cooperation actor in the world, the European Union. But two weeks later, he received an email saying they were offering him the position. Later, he learned that it was because his response had been discussed in the corridors of the European Commission, and other unit heads critical of Dr. Fronz and "her" Global Fund wanted to interview him. She quickly selected him, perhaps to tie his hands and silence those uncomfortable reasonings.

Thanda accepted the position of "senior administrator" for the European Union to start in mid-March 2004. He arrived with one suitcase. During his time at the Santa María shelter, "exiled" from his family home, he had learned to live with little. He wore a wool knit sweater made by his Amama, a watercolor of Castilian wheat fields by his grandfather, a prayer of generosity and humility from his father, a recipe notebook from his mother, a keychain given by his sisters when he passed his medical exams, a beautiful letter from Ángeles telling him that no one could take his place as a father, a drawing pad from Daniela, a photo of the four of them with the family in Ukuzwana, Gandhi's diary given by Patxi, a photo with Jonay and Buhleve in front of the mission's house-hermitage, a Madrid Community firefighter T-shirt signed by his colleagues, and an umbrella with the signatures of the residents at Santa María de la Paz. He also brought his generic brand "terminator" laptop, his Spanish guitar, a change of clothes, work clothes, exercise clothes, toiletries, and not much more to Brussels.

He said goodbye to his daughters with a walk in El Retiro Park. He gave each of them a diary he had written for them in Ukuzwana and a weaver bird's nest.

* Do you remember the pine tree in Ukuzwana where hundreds of weaver birds came to reproduce?
* Yes, daddy - Ángeles said immediately - I remember it well; I used to climb it with Adam.
* Well, those nests are made with its leaves, called needles. The weaver daddy works hard to build the nest by weaving with hundreds of needles. As you can see, it has an opening, an entrance hallway, and a place where the mom can lay eggs, and the little birds can grow, protected from rain and predators - the weaver bird babies. All of this is anchored with the strongest needles, around a branch. It happens that, to make sure the mom is secure, she tries to undo and untie the nest from the branch with several pecks. If the nest withstands, she enters the home and lays eggs. If the nest doesn't hold and falls to the ground, like these I brought you from Ukuzwana, the mom rejects the dad. I want you to keep them to remember that I put my love into the nest, but mom didn't see it as secure. She found another nest. But I will see you a lot. We will talk every day via Skype. We will spend beautiful times together in Madrid, Brussels, and on adventures around the world because one thing will never, never change: my profound love for you.
* But we will always love you very much, daddy - said Daniela.
* And I love you both. You are my princesses, the most beautiful light that illuminates my life and gives me strength. I will fight so that your friends in Ukuzwana and in many other corners of the world can grow up with health and safety, with food and medicine when they need it. And I want you to be my strongest allies. Okay? Everything I do when I'm not close to you, I will do for the three of us, agreed?

Upon arriving at the reception, he called Dr. Fronz's secretary. A tall and elegant secretary named Claire, who spoke five languages, came down to escort him. They went up to the fifth floor, walking through a long-carpeted hallway where Thanda could see people in their offices, mostly with their eyes on the computer screen, left hand on the keyboard, and right hand on the mouse.

They reached Dr. Fronz's office. She was a woman in her fifties, tall, robust, with hard and linear facial features, a half-smile exuding self-sufficiency, and an inquisitive gaze. She was sitting at a desk, speaking on the phone in Flemish. Thanda noticed a photo in which she received the Jonathan Mann Award from the International Physicians in AIDS Care. The award was shared with the White House AIDS director, a former Miss Universe who took photos with AIDS patients, and former President Bill Clinton, who made considerable efforts to prevent access to affordable medications for African patients outside the monopolies that funded his campaigns to become president and collected debts during his term. That supposed advocate for the humble gave speeches for $300,000 per hour. He looked at that photo and others from the global AIDS conferences and Global Fund Board meetings that filled a wall. On the other wall, there was a flag of the European Union with its twelve yellow stars on a blue background. She invited him to sit down and asked Claire to bring two coffees.

* Welcome, Thanda.
* Thank you for your trust, Dr. Fronz.

Something told him that it was better to maintain some distance.

* Despite your lack of knowledge of global cooperation and AIDS policy, I have decided to recruit you because I found your response in the interview to be honest, and I highly value your experience in rural Africa.
* Thank you again. I come to defend the European value of universal health and social justice, Dr. Fronz. I will give my best in that endeavor.

With a sly smile that he couldn't understand, she asked Claire to call the entire unit for a meeting to introduce him to the team.

There were about twenty people from ten European nationalities. Each one introduced themselves and shared their "dossier." They prepared cooperation programs in education and health, which had to go through long processes of discussion and approval before being contracted, releasing funds from European taxes entrusted to the commission to pay for experts or necessary imports in "developing countries." They spoke a bureaucratic language that Thanda couldn't understand, even less so when they spoke in French, a language Thanda didn't master and was very common in the European Commission. Afterwards, they asked Thanda to introduce himself. He did it in English:

* Good morning, everyone. My name is Thanda, born in Madrid, studied between Madrid and the Canary Islands, and worked as a doctor in Spain and two years in Zimbabwe, very dedicated to the prevention and treatment of AIDS patients. The last year, I worked again in Madrid and devoted myself to marginalized populations in a homeless shelter and emergencies with the fire department. I studied the EU cooperation competition in health because I want to contribute to a fairer world that respects and protects the universal right to health.

Thanda observed skeptical looks in almost everyone listening, even some whispers among some of them. Only in two people did he see a genuine connection in their gaze.

After the meeting, one of them approached him. He was a man around fifty, with long grayish hair, a deep and clean look, albeit with a tone of regret, and a smile that Thanda felt was genuine.

* Welcome, Thanda, my name is Javier. If you want and have no other commitment, I invite you to lunch.
* Delighted, Javier. Thank you very much.

Javier had been in the Commission for fifteen years. He joined shortly after Spain entered the European Union. He was a labor lawyer and committed to just causes. He had been very involved in the Spanish democratic transition. Shortly after joining the Commission, he fell in love with a beautiful Belgian woman with profound spirituality. Javier combined his tasks in promoting international cooperation in education with art, humanism, and a passion for nature. From the first day, Thanda found in Javier an ally, accomplice, and loyal friend.

* Javier, in your long experience in the commission, what would be your advice to preserve my ideas and my enthusiasm for contributing to a better world?
* Just that question, Thanda, tells me about your idealism. Take care of it as the most valuable thing. This immense machine has thousands of pieces called officials. Each one has its place in the circuit of visas and decisions, following the commissioner's instructions, the council's, the parliaments, and the political whims of visibility and power. If you're not careful, you can end up like most people: trying to please bosses without questioning them to climb the promotions ladder, not thinking for yourself but copying and pasting politically correct things, growing in cynicism without believing anything in political speeches and promises, allowing your children an elitist school where they will come out trilingual and spoiled, and letting the machine grind your soul, and you retire, if stress doesn't take you down first, with a privileged pension, then, perhaps too late, to begin to live.

Thanda looked at him with sadness and surprise. He didn't know if Javier was exaggerating, but he knew that there was some truth in that dystopian scenario.

* I'm presenting it to you this dramatically on your first day because when I heard your presentation to the section, I felt that you bring light of enthusiasm and commitment for a better world, Thanda. Almost no one who comes to this European cooperation system has lived with the communities we are supposed to "help." Almost no one here, Thanda, has eaten like them, slept where they sleep, lived without taps or switches, without salaries or pensions, without insurance or refrigerators. And yet, we pretend to be their saviors without questioning one of our privileges.
* How do I resist and be myself, Javier?
* Precisely by being yourself, Thanda. Be yourself always. Don't do anything to please others, to please the bosses, because it's "acceptable" or "politically correct." Do it because you believe it is just. You will take many hits and feel a lot of pressure, but you will be the most beautiful you can be in this life: yourself.
* How have you managed it yourself? I see that you have a lot of passion for life and for contributing to just causes.
* Thank you, Thanda, I try. Since I came here, I have maintained creative, intellectual, and solidarity activities in my free time. That balance is very important. It's not always easy in here to find space for free thinking and open debate, spirituality, and communication of feelings, or authentic and direct solidarity with those who need it most. I sing opera, write plays, participate in a "men's group" that rejects machismo, and promote solidarity projects with Palestine and Tibet. But I don't want to brag, Thanda. I am privileged and often fall into selfishness, apathy, and whims.
* How wonderful that you are here, Javier. I had strange sensations with Dr. Fronz.
* Be careful, Thanda. She has a lot of support from council politicians and parliamentary members. She has gotten used to abusive treatment, especially against men, and no one stops her. Everything here is pyramidal: orders come from the top down, and evaluations are also done from the top down. And everyone wants to go up. Result: a hierarchical system of abuse.

Thanda went to his office, spacious and with "two windows," a privilege stipulated for "principal administrators." He placed three photos around the computer screen that seemed to suck up a good part of his life: of his daughters, his parents, and another with Jonay and Buhleve.

He returned walking through the neighborhoods of Evere and Schaerbeck, with a lot of immigration from North Africa. The days were short and cold, like the greetings of the people. He arrived at Beatriz, Meimuna, and Moyes' house and reunited with them after their workdays, with much affection. At six in the evening, he spoke with Ángeles and Daniela on Skype, they told him about their classes and tasks. Then, he called them when they went to bed at nine o'clock and wished them sweet dreams. Between both calls, he usually went running in the Cinquantenaire Park with Moyes, with whom he was establishing a beautiful relationship, almost as if he were his eldest son.

Beatriz was already over sixty years old, and after fighting hard in the Directorate-General for Trade to approve the Kimberley Agreement to stop the illegal diamond trade that fed, as her brother Haka discovered, the arms trade and cruel wars, she had requested a position in the European Union delegation in New Delhi. It had been granted, and she was supposed to start in September. She and Meimuna were eager to go to a new world, with a spirituality that broke the anthropocentric walls of their Christian and Muslim origins.

Moyes was enrolled by then in the London School of Economics. That weekend, the four of them walked to Montgomery, took tram 44, and arrived at Tervuren station, crossing a grand chestnut tree avenue and a beech forest that, despite its bareness in winter, appeared magnificent. From there, they walked to the Museum of Africa and the wonderful Tervuren Park, with bittersweet memories for Beatriz in her early years in Brussels under the strict control of Opus Dei.

They went to eat at Spaans huis, an old medieval dwelling that inspired a novel of the same name, recounting the love between a Flemish nobleman and a gypsy. It was a charming place, amidst nature and in front of a huge pond and two giant sequoias.

In the following months, he began to feel how the interior of that great power machine worked. Two months after his arrival, ten Eastern European countries joined the European Union. In parallel, they also joined NATO, breaking the gentleman's agreement between Reagan, who died that same year, and Gorbachev, not to extend NATO and its military threat to Russia's neighbors. In the corridors of the European Commission, texts were being prepared for debate in the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers on its constitutional treaty. The long arm of Washington still divided Europe between those who supported the invasion of Iraq - the UK, Spain, Poland - and those who opposed it, especially France and Germany, the "old Europe" as called by Bush, who was contending with Kerry for reelection in the United States.

During those months, Thanda learned some French and European bureaucratic jargon, maintained his daily Skype meetings with his daughters, ran, and kept his "firefighter" fitness routine. He exchanged emails with Jonay, Fernando, and Patxi, with whom he felt a connection that could be described as existential.

He began attending meetings where cooperation strategies were discussed, and he had to argue in favor of health support. When he had built an entire analysis in support of health in Sudan, one of the poorest countries in the world with high maternal and infant mortality, Dr. Fronz told him not to insist on that argument and to focus on preparing a "sectoral budget support" for the wealthy former British colony of Barbados. He couldn't understand these power games between unit heads, directors, and ambassadors. He later found out that European oil companies were pressing for a road project in southern Sudan, rich in oil and torn apart by poverty and war. At the same time, the British government wanted a hospital with a heart care unit in its former colony, where British pensioners retired or spent warm winters. Every day, he received letters from unions requesting more privileges for officials who earned salaries far above European citizens, whom they were supposed to serve. He felt much pity to see so little human sensitivity.

He also had to prepare his boss's participation in the World AIDS Congress in Bangkok. She boasted of having attended twenty world congresses. Thanda had to prepare her briefing: writing a study of what the congress was, who attended, the objectives of her mission, her speeches, meetings with other officials and leaders where he proposed “speaking points” (what to say) and “defensive points” (arguments against possible criticisms), in addition to the press dossier to get her name in the media, announcements of millions given to "her" Global Fund, and a detailed list of her business class tickets and reservations in a five-star hotel.

Thanda then prepared speeches and positions based on the right to health, free and non-discriminatory public health systems, and access to medicines by questioning patents, which circumvented the Doha agreements.

From Anna in Barcelona, he learned that the Thai government planned to start applying the Doha flexibilities for cancer medication, also held hostage by high prices from major pharmaceutical companies. He suggested to Fronz a meeting with officials in Thailand preparing for this commitment to access vital medications. She rejected it. His drafts were repeatedly crossed out and criticized with expressions like "not political" or "inconvenient" or even "you do not understand."

When he checked the prices of tickets and hotels and proposed traveling in economy class, with more modest airlines and cheaper hotels, he was removed from all logistical functions, which were faithfully taken over by his secretaries.

Thanda remembered his happy time in Ukuzwana, earning a local salary thirty times less than what he received as a European official and being literally thirty times happier. Moreover, he suffered from the distance from his daughters and parents. He tried to maintain a simple and healthy life, sent what he could spare from his salary to Ukuzwana, and fought for just causes, but he felt lonely and sad. Only his long discussions with Javier about human rights, with a Swedish colleague named Johan, a loyal friend and noble person, about respecting nature, and with Moyes, Beatriz, and Meimuna about the eco-village network, kept his enthusiasm and commitment alive.

The European Union then constituted a tenth of the world's population, a fifth of the gross domestic product and world trade, a third of patents and Nobel Prizes, half of development cooperation, and half of international tourist destinations. It was the region with the highest life expectancy, close to eighty years, the highest rate of higher education, and the lowest violence index.

He began to read about the history of Europe in that Spaans Huis where trust grew with its manager, Michel, who employed former prisoners, almost all in addiction rehabilitation. Thanda liked to sit there with a hot onion and garlic soup, his father's favorite, in an upstairs room that looked like a living room from a 17th-century home. There, he kept books, almost as if it were his "cottage in the woods."

As summer approached, and with the excitement of reuniting with his daughters and enjoying a long summer together, he went for a Sunday walk with Moyes in the grand Tervuren Park and its adjacent "Soignes" forest (of the care).

Following the yellow daffodils, heralds of Brussels spring, there was a fascinating explosion of cherry and plum blossoms, and gradually all kinds of flowers. All the trees started to turn green, starting with the chestnuts of the wonderful Tervuren promenade, where he had become accustomed to tram 44, and continuing with the beeches of "Soignes" and finally, the more reluctant, the noble oaks. But the most fascinating part of that prolonged spring in central Europe was the beechwood fields flooded with wild purple hyacinths forming magical carpets that seemed to be painted by Cézanne.

* How are you, Moyes? How are your studies and life going?
* Well, Thanda. Already preparing for the International Baccalaureate exams. After that, I'll go to London to study economics, and that way, I'll let my moms have their own universe without being so focused on me. I also need it to grow as a person.
* I understand you very well, Moyes. I have always felt a deep love for my parents, but to grow, reinvent ourselves without expectations from anyone, we must follow our own paths.
* And tell me, what are your impressions of these first six months?
* Well, Moyes, to be honest, this Europe, echoing the cry of the Jordanian king calling for his daughter abducted by Zeus and taken towards the dark horizon to the north, has a mysterious soul with many shadows. It is the cradle of the Greek classics and their first ideas of democracy in the agora, the fascinating art and brave science of the Renaissance, the printing press, the French revolution of equality, and then the industrial source of all the comforts of today. But it was also the cradle of the crusades, the inquisition, colonialism, slavery, the great wars, and the thousands of shipwrecked drowned in its Mediterranean Sea, rejected to death by a Europe wary of sharing its privileges. Humanity, especially through the monotheistic Mediterranean religions, is imbued with its supposed superiority over other expressions of life. And Europe always breathes airs of owning the true religion and superior wisdom, and based on these myths, constructs its hierarchies, nations, and empires. Revealing that Zeus gave Europe a bronze statue, Talos, which chased and burned anyone trying to enter its domains.
* And what do you think of the European Union, Thanda?
* In my opinion, after hosting the two cruelest wars since the Middle Ages, the European Union was surprisingly established just five years after the Nazi surrender. Such a rapid reconciliation had never happened in history after such terrible violence. I believe there was a sense of shared destiny. In fact, the idea of a united Europe in brotherhood and peace came from a century earlier, from the French romantic writer and republican politician Victor Hugo, who proposed the 'United States of Europe' at the international peace congress a hundred years before. It was in the mid-19th century, in the heat of the wave of European revolutions that ended most of the absolute monarchies on the continent. Those libertarian outbreaks lasted little, and authoritarianism, once hereditary, transformed into new forms of oppression by those, like Napoleon and Hitler, chosen by the people. It is almost miraculous that, since the founding of the European Union, almost at the same time as the United Nations, there has been peace, the shameful colonies in Africa and Asia have gained independence, democracies without dictators have been maintained, and we have grown into a social model based on tax redistribution that guarantees universal health and education. That's why I'm here, Moyes, believing in a Europe that, if it truly defends universal human rights, will have to dissolve its borders, share with historically marginalized peoples, and defend a United Nations that truly upholds those rights. Additionally, there is the increasingly clear challenge of ending the era of oil by returning to nature. In alliance with Jonay and Aimsa in New York and with our beautiful family in Ukuzwana and Gomera, I want to contribute from here to a better world. They will call you utopian for all of this. I suppose it's not easy to defend these ideas within that system of powers and interests.
* That's right, Moyes. When they call me utopian, I consider it a stimulus to keep being one. You know it was Thomas More who, almost five hundred years ago, dared to describe what until then was only thought, with the threat of eternal fire, to exist in the paradise of the monotheistic religions that dominated and still dominate this part of the world, and whose prophets compose your name. He described it as a place of perfect harmony without the need for laws. Back then, there was no awareness that this harmony must include other forms of life.
* What happened to that good idea of utopia?
* Well, halfway between More's time and our present, in the late 18th century, the Frenchman Fourier and the Englishman Owen promoted the concept of libertarian socialism, in which they thought that social justice would come from the example of small communities in harmony. If you add to that the concept of natural harmony with Gaia, Pachamama, those ideas are now embodied by the network of spiritual eco-villages that Aimsa in New York is so strongly defending.
* Did the idea of utopian socialism succeed?
* No, within the International Workingmen's Association, the libertarian trade union movement that allied with the romantic revolutions of that century, Marx opposed it, scorned it by calling it "utopian," and promoted the idea that to subdue the power of capital, a revolution was needed in which the proletariat would defeat the oppressive bourgeoisie owning the means of production. I think that concept came from the impossibility of not thinking in terms of the Nation-State.
* But Marxism failed in Europe, didn't it?
* Well, in my view, with its confrontational attitude, it polarized the world between communism and capitalism, both hierarchical, alienating to the system, and alienating to human beings. Europe has tried, from the social security of the German Bismarck, the English Lord Beveridge's national health system, to the Nordic social democracies, an intermediate social model that is the one that today comes closest to social justice and respect for human rights. But it still relies on nationalisms and borders, alienated masses, and ecological destruction.
* Well, excuse me, Moyes. I talk too much. Perhaps because of my great confusion, to justify my role within this power hierarchy. In essence, I am an anarchist, like my maternal grandfather, and if I'm here, it should be with the strategy of contributing to all this changing, dissolving borders, ending the power of capital, and returning to nature.
* Let's toast to that, Thanda.

They clinked their glasses of cherry kriek and walked towards the African museum.

They felt pain seeing that exhibition of European oppression of Africa. Moyes, very sensitive to the history of slavery due to his African origin and the drama suffered by his mother, had read "King Leopold's Ghost" and explained the shameful meaning of that museum with supposed ethnographic and natural educational objectives.

* Thanda, it hurts me to enter this exhibition of terror, but it is necessary to know the history. At the end of the 19th century, after the Berlin Conference where the main European powers divided the African continent into their colonies, Leopold II turned the immense Congo Basin, the African Amazon, into a private field of forced labor and indescribable cruelty. Driven by the desire to exploit its rubber, minerals, and ivory riches, he ended the lives of over ten million Africans. Little is said about it here. In fact, that genocidal king triumphantly exhibited the display of his possessions here, to the acclaim of Belgians and the world, including preserved bodies of native Congolese.
* It's horrible, Moyes, no less than the massacres of the other European powers in their colonial, exploitative, and "evangelizing" ambitions worldwide. As Europeans, we must, in our relationship with the rest of the world, *feel and express forgiveness and humility*.

# The penultimate battle, Nampula. Mozambique, November 2004

When Thanda was a child, his father went to work on the island of Gran Canaria. Thanda was barely entering adolescence. He befriended a neighbor his age, Raimundo. In their summer adventures through the streets of Las Palmas, he had his first kiss with a girl. Later, Thanda and his family emigrated to Holland due to his father's job.

One day, his mother told him that Raimundo had had an accident. It took him a while to find out the truth, that Raimundo had taken his own life because his increasingly uninhibited homosexuality and effeminacy exasperated his father. That tragedy marked the life of that beautiful family forever.

Raimundo's sister, Maria Jesús, entered the convent of the Servants of Mary, near Los Arenales, at only fifteen years old. After a period of seclusion, she was assigned to teach religion in a school in Toledo. Upon learning that Thanda was working as a doctor on a mission in Africa, she wrote to him. They maintained a correspondence that grew in intimacy. Maria Jesús told him about the last ten years since her brother's suicide. She spoke of her vocation, seeking peace in faith and dedicating herself to the poorest. She confided that she felt trapped teaching girls from high-class families in a religious private school.

Thanda sent her "Illusions" and simply asked, "Are you happy?" and told her, "That is your only commandment, Maria Jesús." When Thanda returned from Zimbabwe to Spain, they met in Madrid. Maria Jesús confessed that she wanted to leave her religious life but was afraid of the outside world and didn't know if she would adapt and want to return to the convent. It was a common doubt, and nuns in this dilemma usually asked for a year outside the convent, choosing a "tutor" trusted by the Mother Superior, to care for and ensure her modest life during that time. In this way, with a positive report from the tutor, they could re-enter the convent without the whole process of taking new vows. It was, in labor terms, like a "leave of absence." Maria Jesús had developed great trust and complicity of ideas with Thanda and asked him to be her "tutor."

Thanda gladly accepted, with the memory of pain and, at the same time, tenderness for Raimundo. He encouraged her to work in a Caritas shelter for homeless women. She enjoyed her dedication but couldn't tolerate life without monastic order. She decided to return to the convent. Thanda explained to the Mother Superior Maria Jesús's vocation to serve the poorest, something she didn't dare say, appearing arrogant by disregarding other necessary tasks in the order, such as private schools that generated profits to finance their missions.

That same year, she was assigned to a convent in Nampula, northern Mozambique.In the subsequent letters, then through email, there was indeed passion for her life and work there. Interestingly, it was Thanda who, from Brussels, felt the longing for Ukuzwana at that time.

In an email message in August 2004, Maria Jesús confided to Thanda that she witnessed how five children from her convent's neighborhood were deceived by a white man and got into his SUV. One of them managed to escape. They knew nothing about the others. A few months earlier, they used to attend to eighty street children in the convent's dining hall and orphanage Mater Dei, and now barely ten came. In recent days, they had found the bodies of children missing some of their organs. Thanda explained the situation to Buhleve and Haka, victim and fighter against child trafficking in Zimbabwe and South Africa, and they contacted Sister Maria Jesús in Nampula.

Since returning from his last trip helping Fernando expose the diamond and arms trafficking that bled Sierra Leone, Haka lived peacefully with Helen between Bulawayo and Ukuzwana. He traveled to communities in the Sibithanda network and through the Anwele Foundation, promoting the idea of spiritual eco-villages in Zimbabwe. He already spoke Ndebele almost like a native, enjoyed singing in Zulu choirs, and was writing an essay on "consciousness and violence" that he hoped would contribute to the end of ETA's armed struggle. Thanda had introduced him to Pascual, and both reflected on the pain caused by ETA's structured violence, despite its legitimate libertarian reasons.

Haka was already seventy-five years old, limped ostensibly on his right leg due to hip osteoarthritis, and had lost sight, agility of calculation, and memory. He spent frequent sleepless nights thinking about children still victims of prostitution, child soldiers, enslaved workers, beggars, forced marriages, or even, as he remembered from South Africa, children sacrificed for their organs for business, still unpunished in the world.

Haka told Helen about it, and he spoke with his adopted daughter, Buhleve, now the doctor in charge of the mission hospital in Ukuzwana. Since Buhleve managed to extract the pain from the night they stole her innocence, she openly talked about it with Haka and Patxi. She felt that, in addition to dedicating herself to the health of her Ndebele brothers, she had to fight against the roots of evil that Haka had so bravely exposed in the last fifteen years.

* Salibonani umkasana wami (we see you - Ndebele greeting -, my daughter).
* Salibonani baba wami (my father).
* You have been a doctor here for almost two years, and everyone loves you dearly, daughter. They admire your serene generosity. They call you "ulitula": the one who calms us...
* Yes, after Jonay, ulibona, and Juan, thandabantu, ulilapha... I am one more in this big family, father, and without your courage, my baba sibindi, I wouldn't be here today.
* I would risk my life every day to bring back smiles of light like yours.
* But you have already fought a lot, father. You deserve to rest, stroll through Matopos, enjoy your home with Helen, spend beautiful evenings here on the porch of your brother Patxi's house.
* I can't, daughter. My nature is to fight for what I believe is just; it's what gives me a reason to live. I have something to tell you about that.
* Tell me, baba.
* A friend of Thanda, who is a nun in Mozambique, wrote to me telling me that children have been disappearing from their orphanage, and they find bodies without organs. I want to go help them, Buhleve. Since she told me about it a week ago, I can't sleep.
* I understand, and I admire you for it, father. I won't insist that "you're too old for adventures," which I'm sure everyone tells you. But I want to ask you something:
* Tell me, daughter.
* I want to go with you. It is my duty to do for other children what you did for me and accompany you in this new fight.

Buhleve knew it could be her father's last battle; she wanted to be by his side, learn from his generous courage, and draw inspiration from him for a cause that rescued her fifteen years ago and revived her life and dreams.

She spoke with the Cuban doctors now working at the Brunapeg hospital. At that time, Cuba had almost fifty thousand health workers in the world's most remote corners, where no one else went. One in every three Cuban doctors worked abroad, and more than two in every three had completed at least a four-year mission in a distant country. During their work, they received a portion of their salary from the Cuban government, and the rest of what countries paid for medical services went to help health expenses in Cuba, economically strangled by the U.S. embargo.

Buhleve had updated the "J Gray Health Volunteer Manual," and now, with all the information on AIDS treatments and the possibilities of telemedicine, it had been published by the Sibithanda publishing house and was called "Where There Is No Specialist." The eighty Cuban doctors, who met every three months in Harare and Bulawayo, took turns with the four copies Buhleve had gifted them. One of the Cubans from Brunapeg, Elias, offered to replace Buhleve in Ukuzwana while she accompanied her father.

Haka kept the old Toyota BJ40 in the garage of his house on Coglan Avenue in Bulawayo. It seemed to be waiting for a new adventure. He fixed the water pump, changed the head gasket, removed the thermostat, useless in the arid heat of the southern summer. He packed his backpack with the diagram and relationship notebook, flashlight, first aid kit, dry food kit, and his sleeping bag. Times had progressed, and this time he also carried a telephoto camera, a water filter designed by his nephew Joseph, a portable radio, and an English-Portuguese dictionary. He also brought a mobile phone and a laptop.

He wondered if he should take the Makarov that had been stored for over ten years. The image of Buhleve threatened at his side came to mind, and without hesitation, he tucked it into a hidden compartment in his backpack and prepared a concealed space under the car. Buhleve packed her backpack and brought her violin.

At the end of October, Haka and Buhleve set out from Bulawayo towards Harare, and six hours later, they continued towards the Chimanimani Mountains. There, they stayed at a mountain climbers and adventurers' hostel called "The Heaven's Lodge," where they slept in a wooden cabin, and Buhleve played the violin. It was an unforgettable night where they talked about life, father, and daughter, and felt the magic of their intertwined destinies. Haka was an example of courage and commitment for Buhleve, and Buhleve was a demonstration of how love and beauty overcome the dark pits of cruelty and selfishness.

The next morning, they continued their journey to Mutare, crossed the border, headed towards Beira, and then turned north towards Nampula. In total, it was a three-day journey. They arrived at the Mater Dei convent, a simple place on the outskirts of Nampula, surrounded by seventy hectares of fields and crops with an octagonal church in the center, a kitchen, a guesthouse, the residence of the sisters, the novices' hostel, and the school for the children. They were welcomed by Sister María Jesús and their Mother Superior, Sister Juliana.

After the welcoming greetings and settling into a room in the convent, Sister Juliana told them her story. She had arrived in Mozambique in the seventies, just before independence, and fell in love with the simple people. They established a convent for contemplative life and charity, living off what they received from their rice plantations, fruit trees, chickens, and a few cows.

Over the years, almost thirty women joined the religious life of that courageous convent. She said it amazed her to see how "everyone took care of everyone in the villages, and children moved freely like birds." Shortly after independence, the war intensified, bringing with it all forms of violence. This, along with AIDS, caused the number of orphans to explode. Two years ago, they saw the first mutilated body of a girl in their courtyard. They continued to find bodies, almost all between twelve and fifteen years old.

She managed to contact the country's attorney general, a former FRELIMO guerrilla very honest, who advised her "not to deal with the police," very corrupt and possibly involved in trafficking. They had made a list of children who had been deceived into getting into a car or simply kidnapped by force. At night, they noticed landings and takeoffs of planes on a vast plain behind the convent.

They suspected a white couple living on a large estate in the area, as there were several witnesses and relatives who identified the white car in which they took the children, and others saw it entering that estate. They even took in a child who managed to escape from there. They had received anonymous letters and threatening calls.

Juliana asked Haka not to drive the white BJ40 in the area as a rumor had spread that "a white man in a white car" was kidnapping children, and the traffickers would likely try to accuse Haka and the nuns. They provided him with a scooter for his investigations.

While Buhleve examined the health of the fifty children housed in the convent and asked each one and their families about the disappearance of their friends, Haka would try to learn more about the estate and its owners. As happened in South Africa fifteen years ago, he wrote a "plan B" in case he himself disappeared or missed the half-hourly check-in message to Buhleve via mobile phone. In this plan B, there were letters addressed to Amnesty International, the Spanish Ambassador, the European Parliament, the executive director of UNICEF, and the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Haka posed as a Basque farmer looking for land and discreetly inquired at a select restaurant, almost exclusively frequented by white farmers and businessmen. After a couple of beers, a talkative Portuguese man told him that the owners of the suspicious estate had come from Zimbabwe, named Gary O'Connor, an Irishman, and his wife, Tania Skytte, a Dane. They bought 300 hectares from the government and planned to develop a poultry farm.

Buhleve learned from an aunt of one of the orphaned children at the convent, who cleaned on that farm, that "whites" constantly came there to play golf, ride horses, and, above all, practice martial arts. When questioning the children about their missing friends, they would say: "nao sei, soy con hombres brancos, que le pegaron (cogieron) en seus carros (coches)" - "I don't know, I'm with white men who took (picked) me up in their cars."

While Haka was investigating the estate, a young man arrived with a ten-year-old child and asked the entrance guards about the "branco" for the "traffic." He had mistaken the neighboring estate. Buhleve asked him who had given him that information but did not reveal who. What he did disclose is that he was told he could sell the child there for eighty million meticais (the local currency, equivalent to about three thousand euros).

When Haka returned, he found a girl about twelve years old crying and lost on the road. Between sobs, she told Haka that she had been taken there by some men in a "white car" and managed to escape when her captors were not paying attention.

That night, an Italian nun, Sister Doraci, who had also been investigating cases of missing children and mutilated corpses for some time, came to dinner at the convent. She said she had reported these cases to the police and the governor of Nampula, Abdul Razak, but no investigation had been carried out. Another woman from the convent, Maria Elilda, a lay Brazilian missionary, said she had also been investigating and had been the target of several ambushes but managed to escape.

During dinner, Haka presented his strategy:

Juliana, Doraci, Elilda, we need to provide the authorities and the world with proof of what is happening. So far, we only have mutilated bodies, but no evidence of who is behind it. I suspect they are linked to a network I fought against a few years ago in South Africa. I'm sure that, just like there, they have connections with UNITA, mercenary groups, and trafficking in arms and diamonds. Here, it's not UNITA, but RENAMO.

That night, Haka prepared a light backpack with a flashlight, his mobile phone, the camera, and, in a double bag, hoping not to use it, the Makarov. He walked through the fields to the O'Connor's estate and jumped over the fence at the south front. He walked stealthily to the house, through the corridors between the long poultry yards, and could see through the kitchen windows. There was an open window, and he could hear a conversation between the O'Connor couple. They lamented the accusations from the sisters and people in the town, of being organ traffickers.

At that moment, he heard the engine of a plane landing about four hundred meters away. He approached stealthily and saw a white Range Rover approaching the runway while a Cessna 182 landed. He saw a man get out of the car with five children, and they boarded the plane. With his camera and telephoto lens, he managed to take photos, although the night was already very dark. He took pictures of the license plate of the SUV and the plane.

Through the sisters, he consulted with a local NGO that, together with the bishop, found out the name of the SUV's owner. He was a South African, Martin Witwater, a known former RENAMO guerrilla, now living openly in Nampula. The registration of the plane was South African, and he sent the data to Nadine in Johannesburg to investigate in the civil aviation records.

While they left photos and data to request an investigation by the attorney general into Martin, Haka and Buhleve decided to follow the trail to South Africa. They were in contact with Nadine, who informed them that the plane was owned by a company called "Fly with us," which rented piloted flights and had its base in Durban. They were more than five days and 2,000 km away. It was five days of confidences and complicity, also with humor and disagreements, but tremendous father-daughter affection. Haka's back and shoulder hurt, and Buhleve convinced him that she would drive. Nadine could not find out from "Fly with us" which clients had rented the service of the specific plane, as they responded that such information was confidential.

As they approached Durban, they went to the airport where "Fly with us" had its hangar. They waited for the office to close, and Haka infiltrated through a half-open window and took photos of the service book. On November 4th, the plane traveled from Nampula to Durban. Customer: Kwazulu Natal hospital, Netcare company. Buhleve knew a former colleague and friend, surgeon Nancy, who was now working in that Kwazulu hospital, then a resident in Johannesburg. They called her and told her about the suspicion. She joined them.

They entered the hospital, now at night, and Nancy managed to get surgical scrubs. They went to the kidney transplant unit. They found the five teenagers from Mozambique, three boys and two girls, in two different rooms, sedated and with medical histories that seemed to have Israeli surnames. Haka stayed in the room with the three boys, waiting for them to wake up. Meanwhile, Nancy asked at the control for the list of operations for the following week. It included five kidney transplants. All the recipient patients had Jewish names, the same ones falsely attributed to the children. They took photos of the histories and the children. In the recipients' records, each one had a note with the letterhead of the organization "Kav LaChayim."

They called Nadine and gave her all the data. This time, they didn't give the police a chance to protect the powerful businessmen. They sent an anonymous article to international press agencies, the European Parliament, UNICEF, and the United Nations Human Rights Commission.

Haka reviewed all his notes from the rescue in South Africa. The loose ends of Gordon and Perry, who fled to Israel, remained. He alerted his friend Aaron in Tel Aviv and asked him to investigate those names again in connection with Kav LaChayim. Meanwhile, they began the long journey back home from Durban to Bulawayo. As night fell, they noticed that the engine's cooling water started to heat up. The speed decreased, and after a few kilometers, profuse steam emerged from the hood of the old BJ40. Using a flashlight, they checked the engine and confirmed that there was no water leakage from the radiator or the circuit. Haka suspected that the water pump was damaged and needed repair to prevent the cylinder head from burning.

They were in the heart of the Orange Free State, the most racist state in the most racist country in the world, despite the official end of apartheid. It was mainly populated by Afrikaners descended from Dutch Hottentots who had been exploiting the land and Africans as farmers for four centuries. The racism was deeply rooted and endorsed by their Dutch Reformed Church. In the next two hours, about twenty pickups passed them, slowing down as they approached, and upon seeing them, the drivers looked at them with disdain and accelerated. A couple of them shouted, "hog!" (pig!). They were aware of the Immorality Act, which prohibited interracial relationships during apartheid, and in some white communities, they still lived in the past, even though Mandela had been free for fifteen years. They might think, despite the age difference, of an immoral union. Haka felt anger, and after two hours, he stood in the middle of the road, forcing the next car to stop. A tall man got out threateningly and shouted in Afrikaans for him to move. Haka responded in English:

* We've been stranded for two hours, and no one stops. I'm traveling with my daughter back to Bulawayo. We just want you to take us to the nearest mechanic to arrange for the car to be towed, try to repair it tomorrow, and continue our journey.
* You're not welcome here. This is a Christian community, and we have our values.

Haka remembered Patxi, imagined what he would have said, and told him:

* Jesus started his life by taking refuge with his parents, rejected by the Pharisees. His message was about love for the needy. He wouldn't have let anyone spend the night in a ditch. I know you don't wish harm to anyone. It's in your power to take us to the mechanic's garage, and we won't bother you anymore.

Haka stepped aside. The man muttered, returned to the driver's seat, and made a contemptuous sign, indicating they could get in the back, among his tools and some sacks of corn. They arrived in town and stopped in front of an old Coca Cola factory that had been turned into a mechanic workshop. He didn't say goodbye or utter a word, as if afraid his fellow townspeople would see him contaminated by immorality. Possibly, he was heading straight to say his night prayers.

* They rang a bell at the door, and ten minutes later, a light came on, and a black man in his sixties, wearing a grease-stained blue overall, opened the door.
* Salibonani, Baba.

Haka greeted him in Zulu, very close to Ndebele.

* Yebo, Baba. Kunjani?

Haka explained the situation and the mistreatment they received. The man said his name was Ruddy and oversaw the workshop, owned, like everything else in the town, by racist Afrikaners. They went out with the tow truck to get the BJ40. On the way, Ruddy told them about his life in that town called Carel. He had emigrated from Orania, the town to the east, in the Northern Cape, where a whites-only place had been declared, racism without reservations in all its expression. At least, there they didn't even have enslaved workers. In Carel, he was offered a job as a mechanic, receiving a salary and a room in a loft above the garage. Every month, he went to see his wife and three daughters in Soweto, where they lived with her sister.

* Uyathaba laphia yini, ubudi wami? (Are you happy here, my brother?)

Haka asked him.

* What is happiness?

He replied, almost angrily.

* I work, eat, drink to forget, and sleep. I count the days to see my family, and I already have scars on my tongue from biting it and not responding to racist insults in this community. But I must work if I want to offer my daughters a different future than being maids in the manicured neighborhoods of Johannesburg.
* But is this the South Africa that defeated apartheid?
* That's right. After all of Mandela's speeches, the promises of the African National Congress, the plans for the Rainbow Nation. This is how we continue, brother: eighty percent of cultivated land belongs to the ten percent white population. Whites have salaries five times higher than us blacks, and the richest ten percent, almost all white, except for some leaders of the ANC, own ninety percent of the wealth. They say it will take time to rebuild a just country. - I don't see it progressing. I know I'll die poor and subjected to the powerful, whites, and blacks. But yes, Haka, I'm happy when I think of my wife and daughters and, in my way, counting the days to go see them and know that they are growing up safely. One wants to be a doctor, another an artist, and the third a lawyer. I'll give my life for those smiles of hope.

The next day, they fixed the water pump together and set off on their journey. Ruddy asked his boss to advance his monthly weekend, allowing him to travel with Haka and Buhleve to Johannesburg.

Buhleve observed her father, admiring his courage. She knew that something from her biological father, whom she barely remembered from her life in Soweto, and from her mother, had infiltrated the souls of Haka and Helen. Haka insisted on driving; he felt better after his favorite massage the night before bed. Buhleve had danced with bare feet, making gentle movements along his paravertebral muscles on his tense back. She noticed him while he drove: he had a very dense white beard and a mane that ended in curls at his nape. He wore a gray beret that partially covered a forehead marked by lines from countless adventures and struggles. Beneath the bushy eyebrows, his eyes had lush eyelashes, green irises, and a pronounced groove under the lower eyelid that revealed more about his joy or sadness than his lips. The flat nose, like all Belokis, framed a linear, powerful yet gentle face, as if breathing nobility. Buhleve admired and loved that human being with all her soul. Her heart skipped a beat when she noticed a slight tremor in his right hand.

They arrived in Soweto and dropped Ruddi off at his house, watching him embrace his wife and daughters with tremendous happiness from the car. They preferred to decline his invitation for lunch to preserve their privacy and headed to dinner with Kate and Nadine. After the emotional hugs, Nadine showed them a magazine with an article about organ trafficking in South Africa titled "Terror Replicates." They discussed the latest battle:

* Some remnants of the "New Dawn" remain, Haka

Nadine said.

* It was to be expected, Nadine. Gordon and Perry still control businesses from Israel. Did Aaron write to you?

Haka replied.

* Yes, but he hasn't found any leads yet. And all the information on Kav LaChayim is sealed. I know it's protected by the Mossad. I need to investigate the Mossad's connections with RENAMO, and from there, their ties to the organ, drug, ivory, and arms trafficking network, and their protection by Executive Outcomes.
* It's like a seven-headed hydra; cut one head off, and more grow, in disparate places, always sowing terror in all its forms.
* But, Haka, you are always hope. Today, those children from Mozambique are returning to their families, and Frelimo and the African National Congress have created an "investigation commission."
* Did you write to Thanda and Beatriz?
* Yes, Beatriz is settling in with Meimuna in New Delhi, but Thanda is helping us a lot. She suggested that we send the information about what happened to a Portuguese MEP, José Rivera de Castro, who asked a parliamentary question to the commission and ended up in Thanda's office. Together, they are drafting regulations approved to end international organ trafficking and proposing a meeting in Maputo to the European Council to engage all governments in preventing and prosecuting all trafficking. We are already in contact with Alicia Mabote, president of the Mozambique Human Rights League, to organize that meeting and the "Maputo Declaration." They want you, Haka, to speak about your fight against these networks many years ago.
* I'd rather not speak, Nadine. I don't like those meetings with so many words from people in their comfortable hotels. Besides, I would be easily identified and have less freedom to continue fighting.
* But my soul brother - said Nadine, taking his hand, which Buhleve still felt trembling slightly - you are over seventy, and it's time to let the young ones take the physical side of the fight, and you write, tell, propose, and make the world shudder with your stories. Remember this, Haka: writing the truth can be as courageous as rescuing children from abduction.
* I'll think about it, Nadine. I feel sweetly harassed by these three beauties, my friends in the struggle, and my beautiful princess. But if I speak, it will be with a balaclava!
* He wasn't joking. He fell into thought. Something clouded his mind.
* But before that, I would like to tie up some loose ends. RENAMO has a structure like UNITA and depends on economic and military support from apartheid in South Africa, still latent in many corners of the police, the army, the secret services, and, above all, the connections between De Beers, diamond and arms trafficking, and mercenary groups like Executive Outcomes. Buhleve, what is the name of the person who abused you, whose life you spared in return, and to whom you revealed the truth to his daughter?
* Joseph Smuts.

Since Buhleve revealed Smuts' identity to Nadine, Nadine had investigated and prepared, with friends from the African National Congress, now police commanders, a dossier on that person. He had been the commander of Battalion 32, dedicated to assassinating members of the African National Congress during apartheid. He was attributed to the murder of Joseph Biko.

Buhleve obtained the patient's address from her former hospital and saw that he was still attending oncology consultations. She knew that her father confronting the man who had cruelly robbed his daughter's innocence could unleash his anger. That night, Buhleve wrote a letter.

Mr. Smuts:

I am Buhleve Beloki. Twice in your life, our paths have crossed. The first was fifteen years ago when you abused my kidnapping and my virginity at Dasy's brothel. You tore away a part of my soul that has wandered in the darkness of pain ever since. Despite that, my father rescued me from that terror network trafficking orphans from Matabeleland for prostitution and organ transplants of people insensitive to the deepest pain, much like yourself. The second was two years ago. I attended to you in the emergency room at Charlotte Maxeke Hospital, diagnosed you with a perforated intestine, operated on you, and removed the tumor invading your intestines.You took my life. I saved yours.My soul is at peace because despite the pain, I have found happiness in loving others, especially those who suffer the most.I hold no grudge against you. I pity you. The harm you have done must be weighing heavily on your soul.Now, I work in a mission hospital in Matabeleland. My father and I learned about another child trafficking network, this time in Mozambique, and we have discovered its connection to the Netcare hospital company, former RENAMO guerrillas, and a secret network of clandestine transplants in Israel. All of this requires armed cover, and we are aware of the past connections between Battalion 32, SWAPOL, RENAMO, and Executive Outcomes.This is the moment when you can redeem the pain you have caused by revealing these connections that are still present, sheltering this and possibly other terror networks.If you decide to do so, for the sake of your soul's peace, leave a note with Dr. Rispel, your oncologist. She will know how to get the information to me, and we can put an end to so much pain. Even if it's hard to believe, I wish that your cancer treatment cures you and that you find peace in the love of your family,

Buhleve Beloki

For a moment, Buhleve thought about blackmailing him by threatening to expose his acts to the press if he didn't confess the connections of the network. However, she believed that the deepest and brightest way to eradicate such evil was through repentance and love rather than violence and fear. She tried to combine the merciful inspiration of her uncle Patxi and the courage of her father Haka.

It was time to go home; they had been away for a month and traveled fifteen thousand kilometers in the BJ40. They returned with the peace of having dismantled another terror plot. But above all, it had been a wonderful month of complicity between father and daughter, fighting for a noble cause. The same cause that rescued Buhleve halfway through her lived life and brought her from darkness to a family, a network, and dreams of light.

# Stepping down the human pedestal. South Dakota, March 2005

NOUR WAS EIGHT YEARS OLD, attending elementary school in Brooklyn, enjoying walks in the parks, her world of poetry, music and dreams with her parents, computer contact with her grandparents in Gomera and her large family in Ukuzwana, where she had returned two summers (from the north) with Jonay to meet her soul brothers, Adam and Unai. He spoke English at school, Spanish with his father and Hindi with his mother. She enjoyed drawing, dancing capoeira in a neighborhood dance group, learning the violin with his father and joining his mother in yoga.

She had developed a highly bonded relationship with Sam, the Labrador retriever they cared for. Also, with the cats in the street, the birds in the trees and the squirrels in the park. Jonay watched her in fascination as she sat across from Sam, at the same height as him, looked at him softly and shyly, almost sideways, expressed with her body an attitude of discreet interest and made subtle sounds. Sam was doing the same. After a while they would talk with looks and sounds. She would end these "conversations" by saying to her parents: "Sam asks when James is coming back" or "Sam says she dreamt about birds" or "Sam would like to go for a walk by the river". Although Nour had a rich imagination and even remembered and recounted her dreams, she didn't say anything she didn't really think or feel, an attitude inherited or inspired from her mother.

A classmate of Aimsa's at UNICEF named Judit had a family cabin in the "black mountains" of South Dakota. She offered it to her for weekends until spring. They went by train and took their three bikes. They arrived at the Hill City station and there took the original 1880's train to the old Keystone Branch, which served a gold mine. From there they rode their bikes to a log cabin facing a beautiful lake. Sam followed them running. It was March and there were still remnants of snow in the tops of the pines. They entered the cabin, made of logs, and lit the fireplace. The beds were on a loft. It was already dusk, and they went to a pier on the lake. Watching the sunset, they shook hands and felt a bond with each other and with that beautiful display of nature.

At that moment the Kyoto protocol was beginning to be implemented, after the voluntary, insufficient, and non-binding commitments made seven years earlier at the meeting that Aimsa attended representing, for the first time, the network of spiritual eco-villages.

- Aimsa, I heard that the Kyoto protocol starts to be implemented this month. What do you think will happen?

- I am pessimistic, Jonay. The commitments were finally at one tenth of what would be needed to avoid global warming with no return. Seven years later, the United States has not ratified. Neither has Afghanistan, ravaged by American bombs in revenge for the attacks on the twin towers, or Sudan, amid war and splitting in two.

- This country is chained to a corrupt power system and its sense of exceptionalism, of being chosen as a superior nation, of arrogant moralism mixed with religious radicalism, makes it shamelessly invade the world with military bases, spies, and their polluting fumes without any shame to reject almost any international agreement.

- South Sudan and the United States are also the only countries that have not ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. After all, there is a certain consistency in this: they are robbed of their future by pollution and prevented from claiming it by denying their rights.

Nour, accustomed to hearing her parents talk about the world and global policies, ensued:

- You can't do that.

- What do you mean, Nour?

- Neither steal our future nor prevent us from speaking.

- Sure, daughter, that's why mommy is fighting so hard for a cleaner world without the powers of people who think they are superior and impose their thoughts and privileges.

- And where are the children? When are we going to decide about our future?

- You are right, Nour," said Aimsa. You have to talk and dream your world. I promise you that from now on when I talk about your rights or your future in any place or meeting, I will ask: Where are they? And when they tell me who, I will answer, the children, the inhabitants of the future you intend to decide, right, daughter?

A few days ago, Jonay had received an email message from Thanda. After being involved in the fight against child trafficking that Haka and Buhleve had unveiled in Mozambique, he had been entrusted with the coordination of the proposal for a policy on children's rights in European cooperation.

- Nour, daughter, do you remember Thanda?

- Sure, Angeles and Daniela's father.

-Well, after his time in Ukuzwana he came back to Madrid and now he is in Brussels, preparing ideas for your right to own your future, youth parliaments. He would love to talk to you.

They went back to the hut with fallen branches and lit the fireplace. The three of them sat in front of the fire and Nour fell asleep in her mother's arms. Aimsa carried Nour to the cot. Sam followed her and lay down beside her. He would not leave her side. As Aimsa returned to the fireplace, she noticed Jonay in thought.

- What's the matter, honey?

He used that word as if to accentuate it. They had been together for twelve years, two thirds of them in Ukuzwana and the other third of them in New York, two ends of the world. From the humble desert to the bustle of plenty. From asking every neighbor, farmer, and patient for a good while as they greeted each other about life, family, crops, ancestors, to crossing paths in the city with thousands of stray glances every day. Aimsa feared that Jonay was sinking his soul into the city.

- She thought of nature. How simple and how beautiful, how inert, and how powerful. I think cities must be disappearing, Aimsa, I imagine them with vegetation covering their asphalt, sidewalks and facades of cement and glass. It is only with eco-villages that we will recover our glances. I was thinking of crossing each other every day in the street, the subway, the crowds of the city, and not looking, and if you look, not greeting, and if you greet, a quick nod of the head, and if you talk, a hurried how are you? with the tacit agreement that the other says "very well" and does not tell you his problems because, even if you have asked him, they do not interest you, and if they interest you, you do not have time, and if you had time, you do not want responsibilities.

- That's right, honey. I will fight hard for the eco-village network so that they can inspire the process after Kyoto and that of the millennium declaration, which still cannot understand the world without constant growth, endless trade, and endless urbanization. Already much of the human and animal food is made with computer-operated transgenic monoculture harvesters, fewer and fewer farmers and almost all of humanity in the cities consuming.

He stared at him. Jonay's gaze was lost in the fire.

- Jonay, look at me.

Jonay looked away from the fire and looked at Aimsa with a smile. She was already forty-two years old, gray hair was glimpsed in her jet hair, like silver glitter, her complexion was wheat and felt soft even without touching, her gaze was penetrating but gentle at the same time, a slight Mona Lisa smile gave to such a beautiful face a shade between enigmatic and serene. It called to embrace her and so she did.

Nothing was said. Aimsa knew that Jonay left part of his life in the city, a black hole of souls, without even connection to any known multiverse.

When the next day dawned, Jonay and Aimsa went for a walk in the woods. They had left a note for Nour: "Wait for us resting, princess, let's go for forest treasures, Sam protects you". They returned with berries for breakfast and some beautiful birch and oak branches to rub with their hands and bring out magical shapes and glitter as he remembered Tomas doing in El Cabrito as a child.

They approached from the back of the house, over a slight hill. About fifty yards down the hillside, they could see a sight they would never forget: Nour stood just outside the wooden porch, in her white nightgown, a blue scarf over her curly hair. Her almost sacred stillness conveyed to Jonay and Aimsa a message of veneration and almost as if by telepathy they stood still gazing at the scene.

About ten yards away was a wild black Mustang mare. She was shining in the still almost horizontal morning rays. She was just as motionless as Nour. Their gazes were as if magnetized by a force that felt very deep even from afar. After a few minutes that seemed to concentrate the eternal, the mare began to slowly lower her head, just as Nour did. It was a mixture of respectful reverence and submission to another's beauty. As Nour brought her two palms in front of her chest in Hindu greeting of Namaste, the mare stretched out her right foreleg and bent her left, as if also saluting with deep veneration. As she lowered her portentous head, Jonay saw that a white cross spot was revealed behind her profuse mane. At that moment the mare turned and galloped off toward the meadows east of the cabin.

Jonay and Aimsa held hands without saying anything. They went down stealthily, as if not to wake Nour from his trance. When they were about ten meters away Nour turned around and looked at them. She was crying. But his face was one of deep peace. One would say in a state fuller than happiness. They came closer and the three of them gave each other a big hug.

Jonay said:

- Two beautiful souls have connected without the trappings of words, without the prejudices of humans, without anything but the energy of their souls. It seems to me, Nour, that you are going to make many friends in the wonderful animal world.

- He told me he'll be back tomorrow.

The three of them spent a day walking with Sam. They made a hut in the forest out of dry branches. They reminisced about talking with Patxi, adventures with Adam and Nour, and Haka's brave fights. They wondered how the grandparents would be in Gomera, Rob in Berkeley, Alin in Bombay, Thanda in Brussels and so many beautiful souls all over the world. As they talked about it, Nour asked:

- How many good people in the world are there?

- I think everyone, Nour. All people are good inside," Aimsa answered.

- What about those who hurt Buhleve and the children of Matabeleland?

- I think there are some people, not many, who have received too little love. When you receive little love, few hugs, caresses, looks of tenderness, words of affection, your heart feels loneliness and sadness. A sad heart is afraid. Fear that no one will help him if there is any risk, fear that no one will share with him and he will suffer from need and, above all, this I think, fear of leaving this world without having been able to love, even more necessary than being loved.

- And why, if they are afraid, do they become bad?

- It is not that they become evil, daughter. It is that their minds, without even realizing it, think that if they act aggressively they will protect themselves from risks, that they will have what they need and that they will provoke respect and submission in others. But they are wrong, all this leads to more fear, a spiral that does not end.

- So, what can we do?

That was often the last question in Nour's conversation with his parents. Then Jonay answered.

- First, don't let them hurt you, or let them hurt others. Like Haka did in Egoli, remember, Nour? Second, live by knowing others, like the grandparents do, Patxi and NoLwasi and the eco villages that mami represents in New York. Because when you know others, you understand them, and then you can truly love them as they are, not as you want them to be. And third, always offer love and tenderness to everyone you meet in life, especially to those who don't offer it to you: they are the ones who need it most.

- Do you love me, daddy, mommy?

- Of course! -said Jonay and Aimsa at the same time laughing.

- Well, then you must understand me a little more. There is something I want to tell you:

- What is it, honey? You can always tell us everything.

- I don't want to go to school. I don't like what they teach. Almost everything talks about man as superior to other living beings. I already know how to read; I want to explore life on my own.

Jonay and Amisa remained thoughtful and looked at her tenderly. They had been looking for "free education" schools based on the children's passions and talents, not on a pre-established syllabus. The nearest Waldorf schools were an hour's drive or subway ride away, and cost too much for what Aimsa earned from the United Nations allowance as a representative of the spiritual ecovillage network.

They walked back through the forest to the cabin and talked to Nour about his wish. Jonay told her:

- I think you are very brave and sincere in saying so, daughter. Tell me, what is it that you don't like about what you are taught or how you are taught?

- I get bored. The teacher, Mr. Hoffmeir, is very bossy. He talks about religion, American history and eats meat. I don't believe in the things he says. Besides, I prefer adventures, like learning about the forest, animals, trips to Ukuzwana, gardening, painting at home, violin with daddy and world history with your stories, mommy.

Jonay and Aimsa looked at each other. Deep down they admired his bravery and knew that the system was prepared to teach and indoctrinate in ideas of competing among people and venerating the concept of homeland. It was based on making people believe that defending the privileges of the richest country in the world with weapons were ethical values, all mixed with Christianity and anthropocentrism. One of Jonay and Aimsa's favorite songs was Roger Waters' "Another Brick on the Wall". Coupled with the message of freedom of the soul that Nour was expressing and asking for, they had to consider very seriously what he was asking of them. Nour went a few meters ahead to climb a tree. She was wearing blue dungarees and a headscarf. His smile was the most beautiful light for Jonay and Aimsa. They could not let an imposed discipline or the fear that she was "not part of the system" cloud such a beautiful light. Aimsa told him:

- Let's talk to your teacher, daughter. You need the freedom to explore and learn from your own curiosity and passion. We will tell you about the experience of the eco village networks where children from all the villages learn with parents, from each other, and participate in community chores, see the stars, compose music, care for the sick, help build houses and work in their small gardens. How I wish I was living the eco village spirit and not just talking about it at the United Nations! And I feel bad that my two most beautiful souls, you two, are suffering the city life.

Jonay, he hastened to say:

- But we admire you so much, Mommy, don't we, Nour? You are defending very beautiful ideas, helping many people in the world, and fighting to make the world cleaner and fairer. Your work is very important, and we give you all our love to fight for that better world.

Seeing that her mother was looking at the ground thoughtfully, Nour told her:

- Sure, Mommy, don't worry, I can still go to school as long as we're still in New York.

The next morning, Jonay and Aimsa got up early again to go pick fruit from the forest. They talked about Nour's dilemma. Jonay said he could group children from the community to learn together in a different way, in the parks, on adventures, and dreaming of a world without borders and sharing in natural harmony. He would talk to parents in the neighborhood. She had heard of Waldorf education and could propose a school that would spark the imagination and fantasy of such beautiful, innocent souls, instead of embittering their hours with imposed concepts and "homework".

When they returned, Nour was again in front of the Mustang mare. They watched her again from afar, as if they were attending a magical ceremony. This time Nour approached little by little, until she was about two meters away. Aimsa had the reflex to go to protect her. A portly animal of more than three hundred kilos could hurt her if it raised its forelegs or even moved its powerful neck forcefully. Nour barely reached the root of her neck. Jonay whispered to her that he had better trust that magic. The mare listened to the whisper and galloped off. The next day the magical scene was repeated. That time Jonay and Aimsa stayed far away and hidden behind the trees. This time Nour had pulled out a carrot and offered it to her. The mare lowered her head and very gently bit the carrot. It was a test of trust. Their gazes were locked. They remained like that, motionless and connected by their beautiful spirits for a long while. Her parents looked at her in wonder.

Such sensitivity was drowned within four walls and among rigid concepts and stories of power and hierarchies, flags, and labels in the education system, which, as Roger Waters rightly said, functioned as brick factories for the decaying wall of an unjust society. Nour was demonstrating a sensitivity for all life that did not fit into the dominant system of hierarchical and mythomaniacal anthropocentrism. He remembered a song his father liked to sing at the bonfire in El Cabrito: "Vincent" by Don McLean: "*This world was never meant for one as beautiful as you*".

# When truth unveils. tenderness, Gomera, September 2005

Martin walked up to the gangway of the Benchijigüa Ferry in the port of Los Cristianos and looked back to say goodbye to his mother Yolanda. She was 45 years old, with curly hair already snowed by a few gray hairs, beautiful honey-brown eyes and a clean look, although with shades of pain.

Martin had finished his degree in nutrition in La Laguna. He adored his mother. With a job as a baker and sometimes cleaning houses to supplement the low salary, she had had a hard life taking care of him as a single mother. She surrounded him with a magical world of tenderness, but with no family and hardly any friends. Martin was fascinated by nature and loved to walk to the top of Mount Teide, but his mother, for some reason he did not understand, never escorted him.

When he finished his degree, he started working at the headquarters of Unilever, a powerful multinational food and cleaning products company, to help his mother, who was already tired and had varicose veins in her legs from so many years of standing in front of the public. He studied the effects of trans fats in margarine, Unilever's flagship product, and warned of their damaging effects on the heart. He also gained access to information on how that company was making money by deforesting Indonesia to develop huge palm plantations to obtain palm oil for its food and cosmetic ingredients. He knew that this damage to human health and the health of the planet was unacceptable.

Hence, he went to talk to the manager of the Canary Islands office he worked for and was told that there was a department in London looking into these issues. He was developing ecological awareness, vegan and waste-free living and decided, for ethical reasons, to quit his job. He started volunteering for the "environmentalists without borders" network. He competed for a TED Talk talking about ecology and warning against the consumption of margarine. Martin discovered that it was censored by Unilever itself, which subsidized those conferences that hundreds of millions followed on the internet. He longed to shed her urban life.

Martin remembered Jonay well and, although he was very young, he evoked his visit to the eco-village of Tenderness. Martin was already twenty-four years old and was a shy young man, a bit shorter and thinner than usual. He had an elusive look, but a faint, sweet, almost constant smile. He had studied engineering but longed to get out of the city. Yolanda had told him often about the eco-villages and the Tenderness community. Martin was reading Aimsa's articles on the web and wrote to John and Umbela, who were delighted to hear from him. He tried to encourage his mother to go with him, but she told him she liked living in Santa Cruz better.

As a farewell, he invited her to one of the first vegetarian restaurants in Santa Cruz. Over dessert, Martin asked his mother:

- Mother, I've always wondered who my father would be, what he would be like now. I know it hurts you to talk about it, but I would appreciate it if you would tell me, it will help us both to heal that wound.

Taking his hand and looking him in the eyes, Yolanda said:

- You have the right son. Let's go home and I'll tell you.

They went back to their small, rented apartment and Yolanda prepared a tea and put a candle, an incense, and some music that they both liked very much: the soundtrack of Cinema Paradiso.

- Mother, all my life I have wondered who my father would be, what kind of values and cruelty he would have to abuse you and never be interested in you again. I have felt both anger and resentment, and the desire to find him and understand this painful emptiness in my life.

When he was a child, his mother had told him that his father had died in an accident, but he missed not having any pictures or knowing anything about his father's family. As he later became a rebellious adolescent, one night in a heated argument with his mother, he shouted at her to tell him who his father really was. His mother tearfully explained that she had been raped and never heard from him again. But she did not give him any more details. From then on Martin felt even more tenderness and commitment to take care of his mother, and he never asked her again.

- I'm sorry, son, that I kept this information from you. It was for the sake of not suffering and not making you suffer, but it is always necessary to know the truth to overcome the emptiness. Tomorrow, you fly to another world, and you must fly with your truth. You are a beautiful person, son, and I am the happiest woman in the world by your side, but I know that you must find your way.

-I hope I can join the community of Tenderness and that you will wisho come with me later, mother. That is my dream. Please tell me about it.

Yolanda finally told his son her life struggle :

Son, I was born and grew up in the house of my parents and paternal grandparents in San Antonio, on the island of Lanzarote. My father was a captain in the army, very right-wing, very strict and daily mass, like my mother. When I finished high school, I went with my best school mates to a party that one of them organized at her house. She had invited some friends she had met a few weeks before. After dancing to the music of Los Secretos, which we liked so much, one of the guys said he was inviting us to a hotel disco. I didn't like that disco atmosphere at all, but my friends insisted, telling me that it was a special occasion. The music was very loud and repetitive, everyone was jumping up and down like crazy. They invited me to a *Cuba libre* and I sipped it little by little as I almost never drank alcohol.

As I was feeling dizzy, I said I would leave then. One of the guys offered to drive me home. I remember falling asleep in the car. The next thing I remember was waking up in one hotel room. I was sure they had slipped sleeping pills in my drink, and I thought I must have been abused, son. I was afraid to tell my father because of what it would do to me and what it would do to those young men. In fact, I came home explaining that I had stayed at a classmate's house because it was so late, and I had no transportation. I talked to my friend, the one who introduced us to those boys and gave me the phone number of the one who offered to drive me home and whom, I was sure, abused me in my sleep. He never answered the phone. I went looking for him at that nightclub, where he worked. They called him Tony. I found him. He apologized. He told me that he didn't want to take me home in that condition and that he booked a hotel room for me to sleep in.

I asked him if he put me on sleeping pills and if he abused me, and he denied it. I preferred not to see him again. Six weeks later, puzzled by my late period, I went to the pharmacy to buy a pregnancy test. I found that I was pregnant. I called the boy's phone number, but they had cancelled that number. I went to look for him at the hotel, but they told me he had left the island, apparently for La Gomera. I explained it to my parents and my father insulted me. He said I had tarnished the family's honor. That I should have an abortion. My mother nodded. I told them that I had been taught that all life is sacred, and they replied, “not for rape”. My father said he would kill the one who did it to me. I told him I was the father of his grandchild, not to do it.

I felt alone in the most difficult moment of my life. I decided to leave to start a life with you, trying to forget that origin and without my father's moral judgment. One of my friends in Lanzarote was from Santa Cruz and her family had a bakery. She told me they needed a salesclerk. I made her promise never to say anything to my family. From then on, I devoted my life to care for you, my son.

The following year I learned that my father had been assigned to another barracks in Leon. Two years later I met Jonay, then a medical student full of ideas of a noble world. We lived together and felt a lot of tenderness and passion, but little by little he was preparing his plan to go to a remote mission in Africa where I did not want to go. It would have meant giving up everything, even if I had almost nothing. I thought a thousand times if I shouldn't have gone with him.

By then Yolanda's eyes were teary and her gaze was fixed on the ground. She had only told him part of the story. The most painful part she would keep to herself. Martin approached her, hugged her with all his strength, and told her:

- Mother, forgive me for so many times I have been selfish and unfair to you. I realize now that you gave your life for me, you gave up being with your parents, you gave up studying at the university, you went to an unknown place, and you fought for my life all these years. I don't want to leave you here alone. Please come with me.

-I must do something first, son. I heard from a cousin of my father with whom I keep in touch, that he is ill, in a hospital in Saragossa. I want to go and see him. It is a part of my life that I must face, an open wound that I must close. With love.

It had been almost two years since John and Umbela, with the entire community of La Ternura -there were almost five hundred people- had returned to the ravine of El Cabrito. After almost two years of abandoning the houses and the terraces of the crops, weeds had grown along the roads, between the walls, the roofs and even inside the houses. Some volcanic stone walls had collapsed due to the strong winds and a dozen crop terraces had crumbled. The windmill was damaged, and almost all the solar panels had been stolen.

First, they fixed the windmill, and with it came the water. They brought back the goats, sheep, and donkeys. They let them graze in patches and cleared the paths and yards of tall weeds. With water and organic fertilizer, they returned to farming and biogas for the kitchen. They put more beehives on the higher slopes and used the wax for candles. They saw that they did not need the solar lights, and everyone felt more romantic and mysterious at night with the candle lights. Fernando shared with them from the community of Valentía a solar panel with which they charged the computer for their communication. Fifteen fig trees had grown between stones and walls, and several walls had been covered with ivy. It was as if nature had protected the place during what they now called in the community "the time of exile".

Juan Antonio, the son of the cacique who had done so much damage to Umbela and his family, and later to the community, was integrating into the community and detoxifying himself from drugs, breaking up with his previous life. He often told stories of his family's sophistication and luxuries and of his history lost in addictions, and how, without love and generosity, life was filled with boredom and idleness, which he tried in vain to compensate for with purchases, property, and power.

Martin arrived on the Benchijigua ferry to San Sebastian and then on Tomas' boat to El Cabrito. He went to John and Umbela's house. They were on the porch serenely watching the slow sunset. They had been doing it every evening, as if it were a ceremony of gratitude for what they had experienced and a welcome to the magical night.

- Hello, Martin. What a joy!

- Hello, John, Umbela. How beautiful is the valley. My mother sends her affectionate embrace.

- Welcome to Tenderness. And may your mother come soon too,

Said Umbela.

- Thank you from the bottom of my heart. I would like to try a week how is your life here and decide if I can be a useful part of the community. I think I will convince my mother later. I feel she is still shy to come as it brings back many memories of Jonay, whom I think she still loves in silence.

-Jonay also loves her very much, even though their paths were different, and that makes her our daughter and you our grandson in our hearts, Martin. Life goes in cycles, it crosses and intertwines us again.

Said Umbela, truly moved. She was convinced that past pains always came back in magical ways to be healed in different and mysterious ways, always with love. John had stood up and put his arm behind her shoulders welcoming Martin. He seemed fragile and said:

I'm getting older, Martin, but every time children are born in the community or new villagers arrive, I feel peace in my soul. I recommend you start with the group that is learning about agroecology. Once you know how to prepare a terrace and cultivate and share food in the community, you can see what other tasks you would like more, like art, caring for the sick and elderly, discovering with children, repairs, music, looms, cheese making, beehives, whatever you want. We're here to share.

They gave him a copy of the Umbela Decalogue and greeted each other with a tender head hug, looking at each other lovingly for a minute.

Martin settled in a house with nine other people, including Juan Antonio, two other young Canarians, three middle-aged German women, a Senegalese, a South African, and a Brazilian.

Juan Antonio had chestnut hair, jet-black eyes framed by a somewhat elusive, shy, and fearful look, a prominent nose, and a mouth with a sweet smile that seemed enigmatic to Martin. Juan Antonio volunteered to be Martin's tutor.

* Martin, first I want to explain to you how we understand the Earth in order to care for it, cultivate it, nourish ourselves, and nurture it: the earth is a living system, just like our bodies: it has minerals, the compounds of life: nitrogen, carbon, and hydrogen, water, bacteria, and plants that maintain a cycle of constant exchanges just like our bodies do. We must feed it and take care of it, make it exercise, sleep, and even sing to its soul. The compost from the worms, the latrines, and that of the animals in the valley are digested by bacteria, just as we digest food in our intestines. Along with water and minerals, nutrients allow seeds to fertilize, whether they fall from plants, are brought by the wind, or we plant them ourselves, and thus new plants grow, just like our tissues regenerate in the body. When the plant ages, it recycles into the earth and follows the same cycle of digestion and reproduction, just like our tissues and cells constantly do, to keep the cycle going they also need water and light, like our bodies. And as our bodies should do returning to the cycle of life. Treat the earth as a living being, it has its lunar cycles, its moments of more and less energy, its illnesses, or periods of weakness, and, above all, its feelings, indigenous pre-Columbian peoples know a lot about this, they call it "Pachamama."
* How interesting, Juan Antonio. I have studied human nutrition and I clearly see the parallel.

Said Martin, while listening attentively.

* In the eco-villages, we cultivate in fields and gardens. In the fields, we mix and rotate types of plants, as this better preserves the fertility of the soil. The ones we most cultivate and rotate to care for the soil are corn in the summer and beans in the winter. We also intersperse pumpkins. In the same place, we vary: first corn, then beans, then pumpkin, and later corn again. The beans climb the corn stalks and provide nitrogen to the corn that it needs for its growth, and when these plants fall, their decomposing organic matter is recycled by the pumpkin. Each plant has its time and function. In addition, the three crops are good for our nutrition: corn gives us energy, beans give us proteins, and pumpkin gives us vitamins. When you make your community terrace, you can contribute four hundred cobs, sixty kilos of pumpkins, and ten kilos of beans per year. You'll see how good it tastes to eat what you grow.
* But I thought in the eco-village there are no private properties?
* That's right, Martin, everything belongs to everyone, but we have collective and individual responsibilities, for example, contributing food to the community pantry and kitchen.
* That sounds very good to me. And it seems incredible to me that I have spent my whole life buying food that I didn't grow. It must be beautiful to see them grow.
* I also come from a "blind" life, Martin, I'll tell you about it later. You'll see what a feeling of peace it is to care for the earth and share the food that your hands sow, nurture, and harvest. We also cultivate and rotate potatoes and sweet potatoes to give us energy, like corn; and lentils and chickpeas, like beans, provide protein. Next, we'll prepare a part of the land with more tillage and compost for vegetables. Here, different species of lettuce, tomatoes, broccoli, eggplants, carrots, chard, spinach, peppers, onions, garlic, as well as a lot of rosemary, oregano, thyme, ginger, turmeric, and then fruit tree areas with guavas, mangoes, kiwis, and banana plants grow very well.
* That's great, Juan Antonio. After all my years of studying nutrition, I have concluded simply that we should eat foods of all natural colors, the easiest way to know that your diet is healthy.
* How interesting! Like the rainbow. Now let's prepare your land. It's March, the beginning of spring, and it's a good time. Let's go to the warehouse for your equipment.

They went to an adobe house with a thatched roof where inside there were wooden shelves with all kinds of hand tools. They took corn, pumpkin, and bean seeds, a ball of hemp thread, a pointed shovel, a rake, and two stakes. In the following days, Juan Antonio helped Martin rebuild and clean his terrace, which was about three hundred meters up the south-facing slope and on the fourth level. It was about four meters deep and thirty meters long. Martin felt something very special knowing he looked after a piece of land with which he could eventually share food in the community.

It took him three days to rearrange about twenty large lava stones in the terrace's retaining wall. Some were so heavy that he used the traction of a donkey they called Lucero. Then they leveled the soil and turned it over, removing stones and sorting them by size, all of which were valuable. Everything truly had a function for total harmony, Martin thought. They brought a wheelbarrow of goat manure and another of earth from the communal worm compost deposit and mixed them with the soil. By the fourth day, it was ready for planting.

There was a greenhouse with shared seedlings. It was cared for by a Frenchman named Yves, inspired by an Algerian farmer named Pierre Rabhi, who also polished Sabina branches with beeswax to create magical shapes.

Martin continued working alone on his terrace. He planted a total of thirty corn pits. Among the corn, he planted beans and pumpkins. He prepared the beds for the garden and planted a good mix of vegetables and aromatic and medicinal plants. He felt responsible for something noble and meaningful for the first time. Without even touching money, he felt that his sweat was noble and the purpose just: to share, not to compete.

Water was pumped by the windmill to the top and flowed down by opening a reservoir through reed channels between the terraces, using buckets to dam the water when necessary. It was a scarce resource, and they watered with brass watering cans as if baptizing the plants with sacred liquid. And indeed, it was.

Martin took care of his terrace every day, watering, fertilizing, and protecting it from pests with macerated leaves from various nim trees surrounding the houses, which also protected from excessive mosquitoes. It was beautiful to see how white butterflies covered them, as if blessing the new life. His cornfields grew, the beans climbed them, and the pumpkins trailed, while in the garden, about twenty types of vegetables grew. In the autumn, he harvested over two hundred cobs, fifteen pumpkins, ten bundles of beans, and a good amount of vegetables. He couldn't believe the generosity of the land and how from just over a hundred square meters, he had food to eat and share.

When Martin contributed his first corn cobs to the collective pantry, he felt like he was truly a part of the community. He went to tell John and Umbela, and they celebrated by having dinner and listening to a tune on John's harmonica.

Martin swam in the ocean every evening, and sometimes John would accompany him. He had also befriended the Canary Island boys and the girls from Brazil and South Africa, with whom he took walks to Roque del Sombrero. With his engineering knowledge, he had also repaired and improved the mill and was building another one with logs and parts he brought with Tomas from the hardware store in San Sebastian, which they bought with the money they earned at the market selling their crops, crafts, and honey. He joined in the storytelling and music gatherings many nights and began to feel great peace and serene joy as he became part of such a brave community.

Every time he met with Juan Antonio; Martin felt a special connection that brought him peace yet unsettled him in a way he didn't understand. One day they went on a long hike to the Lourdes Hermitage in Garajonay. They decided to take a whole day for the hike, which was about five hours uphill and three hours downhill.

Juan Antonio had enthusiastically integrated into eco-village life. He had slightly long hair tied in a ponytail, a broad forehead, sparsely populated eyebrows, eyes with more sparkle than expression, a somewhat aquiline nose, angular cheekbones, and a prominent chin. Martin noticed a leaf-shaped mole on his right cheek. He had a very similar one on his neck.

* Tell me about your life before coming to Ternura, Juan Antonio.
* Did John and Umbela perhaps already tell you something? You heard me last week in the evening gathering talking about drugs and the soul-destroying they entail.
* Yes, it was brave how you broke free from those chains. But how was your childhood? How did you get into that world?
* My father is a big shot on this island, Martin. He owns over thirty buildings, four hotels, the concession for the airport in Santiago, restaurants, shops, garages, and even a concrete block factory. His construction company, half-owned with Don Manuel, the hospital surgeon, has a dozen trucks, dump trucks, and excavators. He's insatiable, Martin, always building more and more. My childhood was very privileged materially. But my mother was unhappy. I couldn't understand until much later that she was abused by my father. I went to study at a boarding school in Eton, England, where there were many children from wealthy families. That's where I started smoking marijuana and trying crack pills.

Juan Antonio paused in his narrative. He felt ashamed of what happened later in his life.

* At eighteen, I graduated from that English school and returned to La Gomera. My father gave me a BMW car. I told him I preferred not to continue my university studies for the moment and travel around the islands. I looked for marijuana on the island and that's how I got to know the drug dealers. Since I had a lot of money, I bought large quantities from them and gave them away to other addicted kids with whom I partied in an apartment that my father also gave me in his Tecina hotel.
* And you didn't study or work?"
* I didn't need to, Martin. And that was my downfall. Since my father had businesses on all the islands, with other businessmen, builders, and hoteliers, I went on a trip to get to know his businesses with the idea of ​​contributing to the family business.
* And which islands were you on the most?"
* I spent a lot of time in Lanzarote. There, my father is a co-owner of the Los Fariones hotel and I set up a nightclub. I lived at night drinking and smoking drugs. I started using cocaine and one day some Italians gave me heroin to try. I got hooked and at the same time became part of the trafficking coming from Morocco.

Martin felt a chill: drug addict, Lanzarote, the mole, Antonio… Tony? He stopped and watched him walk about ten meters ahead of him. Could he be walking with his father? Juan Antonio looked back.

* What's wrong, Martin?
* Tell me something: were you called Tony back then?
* Yes, during my time at Eton, I got used to that name. Why?
* Twenty-five years ago, a woman was drugged with sleeping pills and abused in a nightclub in San Antonio by a person they called Tony, who disappeared from her life. She doesn't know about me. That person is my father, who gave me life. And at the same time, he's the one who cowardly destroyed my mother's life.

Juan Antonio looked at him with conflicting feelings of emotion and deep guilt and shame. They were next to the Roque del Sombrero, and Juan Antonio asked Martin to sit facing the sea.

* Martin, from what you're saying, maybe I'm your father. You have every right to despise me, to distance yourself, and even to report me. But that person is not the one talking to you today. I ask you to listen to me.

Martin was like paralyzed, looking at the ground with his fists clenched in anger, resentment, and pain. He couldn't look into the eyes of the one speaking to him, almost couldn't hear him. Nevertheless, he sat on a rock, ready to listen to the father he had thought about and imagined for so many years.

At that time, I was a young man, your age, but without your values. The values ​​that your mother instilled in you with a life of honest effort and quiet generosity. I grew up, as I told you, in luxury and privilege. I studied in the most expensive schools and had everything I asked for, except my father's love, which I learned not to ask for or expect. I hung out with young people who slept during the day and drank and did drugs at night, having all the money they wanted and with-it everything money could buy, but not true love.

* Juan Antonio, are you, my father?
* I think so, Martin. I remember very well what happened that night. I saw something different in your mother compared to all the other girls we used to hang out with. She was shy, she seemed overwhelmed in that environment, she had a clean, brave yet vulnerable look. I felt a strong attraction. I felt like getting out of there and out of that superficial life to delve into pure looks like your mother's. When she said she felt drowsy and wanted to go home, I offered to accompany her. One of the guys from that group warned me when I left with your mother that her father, your grandfather, was the captain of the military barracks and could react very aggressively toward me if I took her home in that condition. So, when your mother fell asleep in the car, I decided to go back to the hotel and take an available room.

Juan Antonio paused. He felt sunk in the worst feeling, that of knowing he had caused someone else's pain for so many years. Martin kept staring at the ground. Tears were streaming down his face. He couldn't even look at the horizon. He waited for a few minutes, and Juan Antonio continued the story. Martin had the right to know.

* That night, I slept with your mother. She was in a deep sleep. I think the alcohol, which she rarely drank, affected her a lot. I lay down beside her, hugged her, and felt that she welcomed me. In the morning, I woke up early to go to the hotel's offices, and when I returned to the room, your mother was gone. Two days later, she came to the hotel to ask for me. We went to the hotel garden. She asked me if I had put sleeping pills in her drink and if I had abused her. I said no, but I lied in part. I didn't know about the sleeping pills, and I truly thought that we had come together willingly. But it was a despicable act, I know, and I'm ashamed of it. She told me she hoped never to see me again and that she wouldn't report me because her father might kill her.

Martin was motionless.

* I didn't know what to say. I felt sunk in my guilt and shame. Dirty. And already dependent on drugs, alcohol, and that life without values. When your mother left, I felt like the only shine of purity and nobility I had ever known was leaving my life forever. A few days later, I asked those young people I went to the nightclub with, who knew your mother's friend if they had put sleeping pills in your mother's drink. They confessed that they had, without any remorse, even mocking. Two weeks later, I came back here to La Gomera. I have remembered your mother's gaze many times, and I have felt nauseated with myself.
* I don't think I can look you in the face anymore, Juan Antonio. I can't stand your presence. I think I'll leave Ternura. I'm going to talk to John and Umbela. It's too much pain. I thought I would find peace and kindness in this community. And here you are, the man who ruined my mother's life.
* You have no idea how much. She could never continue her studies. She distanced herself forever from her family. And I grew up without a father, imagining him in my dreams. She told me you had died in an accident. When I found out the true story recently, I felt a terrible wish: that the accident had been real. I want to banish hatred from my life. But I don't think I can do it while living with you.

They walked back to the community in silence. Martin was a few meters ahead until a few minutes later he started running downhill. Juan Antonio preferred to stay on the path. He watched his son disappear on the road. He wondered how such an ignoble act could have engendered such a pure and sensitive being. He felt both moved to know he was a father and disgusted with his past.

Martin went straight to talk to John and Umbela. It was already dusk, the contemplative hour when he would find them on their porch. They saw him arrive agitated. John greeted him with a nod and said:

* Hi, Martin, how are you? I sense you're restless. We're like your grandparents here for you, tell us, what's wrong?

Martin, between sobs, explained what had happened and his decision to leave the community.

Umbela intervened:

* Martin, you are a being of light. Hardworking, supportive, and sensitive. Everyone loves you. Your terrace is covered with white butterflies. You bring generous harvests, help us with mill repairs and water, we appreciate every day you're living with us.
* Me too, Umbela. In this place, I have found peace of spirit. But what I learned today disrupts my feelings. I need to talk to my mother. And right now, I prefer to be away from the man who caused her so much harm.
* You have your right, Martin, and we understand you well. We can't ask Juan Antonio to leave because of his past, which, believe me, he has left behind. Even if it were for acts of his present, in this community and in all eco-villages, there is no punishment, repudiation, or exile. It is only with love that wounds are healed and the fears and emptiness that cause pain between people are unlocked.
* I know, Umbela, and I would never ask for such a thing. But I need to know if I have the courage to overcome the pain that now burns my soul.
* I understand you, Martin. But let me remind you of some life intentions from our decalogue that can help us: every life is unique and sacred. Yours is, Martin. And in each of them, we all live. We are called to harmony with everyone. You too, Martin. And even more so with your father, who has emerged from the darkness and is a good man, believe me. We live that harmony with love. Hatred and resentment suffocate love, and with it, your being. Deep love makes us avoid any possession relationship between us, whether it's between couples, children, or anyone else. Juan Antonio can only be for you a reference of love that will heal the emptiness and pain of so many years. And, above all, Martin, I remind you of our eighth principle: we address differences through dialogue, empathy, and reflecting on our faults towards others. It is perhaps the most difficult thing, especially when the pain is as deep as yours: "no one is guilty or innocent, we all fall into weaknesses when we forget our nature of love and hand it over, even to those who harm us, out of compassion.
* But Umbela, how can you say "that there are no guilty or innocent"? Was my mother guilty of being abused in such a despicable way? And is that person innocent of what he did?
* At its root, yes, Martin. Juan Antonio didn't receive love in his childhood and youth. It wasn't him who acted, but his fearful and lonely soul.
* You can't understand me. I'll leave tomorrow. Sometimes it's necessary to acknowledge that there are people who harm others, who are aware of it, and who had alternatives not to do it.

Martin went to pack his backpack. To give him his space, Juan Antonio didn't return to the house they shared with other community members. He spent the night looking at the stars and writing.

When the next morning Martin boarded Tomas' boat to go to San Sebastián and take the ferry back to Tenerife, the old sailor handed him an envelope that said, "For Martin."

When he got on the ferry, he opened the envelope and read the letter inside.

Dear Martin,

I have no right to call you son, but believe me, I offer you my love and harmony, and if you wish to live here without my presence, I will leave. You deserve the serene peace wherever you choose to live, and take care of the being that, albeit fleetingly, I felt as the most beautiful that blessed my life, now I know, by giving birth to the life of a wonderful being like you.

I ask you to deliver this letter to your mother,

Hopefully, one day you'll be able to look me in the eyes and forgive me,

J.A.

He needed to know if the content of this letter to his mother could cause her even more pain, and as the ferry moved toward Tenerife, he read it:

Dear Yolanda,

I hope you are well reading this letter, and that, after doing so, it does not disturb your peace and harmony with life.

I am Juan Antonio; I have known your son for the last six months in his life in the Ternura community. I have sensed in him a wonderful being. He reflects the values ​​of honesty and generosity that he has seen in you.

I am the one who, twenty-four years ago, abused your vulnerability and the deceit, which I did not know, one night in Lanzarote. Believe me, I felt in your clean gaze something that I have never felt again in my life. I have dreamed many times of that fleeting moment when you, semi-conscious and I unjustly taking advantage of that situation, we joined our beings. I have never felt anything like it again. My soul, before and after, was wandering in the darkness of hedonism and was sinking into drug addiction. Two years ago, I discovered this community of Ternura and the values ​​of spiritual eco-villages. I found my soul in nature, harmony, love, sharing, freedom, empathy, service, compassion, discovery, and the sense of humanity. Renewal.

I offer you, Yolanda, my heart of empathy and love, and I ask for your compassion for who I was. Martin deserves this beautiful life in community and today he leaves with a broken heart for facing face to face with the one who caused you so much pain. If he wants to come back without me being here, let me know and I will leave. But if you want compassion to release the weight of twenty-four years of pain and emptiness, here we are both, to try, with all my love, to reclaim the time being the father I never was and perhaps never deserved to be. Something wonderful that I have discovered here is that love heals everything and makes the horizon of hope shine,

With my sincere soul and wishing for your harmony and peace,

Juan Antonio.

# I fight if you fight. Brussels, February 2006

Thanda continued his work in the bureaucratic jungle of Brussels. Beatriz and Meimuna now lived in New Delhi, and he took care of their apartment. Moyes had gone to London. He began to feel what solitude was. From his cherished family life, he moved on to marry and live with Cristina, then into the adopted family of Ukuzwana, and then his first six months in Brussels living with Beatriz, Meimuna, and Moyes. He had always beenin tender company.

He had now been alone for a year and a half, in that cold city, in a dry job of words, longing, above all, for the warmth of his daughters, who were now entering adolescence. At first, they spoke punctually every day at six in the evening, after school, discussing the day, homework, friends, memories. Thanda had a story, a joke, or a parable ready, and he would briefly talk to them again at nine when they went to bed. After a hesitant start, Cristina had been consolidating her bond with the man who occupied her heart while Thanda worked in Ukuzwana. His name was Gregorio, and he already lived in the house, slept in the bedroom, ate from his plates, and, what hurt Thanda deeply, played with his daughters. Thanda sunk at the thought that that man spent much more time with his daughters than he did himself, and he feared that he was being replaced in the bond that was so revered to Thanda. He often reread Ángeles's letter when he moved to Brussels, and his sight almost always blurred.

Cristina and Gregorio were creating a new family with the girls, enrolling them in extracurricular activities, increasingly preventing Thanda's happiest moment of the day, that of sharing in the distance with his daughters. This tearing apart was also complemented by frequent demands in the Madrid court, where Cristina requested more money each month, arguing the girls' needs due the after-school activities he did not decide upon and prevented him from speaking with them. She also requested registering the family home to her name, and a "compensatory allocation." All of this was argued by expert lawyers because now Thanda's salary at the European Commission was higher, and she demanded a greater balance between the parents. Additionally, he was accused of abandoning his daughters for professional ambition. Thanda lived very simply, never bought clothes for himself, and ate the vegetarian menu in the commission's canteens. He used his salary to support his parents, his daughters' expenses, and, most importantly, to support the needs of Ukuzwana in medicines and Sibithanda in food for the AIDS orphan children.

His disagreement was not about accumulating for himself, but because such constant demands, about two each year, were baserd on a long defamatory narrative portraying him, with the language of expert lawyers and impudent slanderers, as a bad father for abandoning his daughters for his work first in Ukuzwana and now in Brussels. Thanda still had the nightmare of seeing his daughters drifting away in a fragile boat without him being able to reach them swimming in a stormy sea. It enraged him to feel that he worked in solitude, and in a very difficult environment, longing to be with his daughters, and his efforts went to the enjoyment of another man who occupied his place and to lawyers who incessantly defamed him in the most painful way to ask, insatiably, for more and more of his salary.

The job wasn't easy either. Dr. Fronz worked for her own glory and often demanded, rudely, speeches and documents for her own agenda and shine. Thanda dedicated more and more of his time to preparing briefings for his boss and the rigid hierarchy of director, general director, and commissioner to whom the officials rendered submissive homage.

Once a year, that same hierarchy issued, after a supposed dialogue, an evaluation of each official under its command. This evaluation was useful for climbing the ranks, like a complex ladder. There were thirteen grades and about five sub-grades in each one, that is, more than sixty steps. Climbing the ladder and reaching a pension at the highest possible level was the obsession of almost all officials. To achieve this, they strove to please any request or whim of their bosses.

Thanda felt sadness seeing intelligent people complacently laughing at any absurd joke or jest of their bosses, or, as they said in their school days, constantly "brown-nosing" bosses who were inflating their egos and increasing their authoritarianism. As John adviced him, he read reflections on libertarian socialists Owen and Fourier, taken up by eloquent dialogues of an American philologist of Jewish origin whom Aimsa knew well and enjoyed listening with his father, Noam Chomsky. He identified totally with the thought that all hierarchy is based on the premise of one person's superiority over another, which, constantly, and especially if the value was seen holistically, was proven flawed.

In that hierarchical environment that suffocated freedom and courage, Thanda was asked to prepare work for the European Commission to support the Global Fund against AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis with hundreds of millions of euros, co-founded by decision of Dr. Fronz. He couldn't agree with such a way of viewing health, fragmented by diseases and prioritizing only some of them, forgetting the others. He also discovered instances of corruption because in the meetings that decided on projects, from luxury trips and hotels around the world, the same "NGOs" participated, which then received the funds and often had much more resources than the ministries of governments of "poor" countries where they worked. A whole network of organizations was created in the world living off those billions, which increased even more with the United States fund against AIDS, the "President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief" (PEPFAR), launched during the Iraq war by George W. Bush Jr., in collusion with war entrepreneurs Cheney and Rumsfeld, and their unconfessable links with the pharmaceutical industry.

Thanda often exchanged information with Aimsa, exploring how he could, from that office of a civil servant, in that jungle of hierarchical stairs, bureaucratic procedures, and power egos, contribute something noble and healthy to the suffering of children who, like in Ukuzwana, were dying every day while others, from luxurious trips and hotels, presented themselves as their pathetic saviors.

Jonay and Aimsa always sent him encouragement and ideas. Thanda tried in the briefings and speeches he prepared for Dr. Fronz and her superiors to talk about the right to health, comprehensive health services, without being fragmented by projects or budgets to address diseases determined by the power cliques. He also proposed to talk about the need to support the budgets of those countries with public budgets suffocated by the macroeconomic adjustments imposed by financial institutions dominated by rich countries, and these in turn by large corporations hungry to grow without limits, to set up their factories with cheap labor, and open markets to obtain unlimited profits. Almost all his proposals were censored and even ridiculed.

He cited the World Health Organization's macroeconomic commission, which had calculated, when the millennium goals were approved, that at least thirty dollars per person per year were needed to pay for the necessary salaries and medicines to make progress in the three health objectives, maternal, child, and diseases covered by the Fund. And that was only a part of the total health needs, possibly actually five times more. He argued that the European Union should support public budgets, not those of the NGO and consultancies’ industry. That way, it would contribute to improving the modest salaries of local doctors and nurses, not the luxuries of international officials and aid workers, and generic medicines instead of those dominated by criminal patents. All his comments and suggestions were dismissively crossed out by Dr. Fronz. Thanda felt trapped in a perverse system, far from his daughters and his true vocation.

It was around that time that a G7 meeting, the group of the richest countries, including the four largest in the European Union -Germany, the United Kingdom, France, and Italy-, who, with the United States, Canada, and Japan, represented ten percent of the world's population but half of the wealth and eighty percent of "international cooperation," was approaching. They asked him to prepare briefings to request more and more funds for the Global Fund. Thanda thought about it overnight. He wrote a "file note" declaring himself conscientiously against doing such work because he considered the G7 an undemocratic oligopoly, like the security council and its permanent members, some of them in the G7, and which only represented four of the then twenty-five countries of the European Union. From then on, he was gradually sidelined from meetings, responsibilities, and of course, his "points" to climb the ladder.

Despite repeated attempts to sabotage him, Thanda organized a debate of religious leaders in the European Parliament to discuss AIDS prevention. They invited Muslim imams, Catholic and Protestant bishops, Orthodox patriarchs, Jewish rabbis, Hindu Brahmins, Taoist monks, and leaders of traditional African religions. He managed to have Kevin Dowling invited, of whom Patxi had spoken so much, and who came from South Africa, despite the reluctance and attempts to block the conference by the bishops' conference before the European Union, COMECE, and, above all, the Vatican's nuncio, now under the iron direction of Ratzinger, whom Patxi and Kevin had confronted for the lives of millions of people who continued to die of AIDS due to the greed of business and the pride of those who presented themselves as spokespeople for divine truth.

Thanda invited the diplomatic missions represented in Brussels, including the United States, high officials from the United Nations, and NGOs working in close collaboration with the Global Fund. He forcefully presented data indicating that the "ABC," especially if "C" referred to circumcision, led to "D" for death, especially in women, who were now most deaths in Africa and at much younger ages than men. The most radical position came from the Catholic Church, represented by the Pope's nuncio, insisting on the message of abstinence and fidelity and the sinful nature of condom use against life, blessed by God. Kevin spoke afterward and exposed the nuncio by saying that in conditions of endemic AIDS in which most of Africa was submerged, the condom promoted life much more than it prevented it, and canonical law permitted it, citing related encyclicals.

Then came a letter from a Portuguese parliamentarian asking for explanations of how the European Commission was fighting against child trafficking in Southern Africa. He cited testimonies from Spanish nuns in Nampula. Thanda was assigned to respond to that question. He and Beatriz had suggested to Haka and Meimuna to encourage the nuns in Nampula to write to the Portuguese parliamentarian they knew and ask the European Union to take an interest in that tragedy. Thanda began to feel that he could finally propose actions for the people who were so close to his heart. By responding that they would use funds to fight child trafficking in those countries and would bring the concern to high-level dialogues with governments and international and regional organizations, he felt that something could change. He designed a border control program for suspected trafficking, police collaboration in mafia pursuit, rescue and rehabilitation of missing children, helplines for children and families, and a meeting in Maputo for a commitment declaration from all the countries in the region, in collaboration with the European Union. Nadine helped to ensure Mandela's attendance. Together, they encouraged Haka to speak about their struggles; he preferred to do so wearing a mask to continue fighting. He jokingly wrote to Thanda that he would "quote him" in his speech, and thus he said: "As an ally in the struggles for justice in Mexico, Commander Marcos says: *to be seen, we had to cover ourselves*." Buhleve also spoke of her experience, and the entire audience rose shouting, "*Amandla*!"

After that work, Thanda, increasingly diverted from the group of health policies and their unconfessable interests, began to think and propose a European policy that defended the rights of children worldwide. He spoke with Marta, Aimsa's friend, who coordinated UNICEF's fight against the various forms of violence suffered by children. Thanda felt strengthened from his solitude in that fight.

It was as if he were doing it for his daughters, even though days and even weeks passed without hearing from them. Their "extracurricular activities" and their adolescence were stealing those sacred moments that bathed his loneliness in innocence and tenderness that seemed to slip away like sand through between his fingers.

He prepared a proposal for a "communication" from the Commission to the Council, outlining how the European Union prepared proposals for common policy. Thanda saw how he could try to do good things for the world and especially for those children in Matabeleland who beat in his heart.

Truly, the European Commission could be an army in the service of hierarchical interests, or a factory of ideas that could become genuinely solidarity-based European policies towards a fairer world. It was the only public administration in the world where a simple civil servant could, with courage, propose an idea that could ultimately become a policy for the entire Union, its five hundred million inhabitants, and a third of the world's wealth.

He was there to fight!

That's why he was far from his daughters, his parents, and Ukuzwana. He devoted himself with all his soul to that policy defending children's rights. He mobilized organizations, parliamentarians, children's groups, allies in the representations that the member countries of the European Union had in Brussels, allies in the United Nations like Marta, and many more. After more than thirty drafts and endless meetings, thousands of email messages, and all sorts of censorship, he managed to achieve a consensus on a European commitment policy regarding children's rights, "A place for children in the External Action." They defended all the rights of the Convention on the Rights of the Child for which Marta had fought so hard, especially regarding safety and health in the first five years, education and creativity up to adolescence, and sexual rights and social participation, raising their voice and lending their strong shoulders to the future world that belonged to them.

He translated it and told it with drawings and a story to his daughters as a Christmas present. During the two years he had been in Brussels, he had visited his daughters every month and spent a good part of the holidays with them.

With some savings of his own and his father's early retirement, they bought a semi-ruined house in the mountains northwest of Madrid. He repaired the roofs with fellow firefighters. He spent time surrounded by nature and profound tenderness and complicity with his daughters and parents, who always supported and encouraged him. When Thanda was in Brussels, the house was always open to Pascual and his friends from the Santa María hostel to the Association of Health Aid volunteers, which established its base there, and to family and friends. Sometimes he was also invited to give lectures on international health at universities and various organizations in Madrid, and he enjoyed taking students to that place, which became a home open to all.

At the end of their Christmas vacation in 2005, Thanda asked his daughters if they would like to spend a year studying at a school in Brussels and living with him. They responded enthusiastically yes. He then proposed it to Cristina. He received a resounding no in response, arguing that he wouldn't be able to take care of them due to his work, that it would uproot them from their world, friends, and study routine in Madrid, and that it was a selfish proposal.

When he returned to Brussels, he felt a sadness that almost paralyzed him. He had nurtured the dream of living with his daughters there while they learned languages, saw another world, and felt the deep mutual love. He could request part-time work. He had seen a little house next to the beautiful Foret de Soignes beech forest and couldn't stop dreaming about that idea. Not only did he receive a disparaging refusal, but upon arriving at his lonely home in Brussels, he found another demand asking for even more money. He felt anger. He felt utilized. He was like a bank to pay for urban and consumer life, with values he didn't share, for Cristina and her partner, who enjoyed the beauty and tenderness of his daughters, whom he could only see for short vacation periods or weekends every month.

He began to think about leaving his position, returning to his humble job as a medical firefighter, and ceasing to contribute to what he felt was so unfair. One day he went to play tennis in a place surrounded by oaks called Overijse, with a colleague from Madrid whom he met at a work meeting because he coordinated health matters in the European Council.

His name was Ignacio Soler, and like Thanda, he was a big tennis enthusiast. They became friends and combined sports with long walks. Ignacio had been in a similar situation for ten years: his two children had returned to their mother in the Canary Islands, and he barely saw them while, under constant demands, he sent them most of his salary. Thanda felt a deep tenderness seeing how Ignacio kept his children's room exactly as they left it: with their books, rackets, skates, and unmade beds.

Thanda felt a cold vertigo thinking about so much time away from his daughters, all their childhood.

He called his father:

* Hi, Dad, how are you?
* Fine, son.

His father never complained about his own needs or pain, he always tried to please and encourage others.

* And you?
* A little bit so-so. I miss Angels and Daniela very much. Cristina keeps making demands and opposes them coming with me for a while. I've decided to quit my job and go back to the fire station, to stop paying for a life of whims away from me and even to lawyers who defame me. I'd rather "die standing than live kneeling."
* Son, you shouldn't think like that. Your daughters are fine. We see them every month and take them to Robledo with the whole family. They grow up healthy, beautiful, intelligent, and with a good heart. And believe me, they love you very much. No one takes your place.
* But, Dad, I want to feel their beauty and kindness precisely, share life, not see them every now and then, and always be subject to lawyers who defame me and to a situation I feel is both unfair and abusive.
* Let me tell you something, son: when you explained your feeling of abuse, I spoke to your lawyer uncle: if you decrease your salary now, the law may consider it negligence and ask you to continue contributing as much as before. Your daughters will suffer from your fight, son.
* But besides that absence that hurts me so much, and being away from you, the work here is very arid, full of paperwork, intrigues of egos, and political interests.
* Son, we are very proud of your effort, and we know it is a lot there far away. I miss you every day. Do you remember our "early riser" Sundays, washing our faces with cold water and going on our adventure? You are an essential part of my soul, son. But you must be strong, persevere in your work, give the best of your effort and your example to your daughters, and we will have, in Madrid and in Brussels, beautiful reunions that reward your effort. You don't know how proud I am of how you managed to get the European cooperation policy for children's rights approved. Don't give up.
* I'm sorry, Dad. I've decided. I'm going back to Madrid to be with my daughters. Take care.

Thanda hung up with his decision, without listening to his father's wise words. Time passed, and he didn't hear from his parents. The conversation and Thanda's abrupt farewell had left a wound between father and son. Two weeks later, Thanda called his parents. His mother answered:

* Hi, Mom. How are you? We haven't talked in a long time; I miss you.
* We miss you too, son. You are in our prayers every day. Your father asked me not to tell you so as not to worry you, but I must tell you that he is admitted to Puerta de Hierro Hospital. He had intestinal bleeding and is weak.
* But, Mom, I'm your son and I'm a doctor. Never hide these things from me. I'm flying to Madrid immediately.

Thanda arrived at the airport and went to the hospital where his father was admitted. He arrived at the room, and his mother and sisters told him they had taken him to the endoscopy room. He went there and identified himself as an internist. They let him in, and a doctor explained the situation to him:

* Juan, your father has advanced cancer in a difficult-to-operate area in the colon. Besides, he is very thin and weak. I think it's best to give him palliative care and spare him the suffering that may remain.

Thanda felt as if a sword pierced him. His father had been everything to him: his guide, his friend, his confidant, his source of wise advice, and memories full of light. His efforts for noble causes had the most precious reward in his father's satisfied smile. Every minute with him was light and strength in his life. He felt he was unfairly losing his daughters and now his father. How would he find the strength to go on? He had been tormented by his dilemma for several weeks and had hardly eaten. His weakness, combined with the emotional blow of his father's situation, caused him to faint.

He woke up a few minutes later laying on a stretcher, with an intravenous drip and a monitor of his electrocardiogram. His colleagues explained to him that he had lost consciousness but that it seemed emotional. His father was already back in the room. They removed the drip. He called a surgeon friend, Fernando, who had visited him in Ukuzwana. Thanda explained the situation to Fernando. He said they could try a new technique, but they needed a lot of courage and determination from his father for the treatment, as it was long and delicate. He went to the room where his father was. In the hallway, he hugged his mother, always with her courage and generous effort. He entered the room. He sat, as he always did with his patients, on the edge of the bed:

* Hi, "boss."

He affectionately called him that when they had something serious to say.

* Hi, son. What a joy to see you!
* How are you feeling, Dad?

He asked, holding back his tears.

* I have something bad, don't I, son?
* It's not very good. But you must fight.

They looked into each other's souls. In a few seconds, all the eternity of two spirits united by love and the magic of living was mused. His father took his hand and said to him, looking at him with the greatest imaginable tenderness, five words that would forever change Thanda's life:

* I fight... if you fight.

# Love in times of AIDS. Matabeleland, October 2006

After her adventure with Haka through Mozambique and South Africa, fighting against the child trafficking mafias that she herself had suffered firsthand, Buhleve continued dedicated with passionate commitment to the patients in Ukuzwana.

A few days after arriving in Ukuzwana, she received a letter responding to the one she left for Mr. Smuts, who shattered her innocence in her adolescence awakening. It told her that her life was nearing its end due to cancer metastasis, and all that remained was to leave the best of her soul as a memory to her loved ones. He apologized for the horrible act he committed twenty years ago and the pain it would have caused her based on the absurd belief of curing his ailments by abusing a child. In the letter, he mentioned that Executive Outcomes no longer existed and many of its veteran mercenaries, linked to the apartheid system of battalion 32, SWAPOL, UNITA, and RENAMO, had joined Blackwaters, which now constituted half of the United States armed forces in Iraq. The contact in South Africa for that perverse network was Ilan Perry, of whom he provided the address in Israel. He said he suspected that these networks were supporting organ trafficking networks and harbored racial hatred, of which he now deeply regretted.

The letter ended by saying:

I ask for your forgiveness so that my soul may rest in peace, so that my acts of love are not drowned by the time of my life when racism, arrogance, and insensitive cruelty blinded my soul. I hope you feel that noble and pure part of my being somehow lives on within you and wants to help you overcome pain with hope and resentment with compassion. I wish you all the light, peace, and love that your noble and generous soul deserves.

Joseph Smuts.

That evening, she went with NoLwasi to the Anwele Tears kopje. She told her what had happened.

* Thank you for sharing that with me, Buhleve, you are very brave.
* It is difficult for me to forgive, NoLwasi. That person and many like him do a lot of harm.
* You are right, umntwane wami (my daughter), but forgiveness is the noblest of human acts. And it should not be with ethical condescension, like tolerating beings of moral baseness. But by understanding their darkness, overcoming the pain caused, understanding that pain made us better people, and knowing that our forgiveness will turn that darkness into light.
* But what about all the dead children? Who returns their light?
* I do not know that Buhleve. I feel that their pain and end are reborn with light and eternity, but no one knows.
* I want you to help me forgive him, NoLwasi, and free my soul from resentment.

They were perched atop the kopje from where NoLwasi felt Anwele's tears ten years ago and where Unai often scanned the horizon in case Nour returned. They meditated together, connecting with ancestors, animal spirits, rain spirits, mopanes, meleleucas, sunset, sunrise, and they reached Smuts's spirit, emerging from the darkness, embracing all that wonderful light, and slowly approaching Buhleve who, with her eyes still closed, opened her arms, and felt the healing embrace of the bravest and most compassionate forgiveness.

Buhleve later informed Haka of that name, Ilan Perry, and his address. Haka, who had been looking for him for a long time, investigated the connections of the pain network, sharing his findings with Aimsa in New York. They managed to get South Africa to request an extradition order, but the government of Israel refused. The connection with the Mossad was evident.

Something began to vibrate in Buhleve's soul. She was thirty-two years old and had never felt attracted to a man, rather repulsion and fear, due to what she had suffered in her life. As her resentment turned into peace, she allowed the interest of a man to enter her life. It was Elias, the Cuban doctor who replaced her in Ukuzwana during her journey with Haka.

A few weeks later, when Elias had already returned to his position in Brunapeg, they concurred at the monthly meeting of the provincial health council. Buhleve didn't usually attend, advised by Jonay, as it was a mere indoctrination meeting by the vein egos of the provincial leadership, totally unaware of rural reality. Besides, they met at the most luxurious hotel in Bulawayo, the Bulawayo Sun, with lavish meals financed by "international cooperation". This time she decided to go because the agenda included a mysterious item, "new HIV prevention strategy". Although in truth, there was a more intimate reason within her, the desire to see Elias again, who had told her he would attend.

She travelled, as always, on the mission truck, which took some patients for diagnoses and specialized treatments at Mpilo Hospital. She liked traveling on top of the bags of maize and talking to the patients. The truck needed to go to Bulawayo twice a month for maize during the increasingly longer dry season due to the slow and inexorable effect of climate change.

She found Elias in the hotel lobby and they shared a tender hug. He asked her whether he could come back with her to Ukuzwana and spend a week he had free. Buhleve nodded with concealed excitement at the prospect of his company.

In the room were the medical officers from the districts of Matabeleland, the eastern half of Zimbabwe, which was as vast as Andalusia with barely twenty doctors working in rural areas and around two hundred in the capital. After the initial ceremonial greetings from Dr. Ndlovu, steeped in corruption and luxury, the provincial governor, and the city mayor, whose shiny Mercedes were waiting outside the hotel after their brief words, they handed the floor to a doctor from the United States to present "the definitive strategy for AIDS prevention in Africa."

Dr. Ndlovu introduced Dr. Daniel Hinalper as a professor at the University of Berkeley, California, and coordinator of the "Abraham" project of the "Jerusalem AIDS Project" and the medical organization Hadassah, in collaboration with USAID and funded by PEPFAR, President Bush's plan to "save lives" threatened by AIDS in Africa, and by the Gates Foundation. Buhleve already knew through Thanda about the perversion of that program, in addition to its link to the U.S. government's terror machine in Iraq and many other places, due to its "ABC" policy, which left condom use as a last and dubious resort. At that introduction, Dr. Ndlovu proudly, as if displaying a hunting trophy, commented that the prestigious guest had more than a hundred "peer-reviewed" publications and fifteen awards for his medical career. While he spoke of the glories of such an illustrious visitor, Buhleve observed the smug smile, masked with false modesty, on the speaker's face and felt uneasy.

Buhleve and Elias had managed to extend the antiretroviral treatment program with Médecins Sans Frontières thanks to Anna's insistence at the headquarters in Barcelona, but they feared that the supplies would run out the following year. Médecins Sans Frontières was experiencing an economic crisis for having declined grants from the European Commission due to its position on the Kosovo war and its confrontation with the positions of the European Union in collusion with NATO. Additionally, the Zimbabwean government, increasingly authoritarian under Mugabe, militarized against the opposition and allied with dictator Kabila and his war in Congo, had very limited funds for medication stocks in general, including antiretrovirals. They received information about the PEPFAR program and discussed it via email with Anna, Jonay, Aimsa, and Thanda.

They deeply analyzed the PEPFAR fund, which had quickly become the main source of money to fight AIDS. That fund, which championed the salvation of millions of people affected by AIDS, benefited American companies due to the high prices of American medications approved by the powerful Food and Drug Administration. Furthermore, its projects were managed by USAID officials and aided by hundreds of American NGOs imbued with the messianic exceptionalism of "saving the world" by the United States. As was also the case with the Global Fund system, these funds were managed and supervised by financial consulting firms that were beginning to dominate the world of public and private finance. These groups manipulated the threads of the complex world of financial derivatives and their tentacles of speculation worldwide. Haka had demonstrated this in his book after his research in Switzerland. Aimsa had shared with them her analysis of a special breed of those management experts, those from the "McKenzie" consulting firm. They were young people educated at expensive North American Ivy League universities, with MBAs, fluent in several languages, impeccably dressed, knowledgeable about politically correct language, and in missions of a few days in business class and luxury hotels, they decided on those billions of dollars, almost always against governments and in favor of the network of NGOs and foundations among which their resumes and careers circulated. Without leaving the luxury of planes, hotels, and chrome-plated SUVs, and earning a hundred times more per day than the monthly salaries of the ministers of the countries they "visited," they issued reports, often disparaging of local governments and institutions, and made decisions that affected the lives of millions of humble people with unimaginable lives for those young "experts."

Buhleve noticed several tall, young blond men in designer suits accompanying Dr. Hinalper and responding to the McKenzie pattern described by Aimsa.

Thanda shared with Buhleve, Elias, Jonay, and Aimsa his concern about the "ABC" policy of PEPFAR. It aimed to promote "A for abstinence," "B for be faithful" (to one partner), and "C for, only in extreme cases, condom." Everyone remembered Anwele's struggle and her commitment with her Foundation. Thanda, who transferred part of his salary to these efforts, sent them an analysis of this strategy and its possible impact in Africa. With the support of contacts from Anna in various Médecins Sans Frontières projects, he demonstrated how over ninety percent of infected women, sentenced to a slow death by the pharmaceutical business, had only had one partner, fulfilling A and B, and after a late or absent C, the ABC had led them - as their husbands did not fulfill it - to a "D," death.

Thanda also recounted how he had insisted on promoting condom use in all the programs supported by the European Union with its funds or indirectly through the Global Fund. He began receiving letters from parliamentarians accusing the Commission of promoting condoms, which they claimed were not entirely safe, leading to increased promiscuity and sexually transmitted infections, including AIDS. He responded with scientific evidence to the contrary, but Thanda and his team continued to receive hundreds of letters from European citizens demanding support for the American "ABC" strategy, conditioning European cooperation, as the PEPFAR program already did, on the non-use of contraceptive methods. He was able to find out that these letters were promoted by various officials and parliamentarians. He found out their names and asked Beatriz, whom she joined in the conversations that group of fighters had from Ukuzwana, New York, Brussels, Barcelona, and now New Delhi. Beatriz told them she knew them well because they were from the Opus Dei network that tormented and expelled her. That group was now reinforced by the new Pope Ratzinger and infiltrated European institutions with clear agendas. But that fight against condoms didn't stop there. What Buhleve was about to hear from Dr. Hinalper took it to an even more perverse level.

Dr. Hinalper explained how over the past ten years he had conducted research in fourteen African countries on how male circumcision prevented the transmission of AIDS. With the help of PowerPoint technology, mobile maps, dynamic graphs, and multiple links to videos, patient testimonials, and even harp music in the background, he explained the biological basis of the danger of the foreskin, which he presented as a diabolical part of human anatomy where sexually transmitted infections and AIDS took refuge, somewhat like the chamber of bullets, the virus, of the weapon, the epidemic, that killed millions of people. He spoke like a savior of humanity. He mentioned his father, an Israeli rabbi from whom he had learned the surgical technique by operating on thousands of Ashkenazim Jews who emigrated from Russia to Israel after the expulsion of the czar and later in new waves after the founding of the Zionist state.

While listening to him, Buhleve thought about the origin of those ideas linked at the same time to the occupation of Palestinian territories under the patronage of the victors of the world wars and their compensation for the abominable Nazi genocide. Elias had lent her Chomsky's book on "the fatal triangle" that explained this history and the links of Jewish power with the White House. Aimsa had contributed many data on these connections in the exchanges, including those related to the war companies in Iraq, their connections with the Mossad, and their common root in financial capital and pharmaceuticals that were still getting rich at the expense of immense pain. They ended up also including Haka in that group of fighters connected by emails likely to be spied on by Microsoft's links with the CIA.

The distinguished professor continued his lecture with the results of his experiments with the lives of thousands of circumcised or uncircumcised Africans. They compared infections and deaths between both groups. They touted as a success the higher frequency of infections in the uncircumcised. Thus, he eloquently concluded that it was necessary to include circumcision of newborns and all men of reproductive age. Only in this way, he said, could the terrible AIDS epidemic, for which President Bush, magnate Gates, and emissaries like the McKinseys of the Global Fund and PEPFAR and illustrious professors and their multiple medals and flowery resumes came to save the lives of unhappy Africans, be reduced. He announced that the PEPFAR strategy, with support from Gates and other fortunes in the United States, would now change the "C" of condoms to the "C" of circumcision.

At that very moment, Buhleve noticed Bishop Pius, an ally of Anwele and Ukuzwana, but harassed from Rome by Ratzinger, and they exchanged looks of concern.

After his lecture, which the audience in the meeting room of the Bulawayo Sun responded to with enthusiastic applause, Dr. Ndlovu publicly stated that they would set up "circumcision clinics" under said project in district hospitals. He mentioned that since a brand-new specialist in surgery was a district medical officer in Bulililamangwe, Dr. Beloki, they planned to start with that hospital and replicate the program in other rural hospitals until circumcising a million Ndebele men of reproductive age and thus stop the terrible epidemic.

At that moment, Buhleve asked for the floor:

* Dr. Hinalper, my name is Buhleve Beloki. I am a surgeon and head of the Ukuzwana hospital in Bulililamangwe. I have no publications or honorary mentions. My 'peers' are my colleagues and my patients. Thank you for your visit and for your concern about the pain caused by AIDS in our community. We take care of thousands of patients every year with very few doctors, often lacking even the most basic medications and with little access to global knowledge and even less to its translation into high-priced drugs due to the monopoly of patents.

She noticed how Dr. Hinalper and his accompanying consultants shifted uncomfortably in their seats and raised their eyebrows with displeasure.

* Regarding what you have presented, I want to comment on something that concerns me. Although circumcised men have half the risk of transmission to their partners, could not their 'false security' decrease condom use? If so, wouldn't the result of your 'ABC' lead to 'D' for the deaths of tens of thousands of women who adhered to 'A' for abstinence, 'B' for fidelity to their unfaithful husbands in Soweto, who would be moving on to 'C' in your circumcision clinics there, and would come, even less intending to use condoms because they have their 'surgical vaccine,' as you call it. I believe your strategy will result in unchecked infections for our Ndebele sisters. Are you not seeking to export your religious practice, based on moral prejudices, disguised as science and subjecting our people to even greater risk?

Dr. Ndlovu looked at her sternly and whispered something in Dr. Hinalper's ear, who gestured to him with his palm as if indicating that everything was under control, and he would respond to that young doctor with firmness.

* I admire your dedication to your patients, Dr. Beloki, but allow me to tell you that you are mistaken in your assertions. The United States government through its PEPFAR program, and the Gates Foundation, are the largest donors of programs and medications against AIDS and have saved hundreds of thousands of lives. Our only intention is to preserve life. Perhaps you may not understand it well. I will be delighted to discuss it personally, but our studies are randomized and triple-blind trials that demonstrate with all scientific rigor that circumcision reduces AIDS transmission by sixty percent. Do you know how many thousands of deaths could be prevented in Matabeleland each year if at least half of its sexually active men were circumcised? About twenty thousand deaths and all the human, family, and social tragedy that entails. I am convinced that your doubts about this program come from misinformation and not understanding the scientific evidence that underpins it.

Buhleve quickly did some calculations on a hotel napkin and responded:

* I do not need your paternalistic saviorism, Dr. Hinalper.

Elias put his hand on her arm as if trying to calm her down. There was a murmur in the room, and Buhleve noticed a blatantly accusing look from Dr. Ndlovu. At that moment, she saw at the end of the room, standing by the door, a man with a white beard, a clear gaze, and a hat pulled down to his forehead. Haka had somehow sneaked into the meeting, proud to listen to his daughter.

Those infections and deaths that you argue circumcision could prevent might only be a small proportion of what the decrease in condom use could cause. It's very simple, and I don't need doctoral theses or the supposed rigor of your 'triple blinds,' with all the ethical questions they also entail: if half transmit forty percent less, meaning a total of twenty percent fewer infections, but that same half uses condoms eighty percent less, which prevent almost all infections, meaning infections increase by forty percent, the net balance is a twenty percent increase in the epidemic. Your good intentions will translate precisely into twenty thousand more deaths. But I'll tell you another ethical consideration: I'm a surgeon, and I know that while adult circumcision is minor surgery, it requires resources and may cost at least two hundred dollars each. Your program will cost, I estimate, around twenty million dollars: if instead of that program and its dubious effect, even high risk of harm, they supported us with generic antiretroviral drugs at prices two hundred times lower than the patented drugs distributed by PEPFAR, they could meet the vital treatment needs of our ten thousand patients dying of AIDS today. Although perhaps a good portion of those funds must pay for your trips, hotels, and salaries, which I imagine are somewhat higher than ours of one hundred dollars a month. I urge you to reconsider your intentions, Dr. Hinalper.

There was a great commotion in the room. Applause from some and shouts from others. Haka looked at her proudly. Dr. Ndlovu took the floor:

* Dr. Beloki, your ignorance makes you insolent. This program will be very supportive to our province. Dr. Hinalper, forgive Dr. Beloki, who is a dedicated doctor to her patients, but she cannot grasp the tremendous value of your research. I beg we move forward with districts that can understand the benefit of this program. By the way, participation in it will mean an extra salary of three hundred dollars each month and a trip to Johannesburg next year to share the program's experiences. Which districts would be interested in participating?

A dozen hands eagerly rose to Dr. Ndlovu's offer, and they continued discussing the program's details with Dr. Hinalper and the consultants from the McKensie clan.

Buhleve and Elias left the room. They went with Haka, who Buhleve noticed had an increased tremor in his hands, to have dinner at his house with Helen and discuss what had happened. Haka had researched with Aimsa the roots of the Abraham program: it was led by Hilnaper, someone Aimsa had met in Berkeley and knew of his networks with pharmaceutical companies, the Gates Foundation, and the World Bank. It was driven by the Hadassah Medical Organization, a powerful organization of Zionist women from North America, with deep influence in the economic circles of Wall Street and the political circles of the White House. This organization had two hospitals in Israel. Its transplant programs were related to Kav LaChayim, operated with Ilan Perry, the organ broker for transplants who conducted business with the network of private hospitals in South Africa, Netcare, in whose clutches children from Mozambique and Matabeleland had fallen by the same traffickers who kidnapped Buhleve.

Haka was investigating with Aimsa Ilan Perry's links to Blackwaters, the Mossad, financial derivatives, and the networks of diamond and arms trafficking that still sowed wars and pain around the world, including their tentacles in the Iraq War. Aimsa was in contact with an Australian friend of Nadine named Julian who had created a network to expose secret documents of political and financial power. The networks of evil remained deep and wide. They said goodbye when the truck picked them up to return to Ukuzwana.

* Dad, I noticed your tremor. Please come to Ukuzwana with Helen on Sunday, I need to talk to you.
* Don't worry, daughter. I'm fine. But I'd love to take a long walk with you.

On the trip and the following days, Buhleve felt a dormant part of her soul awaken with Elias.

Elias had been born forty-five years ago in Santa Clara, in central Cuba. He was the son of a mathematician grandson of Asturians and an Afro-Cuban historian, both professors at the University of Las Villas. He grew up running and playing with other children in the main square and its surrounding streets, reading Martí and being a faithful pioneer in primary school, playing "pelota" while advancing in secondary school. Fascinated by the stories of Cuban internationalists since the 1960s, vanguard of the values of the revolution, he also studied medicine at Las Villas and then specialized in internal medicine, with a deep vocation to serve. He was an athletic mulatto, but not very tall, strong but not muscular, socialist but not a party member, romantic but not a poet, attentive but not affected, extroverted but not garrulous.

Elias had read with fascination Buhleve's book "where there is no specialist" when it was Brunapeg's turn to have one of his copies in rotation among the Cuban internationalists in Zimbabwe. He had met her for the first time at a provincial health council meeting in Bulawayo and her shy beauty and humble intelligence drew, for Elias, almost a mystical light for which he felt an unconfessable mixture of admiration and devotion. That is why, as soon as Patxi asked Sister Johanna for support in Buhleve's substitution, Elias volunteered.

During the month and a half that he filled in for Buhleve, he grew fond of the mission, Patxi, NoLwasi and the family, and the patients, who took a liking to him as well. Since there was a Cuban doctor couple in Brunapeg, Elias was able to ask for a week off and return to Ukuzwana to share the work with Buhleve.

Elias shared a room with Adam and Unai. Adam had started flying with Joseph, who had adapted inyoni-enkulu with solar panels. Unai was still enthusiastically climbing kopjes and scanning horizons. Elias would get up very early to go for a run, come back at dawn, take a bucket of water outside and bring Buhleve some cut guavas, have breakfast together and then visit the wards, the office, and the operating room together. Elias would learn from Buhleve's surgical skills, and she would learn from Elias' pediatric knowledge.

Buhleve was a tall, shy woman, always wore a scarf covering her hair, with a broad forehead, a pure look and a subtle smile. She made a grimace with an arched eyebrow when something surprised or pleased her, coupled with her click ndebele "tsh...", which fascinated Elijah. He had been impressed by her bravery in the face of Ndlovu and Hinalper. What attracted him most, though, was his hand mimicry: soft and slender toward elongated fingers that moved in a way that Elias felt expressed even the most intimate feelings. He had to hide so as not to be hypnotized by her hand gestures or her clean gaze.

Buhleve was attracted to a man for the first time. He would secretly spy from the window on Elijah's arrival in the mornings with the guava, although he would pretend not to be surprised by his arrival. She loved his mixture of gentleness and Latin humor, his discretion in his treatment and his vocation and affection for his patients. He was attracted by her serene gaze, her linear but soft features, her almost ungainly yet elegant manner.

They began to walk after the day's work along the nearby roads and kraals and to tell each other their stories. Elias told her of his revolutionary fervor, of Cuba's tropical beauty and its music and dance. He lived very simply. He was passionate about reading. To learn more vocabulary, he was reading an English edition of Love in the Time of Cholera. He also prised to draw pencil sketches on a notepad that he alternated with medical notes. Buhleve told him about his childhood with his parents and grandparents and jumped to the stage of his medical studies and specialization in South Africa. One day the conversation took them back to the time of the pain that had marked Buhleve's life, and her fear of men:

- And tell me, how did it go during this trip that absented you from Ukuzwana?

- It was a tremendous adventure with Haka, he is so brave!

- Yes, I have heard about him. Patxi's older brother, right?

- Well, he's also my father. He adopted me when I was fifteen.

- How did that happen?

- It's a very personal thing, Elias.

- I understand and I respect that. But I must tell you that I would like to know your story because I must be very sincere: I feel that a beautiful bond is being born between us.

- I feel the same way, Elias. Let me tell you: when I was twelve years old, I lost my mother and father to AIDS. My four brothers and I were left to live with my grandparents, who were already old and had a small, half-dried cornfield, two goats and some half-decayed huts. Some South Africans who came to trick them by giving them some money and promising to give me a scholarship, took me to Soweto. I was locked up for three months in a four-bedroom with other girls from Matabeleland. We were drugged and abused. We were taken one night to what was to be our destination, a brothel. That first night I was sedated and abused by a man. Before dawn, the police arrived thanks to Haka's unmasking of the trafficking and prostitution ring, as well as an organ trafficking ring. Haka and Helen adopted me, and I lived with them for a few years until I went to Johannesburg to study. Haka saved my life and her courage, for which she continues to fight despite her age, inspires me every day to continue without regretting my past.

Elias looked at her fascinated and saddened at the same time as he imagined that time of cruelty.

- I am deeply sorry, Buhleve. And I really appreciate you sharing it with me. I can understand how difficult it is for you to talk about it.

- My virginity and innocence were stolen from me with violence and cruel treatment, Elias. But when I finished my specialty, fate wanted me to be the doctor who saved the executioner of my youth from an intestinal perforation. That first gesture of overcoming resentment I finished integrating yesterday in my soul in a sincere ceremony of forgiveness that I did yesterday with NoLwasi.

Elias did not know what to say. His secret attraction to Buhleve's beauty now jumped to a plane of spiritual admiration for her greatness in forgiving such acts and giving herself to the service of others, even the one who hurt her so much.

He offered his hand to her. Buhleve handed it to him. They looked at each other. They embraced deeply. Buhleve felt both their hearts beat in rhythm with elation.

# Little Tenderness. Keystone Branch, mayo 2007

When Nour asked two years ago why she should go to school, her parents couldn't give her a clear answer. "To learn?" she learned more from reading and real-life experiences. "To socialize?" She socialized more in the streets, parks, and, especially, the villages, with people of all ages and backgrounds, not just children her age from her neighborhood. "To think?" Nour said that in history and science books, they were fed a narrative of human and white supremacy that she disliked, and Newtonian science that was incorrect -echoing her mother's views-. "To create?" There, her imagination felt stifled at school, finding inspiration in her free time instead.

Initially, they spoke with the local schoolteacher to see if he could allow more freedom of creativity, thought, and expression for Nour and her classmates. His reaction was defensive, citing adherence to government syllabi. When Aimsa and Jonay mentioned considering homeschooling and nature-based education, the teacher threatened to report them to child protection services for not respecting their daughter's right to education. This threat ultimately led Jonay and Aimsa to withdraw Nour from school. Jonay bid farewell to the teacher, Mr. Hoffmaier, with these words:

* Our daughter's name is NoLwasi, mother of knowledge. It's a Zulu name. In that culture, knowledge means understanding one's deep soul and connecting with the world beyond the present time, linking with ancestors and dreams, and feeling the energy that unites us all. Her soul knows no bounds, unlike the history books told by the victors, the Newtonian science concepts, or the art books repeating works from centuries ago instead of encouraging her classmates' creation, as valuable as those displayed in museums. And abstract mathematics is more fun when applied to everyday discoveries. I wish you the best in life, Mr. Hoffmaier, allowing your soul to flow and not the codes imposed by power. Your class is too small for our daughter's soul. It suffocates her. And I believe it does the same to the rest of her classmates and to yourself.

They discussed it with Marta, leader of the Children's Rights Convention, and Thanda, who led the EU's external action in defending children's rights. Both agreed: the true adventure of knowledge was often stifled by rigid education systems, in content and form. Thanda even reflected that often "education" responded well to its original Latin meaning: educare, to fatten cattle. Like in mental health, someone unfit for a sick society might be healthier and could more easily change a rotten system, as everyone knew was the dominant globalized system of production, consumption, and speculation. But both Thanda and Marta insisted that such a decision was as brave as it was difficult because it would require changing their way of life, accompanying Nour in every step of discovering and discovering herself, feeling accompanied in that magical adventure.

They spent the first year at home in Brooklyn. Jonay left his isolated community health activities, still pending approvals for his titles to be able to have contracts and medical responsibilities. He devoted himself, with great emotion and passion, to being Nour's "adventure companion of discovery." Aimsa, more occupied with representing the network of eco-villages, which already had five million eco-villagers worldwide, reserved four two-hour sessions a week to draw with Nour as each saw the world.

In that first year, Jonay and Nour went out for walks with Sam in parks and streets. They conversed every day with Jerry and other homeless community members, with baker Howard, fruit seller Thomas, postman Mohammed, who often stopped for coffee with them, nurse Yenny from the community health center, Bob the neighborhood librarian, David at his artisan furniture store, local policeman Frank, Lee the park gardener, and many neighbors who greeted them from their homes or in the park.

Every day Jonay documented in a notebook their discoveries, which came from Nour's questions and interest and his own hypotheses and how they tried to prove or discard them. They had an atlas, a science book, world history tales, a music theory manual, advanced with the violin, and did dances they also invented. Jonay used to tell Nour and Aimsa that he felt very happy because he had the most beautiful job in the world: accompanying Nour in discovering the magic of life. He said he learned a lot too. They went to museums and zoos, but felt sadness seeing animals caged, natural history dissected, and ideas and memories of the past frozen.

While Aimsa devoted herself passionately to leading the eco-village network, Jonay and Nour traveled for the third time to Ukuzwana, where Jonay was once again Jonay, and Nour discovered with Adam and Unai, her soul brothers, the magic of kraals and kopjes in total freedom and simplicity.

Since their first stay in the Black Hills of Dakota and Nour's magical encounter with the Mustang mare, they began going to nature more and more frequently. They found another place closer by. It was a small community called White Lake, part of the town of Bethel in Sullivan County, about a hundred kilometers from New York City. There, they rented a small cabin facing Lake Kauneonga, which in the native language meant "lake with two wings." In addition to spending summers and Aimsa's holidays on Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter, Jonay and Nour sometimes went for a week, especially when Aimsa had to travel for work.

They spoke with the Bethel town council about their choice of free and nature-based education. They were referred to the youth delegate named Jeremy, who had been a hippie in the sixties since the Woodstock Festival was held in his town. He had been a conscientious objector to the Vietnam War, a vegetarian, and a banjo musician since then. He invited them to dinner at his home with his family, and they resonated well with his ideas about life and the world. He was fascinated by what Jonay told him about the Ternura eco-village in La Gomera and the global eco-village movement. Jonay suggested they could start with a piece of land where they could discuss this alternative worldview with children and young people whom they would welcome into a cabin. Jeremy managed to get the Bethel town council to approve the "A Journey in Nature" project for schools in the area, and with that, they were granted a piece of land with a half-ruined cabin in exchange for fixing it up, planting a garden, and welcoming children for education about crops and nature.

So, in the second year that Nour called the "year of freedom," Jonay and Aimsa agreed that life in nature would be much happier and freer for Nour. Aimsa would take the train more often since she could now do much of her work remotely, except when meetings and trips to the United Nations prevented her.

Jonay and Nour moved to White Lake after Christmas 2006. They worked hard to build their "loghouse" so that it would be ready for their mother's visit, which would coincide with Nour's birthday on May 22nd.

They started by drawing how they wanted the house, with no walls or doors, with large windows facing south, with a fireplace in the center and a circle around it to sit, a wood-burning kitchen and coolers to store food, lofts for sleeping warmer in winter, closets for blankets and kitchen utensils, with an outdoor dry toilet and shower, and with a large porch overlooking the lake, from where they could watch the sunsets. They said it would be a house without possessions, to share, and careful not to accumulate books, clothes, or ornaments other than those quite essential or very dear to them.

They calculated how many logs they would need and of what length. They managed to borrow from the town hall through Jeremy a saw, chisel, plane, crosscut saw, drill, and dowel cutter.

Every day they spent half the time looking for wood and stones and the other half, building. A friend of Jeremy's, a Cherokee mason named Charles, helped them build the foundations with stones and mortar.

They decided to gather cypress, Douglas fir, white pine, and yellow pine logs. All the logs were from trees already fallen due to age or strong branches. They did not cut down any trees. They used a meter to select logs that were at least twenty centimeters in circumference. It was important to cut the logs before spring arrived in April when the sap was scarce, and the wood could slide on the snow with minimal damage to both the wood and the forest.

They learned together how to prepare the logs: first, they removed the bark and coated them with a resin from the forest that they heated and diluted. By applying it to each log, they prevented deterioration from insects, mold, and fungal attacks.

After a month, they had stacked the logs they would need and completed the foundations. They secured the thickest logs to the foundations, one every three meters on each side and one on each corner, a total of ten, and prepared the base of the floor with the spring or stilt method, then fixed by opposing notches thirty centimeters above the base on the horizontal logs on which the floor would go. Jonay and Nour decided to make spaces in the floor for the central chimney and for the food cooler in the summer.

They then continued to raise the walls of the cabin, carefully aligning the logs so that the centers of all the logs pressed downward on the central line of the wall, which in turn rested on the central line of the base. In this way, the unique shapes of each log fit into the whole, a symbol of the free education they tried to have and not the one bought from a company that was surely environmentally destructive, with precisely cut and plasticized logs with toxic substances.

They brought birch branch boards in Charles' pickup truck from a nearby sawmill that respected the forest. They then obtained nails from the hardware store and laid the floor, the roof, and the chimneys of the living room and kitchen, the lofts and boards for the kitchen and for the latrine, the shower, a shed for garden tools with a part exposed to the sun and covered by glass for the seed dryer and greenhouse, and the favorite corner: a swing for three hanging on the porch overlooking the sunset. Jeremy gifted them with mattresses, cushions, and at the local thrift store, they found dishes, three pots, wooden cutlery, linen sheets, and wool blankets. They then channeled water from a spring that was a hundred meters from the cabin and thirty meters higher. The water flowed almost constantly and was stored in an elevated cistern they made with local stones. From there, the water ran when they opened a gate through the furrows they made in the ground, draining towards the lake. They made a deposit with the boards for the worms to digest the compost of organic waste.

The family decided to name the house they had built together with their own hands "Little Ternura." In memory of the beautiful dream in the El Cabrito ravine that inspired the spiritual eco-village network, the hope for a world that would escape the cruel and blind clutches of consumption.

Everything was ready for May 22nd when Aimsa arrived to celebrate Nour's eleventh trip around the sun. Jonay and Nour went with Sam to pick her up at the bus train station. When, after two kilometers of walking through forests, they arrived about a hundred meters from where the house could be seen, they stopped in silence. Aimsa felt her tears flood her eyes. It was finally her home. From the garbage dump in Bombay, the streets of Calcutta, the Ashram of Sri, Rob's house, the boat in the bay, the hermitage of Ukuzwana, and James' house in Brooklyn, she had migrated around the world without fully feeling at home. She felt that she had arrived, after a long and winding path, at home, with her soulmate and the extension of her existence in the beautiful and free soul of Nour.

Spring had already brought forth dozens of species of flowers around the house, green shoots were growing on plum stakes they placed around the house, and small tomato, lettuce, broccoli, eggplant, pepper, garlic, ginger, chives, spinach, rosemary, oregano, mint, and parsley plants were beginning to emerge in the greenhouse, among others.

After watching the sunset from the porch swing, they prepared a watercress soup and a dessert with blackberries and maple syrup they had collected in the forest. As Aimsa had told Jonay her feeling of the longed-for end of a journey, Jonay played the violin notes of "The Long and Winding Road," which Nour sang. At that moment, Jonay and Aimsa gave something very special to Nour. Jonay spoke:

Daughter, from infancy, you illuminated us with the tenderness of your innocence, you continued to dazzle us as you began to discover the world in Ukuzwana with your laughter alongside your brothers Adam and Unai, you have continued to inspire us in New York where you were discovering the urban world and bringing warmth and light to our home. Two years ago, you were as brave as to confront and reject the system that imposed itself and suffocated your desire to discover from your freedom. In the last two years, we have been discovering together and through adventures with people and nature along the way, ideas, knowledge, memories, dreams, creations, and we have even learned together to build our home. Today, we give to you, Nour, aware that you will appreciate it because you have shown us courage and tenderness, sensitivity, strength and generosity, the diary that we have been preparing for you since we knew you were coming into the world until, at two years old, we arrived in New York. This is our gift.

In the following days, Aimsa and Nour were inseparable. So much so that Jonay decided to give them their space and went for a two-day walk to sleep under the stars in the Catskills Mountains.

Aimsa enjoyed a week of complicity with Nour in their new home in nature.

* Tell me, Mom, what can you teach me?
* I don't like the word "teach," Nour. I can share ideas with you, but I need you to share yours with me. I know some things, and you know others. I have more experience, and you have more imagination. Together we can discover adventures and fight for what we think is noble and beautiful, okay?
* I really like seeing the animals here in nature, Mom. It hurts me to see them tied up with chains in the city among cars and asphalt.
* That's what I wanted to talk to you about, daughter. For more than twenty years, thousands of scientists from all over the world have been working on the "International Panel on Climate Change." Every five years, they write a global report. They have just completed their fourth report, daughter.
* And what do they say?
* That there is no doubt that human beings, by burning fossils from beneath the earth, like coal first, then oil, and now gas, are increasing the planet's temperature.
* What are fossils?
* It's everything that contains carbon, has lived on the planet, and when it dies, it gets buried beneath the Earth.

Nour didn't understand the verb "buried," but she guessed it meant sinking into the earth. She thought about the lives of her grandparents, her siblings, her parents, herself, turning into coal. She felt dizzy. She had hardly ever talked about death with her parents or anyone.

* And what can happen because of all that smoke? How long does it take for a life to become coal or oil, Mom?
* Well, at least ten thousand years, some are over three billion years old. And do you know how long it takes for humans to burn them?
* I don't know, since cars?

Since what is called the Industrial Revolution, daughter. When they invented the first steam engine, by burning wood or coal and heating water, the force of steam moved the wheels, and thus the machines, trains, ships, and later cars, then electricity, heating. Men began to manufacture clothes and machines faster, to cultivate much more food, to move much faster, and to protect themselves from cold and heat.

* And were they happier like that?
* Partly yes, daughter. Since then, food in cities has increased because more was cultivated and transported faster. Then the clothes, the ways of building houses, the book printing presses, the radios. Now, also for having discovered medicines and vaccines, humans live twice as long as before the discovery of steam engines and everything that has followed in these last two centuries.
* But we have already filled the skies with smoke. And we are also killing many animals. What do you think we should do?
* Well, daughter, that's what worries me the most. Look: it is increasingly clear that by burning those fossil fuels so quickly, smoke accumulates in the atmosphere.
* But Dad taught me that forests absorb the carbon we and other animals exhale. Can't the forests absorb all the smoke from cars and factories?
* No, daughter. They absorb the carbon exhaled by animals, some fires, earth, and glacier fusions. But human combustion of fossils produces too much carbon and too quickly. Look, what took hundreds of millions of years to form, we have burned in less than three hundred years. The excess carbon is stored in the atmosphere, for more than a thousand years. The planet was not prepared for this, daughter.
* And what can happen if we keep emitting so much smoke?
* Well, you should know this, daughter: I have collaborated with the panel of experts, and we have estimated, with a lot of mathematics, how the temperature increases as the air fills more and more with smoke. We also know that when it exceeds two degrees above the average levels before we started burning coal and oil, it will be very difficult to cool the planet, and it will heat up more and more, making life difficult.
* We have to do something, Mom, we have to stop emitting smoke. Why do people keep polluting? Then cities are very bad for life, aren't they?
* Because everyone wants to continue with their comforts, in their cars, with petroleum plastics that also kill fish in the sea. Look, there are already oil fields to burn up to three times more than the limit that leads us to that temperature limit, and instead of closing them, more and more oil is being sought under the earth.
* And are we going to live "clean," Mom?
* You are absolutely right, daughter. Here in White Lake, we can live in natural harmony, in consciousness, cultivating and sharing. I will come from New York by train and then by bike. And I am going to stop flying all over the world. Justifying that I do it for the spiritual eco-village network, which is already saving more than thirty million tons of emissions every year, I excuse myself from flying on planes and going to meetings. But it's not fair. I'm no better than anyone else. I won't have the right to tell anyone how not to pollute if I do, right?
* Exactly. And tell me, how sick is the Earth, Mom?
* It's like she has a fever, daughter. It's like us when we have two degrees higher than normal: we call it fever and we start losing cells.
* And what have you thought we can do, Mom, you always fight so that there is no injustice.
* I believe we have two centuries to prevent humanity and other forms of life from disappearing from Earth: this XXIst century, in which you will grow and live, so that little by little we stop burning fossils and suffocating the air, and the next 22nd century so that those who follow us can heal all the damage we have done to Mother Earth. The family in Gomera and in Zimbabwe is already teaching how we can, with the network of spiritual eco-villages, change our way of life, live in community and in nature, without borders and without greed. Will you help me?
* Yes, Mom, I'm going to fight with you and Dad.

# The Eco-Island of Laurel forests. Gomera, abril 2008

Jonay was returning to his island. It had been seven years since he had last seen his parents since his farewell from Ukuzwana. James had already returned from his journey around the world. Now Jonay lived with Aimsa and Nour in White Lake, where they had been fostering an eco-village expanding from the "little tenderness" cottage. Aimsa spent some periods there and others in meetings in New York for United Nations gatherings. The network of spiritual eco-villages had attained the status of a United Nations member, as it counted more than ten million eco-villagers among throughout the world.

Since her conversation with Nour, Aimsa had stopped taking planes. She promoted the expansion of the eco-village network online and fought against various vile webs that continued to cast shadows over the world.

At the origin of the network, the Cabrito Valley and the Ternura community, something stunning was brewing to which Jonay wanted to contribute. Additionally, his father was already in his eighties, and although he continued to fight with strength and charisma to lead a new step towards a New Humanity, Jonay wanted to be by his side in that battle.

This time he asked James for the sailboat, now reinstalled in Brooklyn with Sam, to sail from New York to La Gomera. They had developed a friendship of sincere camaraderie, and upon his return, James felt as if the house and, above all, Sam, were waiting for him with the affection they had received from the Harris family. Therefore, and given that, just like the house was better inhabited, the sailboat was better sailing, he lent it to Jonay for a year. In return, they offered him the cottage in White Lake to spend seasons there in nature. Aimsa would continue her work remotely via the internet. And Nour would continue to learn from the school of life and the world, now sailing its seas.

Between January and April, while Aimsa was busy with the halfway review of the Millennium Goals, Nour embarked on a new adventure with her father. Jonay recalled his navigation skills from when he was a child and teenager with his father and became familiar with the winds of the North Atlantic. When they felt confident, Aimsa joined and the three of them set sail. They headed to the Bahamas Islands, where they stopped for two days to gather provisions of fresh food and water. They continued sailing for three weeks until they reached the Azores Islands and then continued to the Canary Islands.

They arrived at El Cabrito port six weeks later. They appeared by surprise. That afternoon, like many days, John and Umbela were watching the sunset. John noticed on the horizon a Nauticat 43, like James's, Jonay's landlord in Brooklyn, who had already circumnavigated the globe.

As he watched it slowly approach from the north, he felt a deep longing for his son's company. He remembered his curiosity about everything during his childhood, how intrepid he was as he grew up and accompanied him all over the island, his adolescence full of dreams and passions to change the world, his medical studies inspired by Fernando, his epic time in Ukuzwana and the alliance with the noble Patxi family, his union with Aimsa, his last visit to La Gomera with newborn Nour, the farewell from Africa, and the distant communication via email and even video-messages with them in Brooklyn and in White Lake.

He was stringing together all those images when he could already see the American flag on the stern and could identify that yes, it was James's sailboat. He felt a lot of emotion; perhaps it brought news, letters as he liked them, handwritten, or memories of Jonay, Aimsa, and Nour. As it approached, he could see someone waving from the bow. It was Nour! She looked beautiful, strong, with her curly hair blowing in the wind, her skin even more tanned from the journey. He alerted Umbela and they headed towards the port, where Tomas was shining several branches of heather with wax.

Aimsa went out on deck and could see Jonay at the helm. He had grown a beard of almost two months; his hair was already turning white, but he looked fit and with his usual clean smile.

The New Morning docked, and the five of them embraced each other with deep emotion, as they had done twelve years earlier in Tenerife when John and Umbela met Aimsa and Nour. John was very emotional; he could hardly speak. He was already eighty-two years old; he could see well after his cataract surgery, but he felt back and knee pains and could no longer move like before, nor sail alone. While Aimsa and Nour hugged Umbela and began to recount the adventures of the journey, Jonay looked at his father, both emotional, and said:

* What did you think? That you were going to enjoy this battle without me?

He said it while pointing to a sign on a post at the small pier that read, "Vote for the Movement for the Ecosovereign Island of Laurisilva" – MIEL (honey in Spanish)-. Below was a drawing of the network of spiritual eco-villages, with a group of people hugging a tree, a photo of John and a phrase: "Let's preserve the natural treasure of our island in harmony."

* How did you find out? I didn't want you to give it too much importance, son. In fact, I feel a little embarrassing with my name on those signs around the island.
* I received a beautiful letter from Yolanda, Dad. She explained how two years ago, Martin came, learned about Juan Antonio's fatherhood, decided to forgive, and join the community. She also told me that at the assembly of the seventeen eco-villages on the island, it was decided to present a program for the municipal, Cabildo, and Canary Islands elections. I think it's great, Dad; we need to invite everyone to live in harmony and experience the peace it brings. Aimsa, who hasn't flown for two years due to carbon footprint awareness, told me we should come and support you. La Gomera can become the first eco-sovereign island in the world. You are already a reference in the network; now the island can be a very strong beacon for Humanity.
* Thank you, son; your support is already a beautiful light.

They settled in the house where John and Umbela slept, without walls, some mattresses, and several hammocks. They had a conversation into the night after dinner, Jonay's favorite dish, watercress stew with gofio. They slept deeply, without the rocking of the waves or the night watch shifts while sailing.

The next day, Nour, who was fascinated to reunite with the mythical Cabrito Valley, went to find children her age in the community areas. The Ternura community had about five hundred people, around one hundred fifty of them under eighteen, almost half of whom were born there, and the others came from more than twenty countries. That night Nour would tell the community about theirsailing accorss the ocean.

Aimsa and Jonay wanted to talk to John and Umbela about their program for the ecosovereign island and how important it was for the network what they were proposing. An electoral program committee was formed. There was one in each eco-village on the island, and they called for a meeting of all of them three days later.

When Jonay received Yolanda's letter that made them decide to sail to Ternura, he told Aimsa that upon arrival, he would need to take a walk with Yolanda, close past wounds with love without fears. Aimsa didn't really have a sense of possession, neither material nor of people, besides feeling a full trust in deep complicity with Jonay.

As the sun set, Jonay went to the little house where Yolanda and Martin lived. He had already seen Yolanda arrive at the sailboat and was eager to meet with Jonay. Night was falling, and she had lit the porch with some candles made of beeswax. She wore a white linen dress, as if giving importance to the reunion. Martin had discreetly gone to meet up with his group of friends on the beach in the community.

He remembered when he asked her to go for a walk together twenty-five years ago. She still had curly hair, although tied back in a ponytail, and black, although gray hairs were beginning to show, but much fewer than Jonay's. Her hazel eyes magnetized Jonay's; her gaze had lost its shyness and carried a shadow of sadness; her smile was less discreet but more subtle; the body hinted at under the white linen was no longer so athletic, nor was her belly as flat. Jonay felt disturbed, unconsciously imagining her nakedness, and Yolanda seemed to sense that thought and blushed.

* Welcome, Jonay. It's been twenty-three years since we each followed our paths. I'm very excited to see you and feel your happiness.
* And I'm deeply joyful, Yolanda. Thank you for your letter; we wouldn't be here if it weren't for you.
* Well, Fernando also spoke to you about the elections, didn't he?
* Yes, but as important as supporting my parents and the eco-village movement was, it was also about reuniting with you. An open wound remained in my soul because the love for your being continued to beat, even though our paths followed different routes.
* I'm thrilled for your happiness. I know from John and Umbela, who have welcomed me as a daughter, that you were very happy in Ukuzwana and feel very connected to Aimsa, even more so sharing the love of your beautiful daughter Nour.
* Yes, Yolanda. Life has smiled at me. I was able to be the doctor I wanted to be for fourteen years, devoted to the most marginalized and combining science with spirit, with wonderful inspiration from our family in the mission. Six years later, I met Aimsa, with whom I felt, like with you, but in a different way, a deep attraction, and we started coming together. Nour came into our lives twelve years ago, and for the last eight, we have been living between New York and a village about a hundred kilometers away, because of Aimsa's work.
* Aimsa is very fortunate. You sacrificed your professional passion to accompany her on her journey.

That comment left Jonay with the feeling that Yolanda was reproaching him for not having done it for her when he finished his studies. For a moment, he thought about how his life would have been if he had done so: perhaps he would be a doctor in a health center in Tenerife or La Gomera, Martin would have some younger siblings, he would have been closer to his parents, and he wouldn't be so lost in New York today. But he wouldn't be the same.

* I am also fortunate, Yolanda. She is a very good person. She is eager to meet you. She comes from very harsh origins in India, bravely fights for ideas we share, including the eco-village network, and we feel a spiritual alliance beyond this reality.
* You're going to make me jealous.

Yolanda said jokingly. Or maybe not.

* Tell me about yourself, Yolanda. You look as beautiful as ever, and my parents tell me that Martin is a young man of tremendous intelligence and generosity; you must be very proud.
* Yes, I am. I gave up many things for him, including following you to Africa, but I don't regret it. I feel in the light of his soul the relief of peace to all my doubts.
* True happiness roots in giving to others, Yolanda. And you have given yourself completely. But tell me, how has your love life been, the forgiveness to the father of your child that you told me about, what happened to your parents, your life, your passions?
* It hasn't been easy, Jonay. I don't want you to feel my story as a litany. You deserve a happy time back in the ravine where you were born and raised.
* I truly wish to hear from you, Yolanda, tell me.
* Well, you know how I conceived Martin and how it led to a rift with my parents. Shortly after you went to Zimbabwe, my father was promoted and assigned to Zaragoza. I wrote and talked to them about Martin, but it took a while to receive a response. The following Christmas, my mother wrote to me and said they would be happy if Martin and I went to spend the Christmas holidays with them. We went, but I felt they expressed a different affection towards me compared to my siblings, with their formal families and Sunday mass attendance. I went four more times during the following years, but Martin asked me not to go back. He felt cold-heartedness from his grandparents that hurt him. Last Christmas, my older brother, who has been getting closer to me, told me that my father was ill. I went to see him. He had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's, and I wanted to tell him how much I loved him, and, despite everything, I always wished him all the happiness. I think he didn't understand me much anymore, but he gave me a hug that I hadn't felt since my childhood, or maybe never.

Jonay thought about the treasure of always having the support, understanding, and affection of his parents, despite the distance.

* Your kindness moves me, Yolanda. Tell me about the encounter with Martin's father and how it made you feel.
* Yes, it's been a whirlwind of feelings. Martin came to this community with a lot of excitement. How strange life's paths are when his tutor in preparing his terrace gardens was the man who abused my innocence and gave life to him! It took me a long time to tell Martin how my union with his biological father was, and I think he harbored as much desire to find him someday as resentment for his abandonment. Juan Antonio was then a spoiled young man in abundance and addicted to drugs and nightlife. He didn't know about my pregnancy and was moved to learn about it twenty-five years later from Martin. I don't want to excuse him for that life and those actions. Life is wise, and I did the best thing in not looking for him and in shielding Martin from my parents' prejudices, despite the pain, loneliness, and vulnerability with which I lived. Upon learning about it, and despite Umbela's advice for forgiveness, Martin left the community, came back to me, told me what happened, and brought me a letter from Juan Antonio.

She took a pause looking into the horizon.

* At first, I didn't want to have anything to do with the man who abused me and marked my life. But a few weeks later, I was diving in Los Cristianos and saw a beautiful starfish being touched by a ray of light filtering through the sea. I felt a message of beauty. I don't know why I associated that beauty with Martin's life, with the idea of this community, and with forgiveness. When I thought about forgiveness, I felt great relief. I had been carrying a grudge that weighed heavily on my soul. I felt that the encounter in life with the father of my child was a sign to bring out the most difficult and the best in me: to forgive to continue life in total harmony. We decided to return.

Jonay took her hand and their eyes looked into each others’ souls.

* It took me a few days to be able to see Juan Antonio and look him in the face. When I saw him, his image barely had any relation to the blurry figure of that night in Lanzarote. He is a good man, very hardworking and generous, and from the reunion and in his treatment always, he showed his repentance and unconditional support to Martin and me, in the way I decided. For now, we maintain a certain distance due to my mistrust, no longer resentment, but we have had several conversations with empathy, Jonay.

Jonay remembered Buhleve's story, even more violent and cruel, and how she had been recovering with, as Patxi said, the noblest gesture that the human soul can express, deep forgiveness, with understanding and unity.

* It is very noble of your soul to forgive like that, and I'm glad it brings you peace... you deserve all the happiness, Yolanda. You said in your letter that you also had something important to tell me. Tell me, Yolanda, you are very important to me.
* It's difficult for me to tell you, Jonay. Do you remember that in a letter I sent to Zimbabwe through your father, I asked you if your work was risky among so much AIDS in Zimbabwe and if you were getting tested?
* Yes, of course, I already replied, thank you for caring, I was careful and didn't get infected.
* Well, my question had another reason: about ten years after you left, I started noticing a painful itching between the ribs on this side.

She pointed to her left side.

* The skin reddened, then blisters appeared, and it became more painful. I went to the doctor, and they told me it was "herpes zoster." They said it could be due to a decrease in my defenses, and they needed to rule out that I had the HIV virus. A week later, they told me the test was positive. I knew about your fidelity, and I could only suspect Martin's father, whose whereabouts were unknown, and I preferred not to search. After that herpes, I developed white patches with a lot of itching in my mouth, and I started coughing. I was diagnosed with pneumonia and was hospitalized. I kept the diagnosis from Martin so as not to worry him. I thought I might die soon. I just wanted to hold on until Martin finished his degree and could continue his independent life.

Jonay felt a deep pain. What ironies of fate that led him thousands of kilometers away from his land to treat patients with AIDS and it was in the home he left. How to ignore the close and surrender to the distant. Wasn't there narcissism and selfishness in it?

* I'm so sorry, Yolanda. Alone, taking care of Martin, without the support of your parents or a partner, and suffering from the disease and, even more, the fear of what it could mean in your life.
* Yes, Jonay. It was a difficult time, but it kept me strong in my mission for Martin to advance on his path. A classmate of yours, Juan, who recognized me in the emergency room, was very kind to me. Just then, multiple treatments began to be prescribed, and I was able to improve my number of T4 lymphocytes and the infections healed. Martin was already fifteen years old, and I told him what was happening to me. He got tested, and was negative, although he has always been shorter and slower than children his age, and I wonder if my infection had something to do with it. I felt a lot of anger thinking that the father of my child, besides disappearing, could have consciously infected me. I consulted legally, and I was tempted to seek him out for revenge. But I preferred not to dredge up the past. I am relieved in my soul, Jonay, that you were not infected, although we always used condoms.
* And how do you feel now, health-wise, Yolanda? I suppose you have an undetectable viral load and good health?
* Well, although I've improved and there's no trace of the virus, the medications have had their side effects, and I have lipodystrophy. I feel embarrassed to tell you; I feel somewhat deformed.

Jonay could observe slender legs and a somewhat voluminous abdomen, but he truly saw in her a beautiful woman with an expression of great serenity despite everything she had been through.

* Really, Yolanda, I see you as beautiful as always. And tell me, does Juan Antonio also have antibodies?
* Yes. He was much worse off. Due to his drug addiction, he had many problems, and, as he told me, AIDS almost killed him, but the new treatments saved him. Although what truly cured him was leaving behind his life of excess and luxury and joining the community. Do you know that he prevented his father from demolishing the community houses and turning this valley into a luxury hotel with a golf course?

Jonay was very pleased to sense in Yolanda an unspoken gesture of pride in Juan Antonio's change and courage.

* Yolanda, I'm sorry for everything you've suffered from loneliness and illness. Your generosity in forgiveness inspires a beautiful light in me. And in it, I see your happiness and Martin's. You have in me a friend and a love that couldn't last a lifetime but left a beautiful imprint that continues to brighten my soul.

They climbed the Roque del Sombrero to see the stars and offer gratitude to the universe for crossing their paths and crossing them again, even if it wasn't in the fusion of their bodies.

Jonay explained later the conversation with Yolanda to Aimsa, and they went together to see her. Aimsa had long conversations with her, and they felt a lot of complicity. They joked about Jonay's clumsiness and stubbornness, and they found in yoga a beautiful moment of connection every sunrise.

In the following days, Jonay and Aimsa reviewed the program with which the network of eco-villages of La Gomera, already registered as a political party, was presenting itself in the elections on May twenty-seventh. Of the twenty-five thousand inhabitants of La Gomera, almost eight thousand, nearly a third, already lived in eco-villages. They thought that another third sympathized, especially due to their concern for nature, and feared that the remaining third was openly opposed to the way of thinking and living of the eco-villages.

When they registered as a party, the officials of the council, still resentful of how they prevented Juan Antonio's father, in collusion with the president of the Council, Don Cayo, from getting his way and exploiting the El Cabrito ravine, put all kinds of obstacles and questions. They falsely accused them that their purpose was not for the common good, that their accounting books were not reliable, that they did not pass health inspections, and that they had not paid taxes. But everything was false, and it was proven so.

John had proposed the idea of an eco-island participating in the elections and trying to convince, not defeat, the other groups of conventional parties. Although initially he faced resistance from the more radical anti-globalization and anti-system groups, his ideas, like paying taxes from their foundation, began to gain the support of the majority. By acclamation, the assembly of all the eco-villages asked him to be the "lead candidate" and spokesperson for the movement. He was already over eighty years old and tried to refuse, suggesting that it should be young people who led the change. But everyone's respect for the pioneers, John and Umbela, was greater than the pragmatism of their reasons.

It was then that the bosses tried to block the registration of the party by arguing that John was not a Spanish national. John insisted to Umbela that she should lead the program, but she contended that it should be John. It happened that precisely that year, the law was passed allowing non-national residents to run as candidates in local elections.

They agreed in an assembly to call the initiative the "Movement for the Ecosovereign Island of Laurisilva" – (short MIEL in Spanish). They proposed this because the laurisilva was the oldest life species that also provided water to the ravines, watercress in the waterfalls, life in all its forms, and the terraces where the food that nourished them grew. The acronym "miel" , honey, symbolized the product of the work of the most beneficial species for life on earth, bees. Some protested due to the similarity to the symbol of one of the most corrupt business groups, Rumasa, but they insisted that it was necessary to cleanse such a beautiful sign of any perverse use.

They adapted the decalogue that Umbela proposed in Findhorn twenty-three years ago, and which Aimsa knew by heart as the founding charter of the spiritual eco-village network. They gradually integrated those principles into a concrete proposal for that beautiful but troubled island, which had endured centuries of chieftains and abuse by the powerful:

* First article: *Care for Mother Earth*: The movement for the ecosovereign island of Laurisilva - MIEL - was based on respect for the Earth, for the island that gave them life, and they had to preserve it for future generations and inspire other islands and regions of the world to do the same. Therefore, they would measure and respect the planetary boundaries of emissions per person in carbon in the atmosphere, in nitrogen in the soil, in phosphorus in the sea, the marine pH level, the area of ​​forests covering at least two-thirds of the island, the rich biodiversity of nine hundred plant species, fifty of them native, unique to the island, the richest in diverse life by surface area in all of Europe, and the magical waters of Garajonay, which, due to its humidity, caused streams to flow, without springs, towards the waterfalls of the ravines. They would gradually ban plastics and chemical toxins in food, cleaning products, and any other form. They would also progressively prohibit combustion vehicles, the airport, oil ferries, thermal power plants, and further expansion of asphalt. To listen to the island, to all its life forms, to the volcanic beat of its existence, they would introduce a program of "empathy with nature" for all ages, in which to learn to know its richness, how to cultivate in balance with the land, and how to care for its living beings. All this would require an investment in materials for local manufacturing of windmills, solar panels, bicycles, sailboats, and ultralights with electric motors based on clean energy. They had consulted with Joseph in Zimbabwe, who along with Adam would assist them in a production and invention plan. Sven Hansen from the Resilience Institute in Stockholm would assist them in measuring and caring for planetary boundaries.
* Second article: *Sacred Life*: For the movement for the ecosovereign island of Laurisilva - MIEL - every life was unique and sacred. Similarly, and with the same rights, every form of animal life was respected and protected. For this, a progressive plan to switch to vegan diets was necessary. They calculated that for the island's inhabitants outside the eco-villages, where no animals were killed or eaten, more than three million animal lives were sacrificed each year, two-thirds of them fish. They would progressively reduce such unnecessary animal suffering by promoting a vegan lifestyle for greater health for the earth and for people. All this would require an increase in agroecological crops in unprotected forest areas. They calculated one hundred twenty square kilometers of crops in plains and terraces, a total of twelve thousand hectares capable of providing healthy and non-cruel food to all its inhabitants and as many visitors. They had consulted with Masanobu Fukuoka, the wise elder from Japan with whom John and Umbela had spent a week on his farm on Shikoku Island. Lisy, who was coordinating the global peasant movement, joined to promote family agroecology in villages, communities, and even in the city.
* Third article: *Love without religions*. The movement for the ecosovereign island of Laurisilva - MIEL - had no qualms about speaking of a principle absent in all political discourse, love, as essential in its program. It was the love between all people and all animals, the basis of their action and proposal. For this, empathy in communities like eco-villages was necessary, promoting non-binding forms in human relationships, preventing loneliness, honoring the memories of ancestors with love, and encouraging meditation and spirituality for the unity of the energy of all its inhabitants. To this end, health services would be called "well-being" and would identify people with anxiety or loneliness, encouraging the community to show them love. They would promote spirituality and the unity of all religions, encouraging no one to threaten with hell or think of a single truth to the exclusion of others. They would encourage heartfelt and prolonged hugs from early childhood and with all members of the communities, and the exchange of feelings about life with other cultures and forms of spirituality. NoLwasi and Patxi would connect with the island to exchange their weekly dialogues broadcasted by the Sibithanda network, and through Javier, they were in contact with the Dalai Lama.
* Fourth article: *Equitable ownership*. Respect for the earth and life, in love, required that all inhabitants of the island distribute the fruit of their efforts equitably, according to needs. The transformation of nature into food, art, housing, forms of transportation and energy, furniture, clothing, natural medicines, and any other product or contraption for well-being, could be individually owned, but avoiding the need of some and the hoarding of others. Doctors and teachers would be volunteers who would accept not to receive salaries and would live on the support of everyone in their housing, food, energy, and transportation. Medicines and means of communication would be imported from the Canarian government in exchange for surpluses of food, medicinal plants, and other goods without affecting the natural balance. Since education and health, based on respect for the earth and life in love, would be free, and the acquisition of food, clean sources of energy, housing, clothing, footwear, and transportation would be obtained through labor with what the land provides, money and banks would not be necessary. Barter and solidarity would be the natural way for everyone to have enough and no one too much. The goods of progress that the island could not manufacture, such as some medicines and means of communication, would be exchanged for the contribution of islanders who migrate to global public goods centers and the contribution of limited amounts of minerals and medicinal plants, in balance with the natural cycle. Thanda, who was developing equity ideas in the European Union, was excited to collaborate.
* Fifth article: *Nature without tenure*: the land, its rocks and water within, and its plants and life on its surface, would not be owned by anyone, neither for money - which would not exist - nor by inheritance, as no one could hoard. Its care would be everyone's responsibility. Lands would be distributed for the protection of life and the ecological production of food, according to the sizes of the eco-villages that would be established in each area of ​​the island. Nor ownership of individuals by each other be allowed, whether through marriage, parental authority, or relationships of noble, labor, or political hierarchies. No one would be superior to anyone else. Everything would flow with love, without chains and in solidarity. Fernando, in contact with colleagues from the Cuban revolution, would advise on gradual, negotiated, and progressive expropriations towards common ownership of natural resources.
* Sixth article: *Coexistence in eco-villages*: communities, to get to know each other and have empathy, would organize themselves into villages, preferably of no more than six hundred people. This would allow, rather than distant and remote knowledge in times and places, to know the neighbors and community members, through which to understand dreams and fears among them and decide in assembly and without hierarchies about their common endeavors for the common good and the care of the nature under their care. Time sharing in other eco-villages on the island would be promoted to exchange knowledge and experiences. The spiritual eco-village network and Aimsa in its global coordination would encourage exchanges through non-polluting travel, to learn from experiences, thoughts, and feelings from other corners of the world. Robert Gilman and the "Context" institute would provide advice and support in these forms of organization.
* Seventh article: *Solidarity in responsavbility*: For the coordination of the island's eco-villages, a council of the ecosovereign island of Laurisilva is established, which will have no privilege and will be elected according to the examples of solidarity of its members and on a rotating basis. The representative of each eco-village to the council of the eco-island is chosen for their acts of solidarity and holds no privilege over others. Within each eco-village, responsibilities would be distributed in supervising the care of nature, the distribution of its fruits, honesty in bartering, preventing loneliness, caring for community sources of energy, transportation, and common spaces, and all this by eco-neighborhoods if the villagers considered it necessary. These responsibilities would be exercised by voluntary rotating positions called "common service" in which, at some point in their lives, all eco-villagers would serve the community. In this area, they relied on the advice of Noam Chomsky and his passion for libertarian solicialism as the form of coexistence in which the greatest kindness of people emerges, with whom Aimsa was in contact.
* Eighth article: *Non-violence*: any type of weapons or objects designed to harm human, or animal lives would be prohibited on the island. Differences of opinion and sorrows due to misunderstanding would be addressed through dialogue, empathy, and reflecting on the breaches of our commitments. No one would be guilty or innocent. There would be no police or judges, prisons, or punishments. It would be the community in assembly and with the principles of empathy and solidarity that would discuss conflicts and approve solutions without winners or losers, without guilty or victims, promoting comprehensive forgiveness and peace and harmony among all eco-villagers, between eco-villages and with other islands and regions of the world. Javier, Thanda's colleague in Brussels, a pacifist, in contact with the Dalai Lama and leader of movements in Europe for the peaceful resolution of conflicts and for respect for animal life, would advise them.
* Ninth article: *Without fixed truths or titles*: All people would seek throughout life new forms of harmony in nature that best avoid pain, hunger, thirst, heat or cold, illness, loneliness, and that increase our joy of feeling, thinking, and meditating on existence. There would be no teachers or students, but everyone would learn from everyone by exchanging experiences, more in the elderly, and imaginations, more in the young, enjoying the joy of sharing the adventure of knowledge, aware that it is constantly changing, sometimes even returning to previous thoughts and practices, such as in Altieri's agroecology and Fukuoka's permaculture. They had the advice of Paulo Freire from Brazil, with whom Aimsa was in contact, and they had developed a lovely complicity.
* Tenth article: *New Humanity*: The ecosovereign island of Laurisilva would relate to all eco-villages in all regions of the world and to all communities, towns, cities, and nations that had other principles and ways of life. Every person was welcome to the island, regardless of their origin or documents, race, belief, sexual identity, or aspirations in life, except for accumulating and causing harm to others. It would be part of a global network of villages in the world that would exchange knowledge and feelings, towards harmony with nature, its fundamental principle, and among all people and other life forms on the planet. The spiritual eco-village network, through Aimsa, would be promoted at the United Nations.

They hence proposed an ecological, vegan, spiritual, communal, equitable, rural, and libertarian island, animated by public servants without salary and on a rotating basis. It would progressively become an island without plastics, carbon emissions, chemical fertilizers, or more asphalt; where no land animals or marine animals would be mistreated or sacrificed, nor trees felled, without exclusionary religions or hell, without land ownership, without accumulation of material possessions, without money or banks, without cities, without power hierarchies or paid politicians or officials, without police, judges, or prisons, without teachers or titles, without documents or undocumented individuals, and without borders. They were supported in the proposal by leaders of all sixteen eco-villages on the island, the Ukuzwana family, Sven Hansen, the Dalai Lama, Noam Chomsky, and Paulo Freire. Nelson Mandela, already very old but serene and wise, had sent his support through Nadine.

The other competing political parties, primarily President Don Cayo Locurbe's Socialist Party since 1990 and the Canary Coalition of Moisés Plencia, were competing with MIEL for the sixteen councilors of the island council and the four representatives of the island in the Canarian parliament.

The eco-village network began to suffer a smear campaign by the other parties through radio, television, the newspaper La Isla, and posters on streets, squares, and roads, even messages on mobile phones. They were accused of "drug-addicted hippies," "anti-Catholic communists," "invasive foreigners," going against progress, order, peace, respect, values, traditions, and even the dignity of the islanders.

Given the growing presence of eco-villages and the support received by the movement for the ecosovereign island of Laurisilva, MIEL, Silvia, the same RTVE journalist who years ago made the documentary about the eco-villages for "Informe Semanal" and whose camera helped prevent the destruction of the community and the El Cabrito ravine, promoted a debate among the three parties that was broadcast throughout the country. The journalist first gave the floor to the man who had been the president of the island council for almost twenty years, Don Cayo Locurbe:

* Fellow Gomerans. During the five previous elections in which you have placed your trust in me, La Gomera has progressed: we have more tourist visitors every year, more roads, the airport is now a reality, the economy has grown with tourism, and the well-being of all Gomerans increases every year. Against the Canary Coalition, we guarantee the social services and social support that they want to squander to favor their businessmen. And against that absurd movement 'MIEL' – he smirked mockingly - let's not allow our well-being, the result of the work of so many generations, to be destroyed without respect by the communes of foreign hippies.

Next spoke the representative of the Canary Coalition, the conservative right-wing.

* Don Cayo, it is time for you to pass the baton to a young and dynamic group, which will not make your mistakes in management, nor ruin the public spending, and attract entrepreneurs who can increase industry, hospitality, and top-level services on the island so that this island becomes the star destination for all Europeans, especially preserving its natural and historical heritage. Little to say about Mr. John Harris, an Englishman foreign to this island, who intends to destroy the properties earned with the sweat of many generations, our livestock traditions, progress, education, and religious traditions throughout our history.

Then it was John's turn:

* Silvia, Cayo, Moisés, listeners of this debate: I love this island and all the life on it. Although the communities of the sixteen eco-villages have chosen me for this proposal, I renounce any salary and will be a servant of the ideas that we want to encourage in consensus, with all respect for all the people who inhabit this beautiful island or who visit us. I was born in Wales, but I feel like I belong to the world. We do not intend to offend any belief, tradition, or anyone's efforts, although we propose an island, the first in the world, without carbon emissions or harm to the environment, without ownership of nature, without money or banks, with goods in equity, without animal sacrifices, without any form, political segregation, without power hierarchies, where we share without competing, and we all love each other without prejudice.

In the face of these words, the "professional" politicians, one already twenty years clinging to power and its privileges and the other in a similar career of public office, launched furious attacks, first Don Cayo, then Moisés:

* Let the listeners know. This disgraceful individual proposes an anarchy without property, laws, or progress, where soon this island would be a dump with diseases, without opportunities, without being the shining tourist destination that we have managed to become. Even the lamp posts wouldn't work in the hands of these arrogant hippies! Vote for progress, for the socialist party.

Moisés, who had already secretly agreed with Don Cayo to govern in coalition against the eco-villages, continued:

* In the anarchist villages on this island, time and progress have stopped, they cook with firewood and don't even have enough to buy bread, they don't even respect marriages or the right of children to go to school and become decent men and women. I ask you, dear listeners, do not vote for this cultural and economic suicide, vote for the Canary Coalition.

John, despite all the defamatory aggression, responded calmly:

* Cayo, Samuel, I don't think you know me or us, that's why you speak with so much bitterness. It's your prejudice that blinds you. I respect your supposed willingness to serve your fellow islanders, but we don't believe that anyone is superior to anyone else to perpetuate representing others for so many years. It's true, Cayo, that we propose an island without property or laws, and we don't want progress or tourism based on destroying nature. Do you know what is the emissions level per person above which the lives of our children and grandchildren will be much worse than ours due to climate change?
* I don't know, and it's irrelevant. Our island is already a lung for the Canaries and the world with our Garajonay Park.
* With all due respect, Cayo, I think you're wrong. With Sven, from the Stockholm Resilience Institute, we have calculated that it is one ton of carbon dioxide per year. Not all the forests and oceans in the world can absorb more carbon above that limit. Just with a hundred thousand tourists per year and their emissions on the ferry, buses, and imported food, that limit is already exceeded. We have ten times more. Yes, we will have less money, but we will be the first ethical island in Europe to preserve the planet, and we can provide healthy food through agroecology, sufficient energy from clean sources, beautiful crafts, and holistic care.
* And excuse me for extending myself, by references. Samuel: it's true that we don't promote marriages, we believe in free love, without chains imposed by papers. It's true that we don't believe in education by differentiated ages and oriented to compete socially for jobs and income. You are a great connoisseur of history and heritage; do you know what the origin of the word "educare" in Latin means?
* I didn't come here to receive lessons from someone who doesn't even have a university degree!
* I don't intend to give lessons, Samuel, just to debate ways of living. It's interesting that "educare" means "to fatten cattle", for their social role, as one more that produces, consumes, and competes. We believe more in sharing experiences and imagination, ideas, and art, oriented towards the common good and not towards individual enrichment. Paulo Freire from Brazil will help us in that change.
* Cayo, Samuel: you are scandalized by an island without property, without borders, without religions, in harmony. But tell me with your heart in your hand: do you like the song "Imagine"?
* That's a utopia, impossible in the real world! -said Don Cayo.
* Populist, demagogue, you try to deceive honest workers who deserve the fruit of their labor! -Samuel retorted.

They each ended with some messages. Each of the professional politicians gave a rallying cry for people to vote for their party and warned not to vote for the eco-village movement and all the evils it would bring to the island. John ended by saying that they should vote according to their hearts, that they would continue to take care of the land and life, trying to improve in harmony every day, and that everyone was welcome to spend as much time as they wanted in one of the eco-villages, sharing the workday, rest, care, assembly, and meditation.

In the two weeks leading up to the elections, a defamatory campaign continued. They were accused of being drug traffickers, and Juan Antonio, still threatened by his father, who was funding Cayo's campaign, spoke on television and radio telling the truth about drug trafficking and the harmony and health he found in the eco-villages. He was disinherited. The eco-villages were accused of poor hygiene and bad health. Luis and Fernando denied it and provided data on their improved health. The eco-villages received visits from half of the island's inhabitants, and most felt their peace and harmony.

# At Home by the Forest. Hoeilaart, Belgium, September 2008

Since spring 2008, everything seemed to be in transition, as if humanity still didn't know the direction of the century or the millennium it was barely starting. Thanda continued to fight for the children's rights policy in a Europe also adrift.

The then fifteen member countries in the European Union were preparing to welcome almost all Eastern Europe, paralleling NATO's expansion toward the Iron Curtain, at Russia's doorstep, against the gentlemen's agreement between Reagan and Gorbachev thirty years earlier. It symbolized, twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the triumph of capitalism over socialism through Washington's long arm in Europe.

With double the economic wealth per person compared to the "poor brothers" knocking at the door, the Western European Union of "the fifteen" had been trying for four years to pass a new European constitution, the Treaty of Rome, but the lack of unity in the most basic values, those of justice and solidarity, led them from failure to failure. Perhaps the society, based on capitalism and the *individual freedom to excel over others*, meant that between citizens and leaders, economic and commercial interests prevailed over social and supportive ones, hindering any attempt at a union of values in sharing. The strongest and most binding reference to these values in the European Union, echoing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, was the European Charter of Fundamental Rights, which needed to be recognized in a single constitution for all Europeans. But these attempts were met with negative referendums in France and the Netherlands. Europe was perhaps, like the rest of the world, on a halfway path "toward an unknown destination".

At every step, Thanda felt how the spirit of solidarity with impoverished or marginalized countries and regions from the central economic power was overshadowed by an unconfessed but tacit euro-centric arrogance in many attitudes. He often put it to the test when he asked his colleagues in cooperation discussions with any "developing" country: "And what can we learn from them?" He almost always found silence as the answer. It was also difficult for him to find an answer.

Also in that 2008, halfway between the birth of the millennium and its goals in 2015, the European Council was discussing global progress towards the millennium goals. They debated how the European Union guided its cooperation towards challenges in the world, trying to champion a supposed "moral leadership" for its positions on universal human rights, its levels of international cooperation, and commitments to climate change. Of course, while keeping its borders and safeguarding its privileges. As Orwell would say in Animal Farm, "we were all equal, but some were more equal than others".

It was then that Dr. Fronz was promoted, despite her conflicts of interest and abusive treatment of so many colleagues, to another directorate. Thanda had for the first time a boss with a big heart, intelligence, and humility, virtues that, he thought, often went hand in hand. He was a French engineer named Jean Claude who had lived all his life in Africa, very committed to social justice. He was returning from his latest assignment in Madagascar. For the first time, Thanda felt respected in his work in the commission. Jean Claude told the entire "human development" unit where Thanda worked that he would spend his first month of integration hardly speaking, listening, and learning from everyone. He was always taking notes in a small notebook, with a careful and tiny handwriting that reminded Thanda of his father's. After a month, Jean Claude tasked Thanda with leading the health section. He had several colleagues from the commission, member countries, interns, and even trainees to support him.

Representing the European cooperation health team, he attended debates at universities and with civil society groups. He dialogued with European NGOs and their lobbies in Brussels, almost all of them benefiting from funds from the Global Fund, PEPFAR, and the Gates Foundation, which funded the consortium of European NGOs for health cooperation. In a debate with this consortium, he had a difficult but sincere exchange of opinions with its director, a young Scottish Labour politician named Frazer, who spoke eloquent English:

* Dr. Garay, why do you insist that European cooperation support public budgets of countries without the capacity to manage them or with the risk of corrupt use? We in NGOs have demonstrated the ability to manage these funds, to reach people, and avoid political interests.
* Call me Thanda, Frazer. First, in the European Union, we defend, from our fundamental charter of human rights and adherence to international human rights treaties, the right to health and the state's responsibility to ensure it. Our European social model is based on the equitable collection of taxes and their use to finance basic public services such as health, education, justice, and social protection. Your home country, Frazer, the United Kingdom, is a good example of this concept of a social state. Why don't we want for others what we defend for ourselves?
* Well, it's not comparable. Our governments are democratic, and their accounts can be audited, detecting their misuse in time. In most developing countries, that doesn't exist. How do you ensure that European citizens' taxes are not going to dictators' privileges?
* Look, Frazer, there are two issues I want to discuss about this. The first one is about the procedures we follow, which are very similar to when the European Union provides funds to its Member States. We do it with great rigor, Frazer. Thousands of reports and audits. I assure you. But there is another reason that, for me, is philosophical or about emotional intelligence in human relationships: trust. Without trust, there is no possible cooperation. In any case, it will be paternalism, evangelization, exploitation, submission, or charity. That is what history is full of, and it has only perpetuated hierarchies, inequalities, and injustices. If a person, a group, or a country truly wants to cooperate with another, it must be based on mutual respect and trust. Being European doesn't make us more honest, efficient, or transparent.
* But there is an undeniable fact: we have societies with greater welfare and social justice. We can direct efforts, funds, and cooperation in that direction, which has not yet been explored by those countries where, we must remember, millions of people die from preventable causes.
* Frazer, we are not smarter or harder working either. Much of our privilege has been built through these forms of vertical relationships. But let me ask you a question: If you want to help a friend and you are doing well and have extra to share, how would you help them?
* Well, I would give them what I have extra, and talk to them about how they are using it and getting back on their feet.
* You've just described "budgetary support," Frazer. You don't tell them to rent this or that house, buy this or that food, dress in one way or another, or do one job or another. You trust them, in their effort, honesty, gratitude, and respect for your effort in helping them. That is cooperation, Frazer, and for me, the most honest way to do it is through public service, which can become universal and permanent, not through private groups and limited projects in time and space.

After the debate, Rafael Lavi, the Secretary-General of Doctors Without Borders, a Catalan journalist leading the movement, approached him and asked:

* Interesting what you said, Thanda, but then, what do you propose we do as civil society?
* Well, maybe you should put your funds into sectoral budget support and engage in dialogue with the government, as we do in the cooperation partners' forum, based on your experiences and testimonies.
* You just said it, Thanda. We are the ones who can bear witness to injustices and act directly at the local level and denounce globally. For this, we need independence.
* Yes, when it's an emergency, I agree, but by empowering communities and countries to deal with future emergencies. And denunciation, of course. In fact, on a personal note, let me ask you: why hasn't Doctors Without Borders denounced the genocide of the United States' war against Iraq, or Israel's invasions of Palestinian territories or southern Lebanon?
* You don't understand, Thanda. It's not technically a genocide. And we must protect our access to victims.
* Thanda thought that nobody was truly neutral, and cooperation was plagued with undisclosed and unconfessed interests.

A year earlier, Anna insisted that Thanda run for a position as a board member of Doctors Without Borders, and so he did. Even with limited experience in the organization through the AIDS treatment project in Ukuzwana, he argued how from within the European Union, he could share geopolitical and international cooperation debates that could be useful for Doctors Without Borders. He came in second in votes, after the president, Paula Fissar, a friend of Quechua origin, a doctor, and a writer with a big heart. He also argued within the European Union that such dedication gave him a proximity to reality complementary to that of European institutions and would avoid any conflict of interest in selections for calls where Doctors Without Borders participated.

He attended the organization's Board of Directors meetings every month and stayed the weekend in Barcelona, sharing with good friends from the association of aid workers. One weekend, Anna invited him to a meeting of aid workers at a farmhouse in the Ebro Delta that she had just bought with her partner Pere. During the meeting, he met a nurse, Sara, who was very fond of hiking in the Pyrenees. Thanda had been without the warmth of a partner's embrace for nine years and began to get close to Sara. Every month, when he attended Doctors Without Borders' board meetings, they shared their passion and intimacy in a small apartment in Santa Coloma and on excursions in the Pyrenees. Thanda longed to live as a family and for Sara to harmonize with his daughters, or to be parents together and form a new home in Brussels, but Sara did not feel comfortable as a mother-without-being-a-mother, nor did she want to leave her city and mountains. After a short time of fleeting encounters, affection began to dissipate as their paths took different directions, and Thanda returned to the coldness of his loneliness.

For a year, he advocated in the Board for moving from projects to support for governments and their public services, from diseases to the right to comprehensive health, from aid workers to supporting local officials with much humbler salaries and much deeper knowledge of their reality, to denouncing wars like the United States' in the Middle East and inequalities between countries and within countries with fair fiscal policies. He ran into a wall time and time again. He saw it clearly in a situation that summer of 2008: Doctors Without Borders was facing an economic crisis as it was focused on the Balkan crisis and rejected European and national funds to maintain independence of action and denunciation in Kosovo. They hired an advertising company to design the Christmas strategy, from which they obtained eighty percent of new members every year. It was a powerful company that also did advertising for car brands, perfumes, and beverages. After a "market study," the director of the study presented his proposal for an image and promotion strategy to the Board:

President, members of the Board. As important in life is to know what we are as it is to decide what we do not want to be. In Doctors Without Borders, there is a lot of passion for saving lives in situations of injustice or disasters, but as they have become involved in more complex issues such as access to medicines or AIDS, the organization has entered a fuzzy area where it overlaps with other organizations. Doctors Without Borders has to be the best, and the choice of every citizen to support it, in the causes it defends : saving lives in emergencies. Period. If it gets into denouncing human rights abuses, it will be trailing behind Amnesty International; if it analyzes social injustices, it will be a shadow of Oxfam; if it promotes peace in a neutral way, it will follow behind the Red Cross. Doctors Without Borders cannot be seen as a defender of peace, justice, or human rights.

Thanda felt a deep anger on one hand, but on the other, a certain relief in seeing how positions were made clear and the wall he had been hitting for some time became more evident. He spoke up.

* You are a company that helps others compete and win over others. It is precisely that capitalism of competing for one's own success and the failure of opponents that has led to this unjust world. The lives we are interested in saving are endangered by unjust wars, like the one in Iraq - he glanced at Paula to see if she reacted -, by extreme inequalities based on the opulence of a few, like some companies that fund us and from which we seek their crumbs, and the poverty of many, and by unjust laws that do not guarantee human rights, such as the right to health. Of all the causes and consequences in diseases, not just the most visible or exotic ones. Excuse me, colleagues, but I do not understand defending health and life without speaking of peace, justice, and rights. It's like wanting to swim without getting wet.

The Board ignored Thanda and decided to support that advertising strategy. They estimated forty thousand new members and three million additional euros in subscriptions per year. They got forty-two thousand.

Thanda resigned from the Board and wrote the reasons for his resignation in the organization's newspaper, Abba. He always maintained friendship and affection for the adventurous and action-oriented soul of the organization, necessary in many corners of the world, but with that idea, they would only be mitigators of injustice. They couldn't transform it. Even if it meant constant struggles and difficulties, he did want to change the world, from within power, with studies, proposals, allies, and commitment. With Courage and Tenderness.

By then, he met Andre-Jacques, a Belgian with an epic life in the Great Lakes, Bellevue Hospital in New York, and who, along with his Icelandic wife, had founded the movement THE-net ("Training for Health Equity-network").

He was invited to give a lecture on his vision of equity and international cooperation in Cuba. For Thanda, as for many young left-leaning individuals of his generation, Cuba was a myth: the revolution, Che, Playa Girón, the internationalists, the brave dignity against the United States, the concerts of Silvio and Pablo in the splendor of the university transition in Spain. He arrived in Havana and was taken to a hotel away from the city where participants from ten countries around the world slept and discussed.

On the last day, Pedro, a friend of Andre-Jacques, attended and introduced them, saying he was convinced they would connect their souls in great friendship and complicity. Pedro "rescued" Thanda from that isolated hotel, took him to meet his wife Suzy and their children José and Haydée at their apartment in Vedado, and offered a walk around Havana in his old VW Golf, a privilege from his mission at the PAHO offices in Sao Paulo. They strolled along the Malecón, the University, the Plaza de la Revolución, and the streets of Old Havana. He saw in Pedro and his family a beautiful example of social justice values and solidarity commitment. He sensed that he would be a great ally in the future. Thanda felt a deep desire to ally with Cuba and its thousands of internationalists, its free universal healthcare, its pharmaceutical industry without a desire for enrichment, and its beautiful people.

Back in Brussels and committed to coordinating health cooperation, Jean Claude began to appreciate Thanda and asked him to attend discussions with all the governments of the European Union countries, in the European Council, on the progress of the Millennium Development Goals related to health: the "health MDGs." He had often advocated for a more comprehensive health cooperation than that of the all-powerful global fund for AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis, arguing what the macroeconomics and health commission had estimated of a minimum budget of thirty dollars per person per year to also advance maternal health and child health objectives. He calculated and presented in debates in the commission, parliament, and council that it would take about two billion euros to save about seven million lives, at a price of three hundred euros per unjust death prevented, less than the cost of a night in a room in the luxury hotels where politicians, officials, consultants, and even aid workers stayed in that great industry of cooperation. That expenditure was equivalent to one day of military spending.

Thanda began promoting that European cooperation funds go to public budgets and not to consulting firms or NGOs, and to monitor how those public funds from poor countries were used in universal health services. So, he traveled to Zambia, Madagascar, and Guyana to design "budgetary support" programs that could protect the right to health.

In one of those debates in the European Council with diplomats living in their privilege, and where Thanda was the only one without a suit or tie, a representative from Sweden asked Thanda:

* Mr. Garay, how has the Commission helped progress towards the Millennium Development Goals in Health?
* Paul - He noticed his name on a card in his jacket -. You can call me Thanda. The European Union does not vaccinate, does not assist in childbirth, or directly treat diseases. Therefore, we cannot attribute any decrease in mortality to our solidarity. We only contribute to it. It is the countries and their citizens who do it.
* Yes, but we must inform the citizens in our countries what effects our taxes dedicated to cooperation have and how the agreed goals are achieved.

During the coffee break, Thanda made a quick calculation on a napkin in the café of the sumptuous building of the European Council. From a recent reading of the World Health Organization's global report, he remembered the following data: average mortality in children under five in the European Union, five per thousand; in "developing countries," eighty per thousand; and average mortality in adults aged fifteen to sixty-five in the European Union, one hundred fifty per thousand; in "developing countries," over three hundred per thousand. He quickly calculated the populations of those age groups in the countries they cooperated with, "developing countries," and estimated that the excess mortality in relation to the living conditions in the European Union was almost twenty million deaths each year. He wrote it down in a napkin he’d always carry thereafter in his wallet. He spoke up:

* Paul and other colleagues. I think it is time to review the Millennium Development Goals. Arbitrary age groups and diseases were chosen, and arbitrarily a reduction in their mortalities, but I believe that this strategy is contrary to a universal and European principle and value.

He noticed a silence and that those high-ranking diplomats who looked with some disdain at a simple Commission official changed to an attitude of rejection:

* Our values are based, according to the declaration of universal rights and according to our European Charter of Fundamental Rights, on the right to health, and therefore to life, being universal. Well, if, being consistent, we want to promote that right both in our countries and in any part of the world we cooperate with, do you know how many deaths per year exceed what our living conditions in the European Union allow us?

There was silence, inquisitive looks, and several country placards were raised vertically to question the Commission representative. Thanda continued.

* Well, they are not the one and a half million deaths from reducing infant mortality by a third, plus the three hundred thousand from reducing maternal mortality by three quarters, plus the million deaths that ending patents would save from AIDS, and the similar number in tuberculosis or malaria. It would be five times more: twenty million deaths due to injustice, gentlemen. All of them deserving equal attention, respect, sensitivity, and action. For this, a few funds from our leftovers are not enough, largely for disease projects and on which we pretend that the European Union saves lives. For this, it is necessary to change our opulence, share without borders, and truly defend the right to health.

Next, Thanda endured a storm of furious questions reminding him that the millennium agenda was agreed upon during years of meetings at the United Nations and reminding him that as a civil servant he was not there to change political agreements, that they needed concrete answers, and that dreaming of a utopian world was useless if concrete steps and results were not taken.

As he left, a man somewhat younger than him approached, with a warm smile and a sensitive look.

* My name is Sergio, I represent Spanish cooperation. Anna Cirera, in Barcelona, ​​told me about you. I come from cooperating in Mozambique. It's the first time I hear here truths like fists and someone defending them with courage. I want you to help me prepare a European global health policy for the next two years so that we can approve it during the Spanish presidency in 2010.

There began a strong friendship and complicity towards that policy that could link health to justice and not to the charity of some leftovers. Thanda began to feel, after four years of loneliness, that he was indeed in the place where he could fight. As he promised his father.

Summer came, and he went to the reunion in Madrid with Ángeles and Daniela, and with his dear parents and sisters, who were already bringing cousins to their daughters. After a week at the mountain house enjoying family and friends from firefighters and the association of aid workers, Thanda went on a trip with his daughters that he had been planning during his nights of loneliness in Brussels. With his mother's car and a caravan lent by a firefighter friend, Paco, he traveled over three thousand kilometers of adventures in forests, rivers, lakes, beaches, mountains, and villages through Castilla, northern Spain, the Pyrenees, and the Mediterranean. He felt a deep bond with his daughters. Ángeles was already sixteen years old and Daniela eleven.

Coincidentally, Cristina and her now husband Gregorio had secured two scholarships for a molecular biology research stay in Oxford and suggested going with their daughters. Thanda suggested they talk together with them in case they wanted to spend one or two years with him in Brussels. They could meet often in Brussels or Oxford, learn languages, and enjoy his paternal and filial love, as thirsty for emotions and adventures as the one they had experienced in the caravan that summer. Cristina thought about it for a few days and agreed. She also needed intimacy with Gregorio. Thanda began a beautiful stage of his life, healing very deep wounds and looking again at the horizon with hope.

After enrolling his daughters in the European school in Uccle, he looked for a house that bordered what he thought was the most beautiful and magical part of Brussels, the beech forest "Foret de Soignes." He found a small house with two bedrooms and a living room with a large fireplace in the village of Hoeilaart, next to the magical forest. An entrance with low, rickety wooden doors led to a path that led to the house, which was sheltered by a large oak tree. The house was made of bricks painted white with doors and shutters made of pale red wood. It had an L-shape, and Thanda thought they were like two arms ready to embrace whoever arrived. Behind it was a garage full of junk. On a stone entrance, a phrase in metal letters read "les temps heureux" (the happy times), and he felt it was premonitory. In one room, he put bunk beds for his daughters, in the other a bed for himself or for his parents when they could visit him. In the living room, there was a table for dining and a sofa in front of the large stone fireplace. He collected wooden crates from the street and arranged reading books, placed warm Himalayan salt lamps and photos of cherished memories. He also placed a family photo on the fireplace mantle from the times they were together, making a fire to cook in the simple life of Ukuzwana. He didn't want the separation to cloud the origin of love in his daughters' lives. They used the garage to wash and hang clothes and as a workshop for all kinds of inventions.

Thanda preferred that nobody helped them, so they organized a points system: they made a list of tasks, another of "faults and rewards," and one of activity "prices"; they printed "Garapuntos" bills with their faces and put in a box the "bank" from which salaries were paid. Thanda tried, as if it were a game, to make his daughters feel a sense of responsibility in household chores and a way to enjoy the rewards more, like watching a movie projected on the sheet they hung from the ceiling, for the duty fulfilled.

He bought a van to travel with them and discover beautiful corners of Europe, in addition to going on vacation to Madrid, but he went to work daily on a bike he bought second-hand. Due to his love for nature and animals, they adopted a puppy they called Homeless, a kitten named Satia, and a rabbit they called Chaplin. Every morning they had breakfast and walked to the school bus stop. Homeless and Satia accompanied them; Homeless stayed to play at the neighbor's house, with another dog he befriended, and Satia climbed trees. Thanda proudly wore his firefighter doctor uniform and rode his bike. As his daughters boarded the bus, driven by an Asturian immigrant with whom he exchanged brief affectionate greetings every day, Thanda followed them for the first kilometer while his daughters and their friends greeted and cheered him.

The nightmare of his daughters alone on a drifting ship began to disappear from his nightmares.

He crossed the forest and arrived at Audhergem and then to Tervuren Avenue and its five kilometers of walking under large chestnut trees, to reach the commission neighborhood where his workplace and his health team were now, with colleagues who shared enthusiasm for the right to health. He ate the vegan menu and sometimes treated himself to a chocolate mousse in the commission canteens. He returned home by bike with the excitement of being with his daughters, in their home. They took a walk in the forest with Homeless every day. Thanda liked to bring branches from the forest to decorate the house with shapes from nature.

A young family friend, Jesus, a trainee at the commission, gave them piano lessons, and Thanda sang with the guitar many nights by the fire. He felt that yes, he was fighting for his daughters' happiness and for a fairer world, as guided by the promise with his father, already cured of cancer. His daughters gave him immense love as they learned languages ​​and made friends from many countries, who came to spend weekends at that "forest house." He was alone in his intimacy, working hard in that arid jungle of words and bureaucracy, making the effort of two hours of biking every day, rain, or shine, to maintain his "firefighter form," striving in household chores, helping his daughters with homework, surrounding them with a magical world, and ending the day by telling them a story, but so exhausted that he often fell asleep before them. It was the time of his life when he felt most bathed in tenderness.

# Covering to be seen. Chiapas, November 2008

Nayra carried in her blood the magical blend of Russian Jewish ancestors, Irish Catholics, African slaves, Maya peasants, and Cherokee Indians. She was born in the village of Catemaco, Veracruz, on the shore where the Western zeal for evangelization and domination invaded the lands, bodies, and souls of its ancestral peoples. Her early years smelled of wild orchids from those forests and the vapors of eggs and basil in spiritual cleansings. She attended the school of liberal ideas of Spanish republicans exiled and inspired by San Bartolomé de las Casas. After a few years, they moved to San Miguel de Allende, where she spent her childhood amidst adventures, mostly with her fearless brothers and friends. "Chamaca jiribilla," her mother used to call her, evoking dreams, the protection of home and her mother's tenderness, and her father's social consciousness and courage.

Soon she felt drawn to spirituality through mantras and yoga with her father, a student of Alan Watts and the Beat Generation, despite the efforts of Catholic school nuns who tried to impose on her a Christian name, Sophia. Yet, in its Hebrew origin of wisdom, like NoLwasi in Ndebele, it reflected her introspection towards a spiritual and magical world that always accompanied her. She also grew inspired by her father's dissatisfaction with the power and oppression system, such as what she heard during her childhood about the American war against Vietnam.

They traveled north through the Las Caracolas desert to Ensenada on the train known as "La Bestia," packed with migrants on its roof and between wagons, risking their lives to reach the harsh north of Chihuahua. There Nayra witnessed the tearing apart of borders in free souls that couldn't comprehend them.

Finally, in her adolescence, she arrived in Berkeley, the rebellious corner against American imperialist capitalism. It was there that the pacifist movements against Vietnam, the social spirit embraced by the hippie movement, libertarian ideas seasoned with marijuana, the emancipation of blacks and women, and dreams of a free, just, and peaceful world were forged. She pursued her studies away from her family, experiencing different cultures and religions, selling ice cream, and serving coffee, feeling the magic of that stronghold of ideas and freedom in the world's most powerful and belligerent country.

But the strongest inspiration at the end of her adolescence came from discovering the Zapatista uprising, coinciding with her graduation. She distanced herself from the partying, punk, and drug scene that pervaded the youth of the nineties on that libertarian coast, awakening a social consciousness that touched the fibers that conversations with her father had inspired in her soul during childhood. She was attracted to that brave movement, which first rose against the celebration of the Spanish conquest, a genocide for the indigenous peoples of that continent, and then against the invasion of the domain of commerce and exploitative and destructive capital by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

Upon her return to Mexico, coinciding with the assassination of the opposition leader Colosio, orchestrated by Salinas' power mafia, she discovered her warrior soul in the Guanajuato desert, alongside her brothers. It was then that the Zapatista National Liberation Army took seventeen municipalities in Chiapas, demanding "democracy, freedom, land, peace, and justice" for indigenous people, and Nayra identified with that struggle.

Her beauty attracted the attention of a modeling agency, leading her to travel the country shooting videos until one day she decided to break away from banality and narcissism and set course for the Mayan Chiapas and Zapotec Oaxaca. There, she discovered authentic beauty in the paths between humble villages and conversations among simple people.

She returned to Berkeley to further her studies in art and cinema, interspersed with stays with her partner sailing in Indonesia and seeking commitments with indigenous peoples in Jalisco and Alta Verapaz. She delved into making beautiful and mystical documentaries about the disappeared in Guatemala, the Huichol ceremonies in Jalisco, and the feminicides in Ciudad Juárez.

She closely followed the San Andrés Accords between the Zapatista movement and the Mexican government on Indigenous Rights and Culture. There, she met and had long conversations with Raúl Vera, a chemical engineer who, after learning about the commitment of the Dominican fathers against pharmaceutical multinationals, entered the novitiate as a graduate and became a religious, delving into philosophy and theology studies in Italy. After holding various positions within the Dominican order in Mexico, he was appointed bishop of Ciudad Altamirano, where he left a mark for his dedication to the poor. By the mid-1990s, the bishop of Chiapas, Samuel, Tatik for the indigenous people, had become an ally of the Zapatista movement in its struggle for the rights of indigenous peoples, causing tensions between the "perfect dictatorship" of PRI political power and the powerful, allied, episcopal conference in collusion with the nuncio. It was thus that in 1995, Raúl received a letter from the Vatican nuncio in Mexico informing him that he was being transferred as a "coadjutor bishop" to San Cristobal de Las Casas. In the appointment letter, they told him that they entrusted him with that mission to "straighten what was crooked." His alliance with Bishop Samuel and the rights of indigenous peoples angered the nuncio and the episcopal conference. Four years later, they sent him to the other end of Mexico, to Coahuila.

The government of Mexico did not respect the agreements it signed with the Zapatista National Liberation Army, committing to grant rights, including autonomy, to the indigenous peoples of Mexico, and to address the demands for justice and equality for the country's poor. None of this was included, as promised by the government, in the 2001 constitution.

Five years earlier, the Zapatistas gathered in San Cristóbal de las Casas to reflect on their strategy of dignity and resistance against national and global politics based on hypocrisy and the destruction of nature. Nayra attended to present a documentary about disappearances in Guatemala. Raúl traveled from Saltillo. Aimsa also attended the same meeting, representing the eco-village network, as they sought alliances with indigenous knowledge and resistance to corrupt governments without autonomy space.

There Nayra witnessed the birth of the Caracolas and the Good Government Councils under the Zapatista principle of "governing by obeying" and, autonomously from the government of Mexico and the governor of Chiapas, sold to capital and corruption. Thus, Zapatismo moved from armed struggle and resistance with Zapatista checkpoints against the government of Mexico to the "stage of silence," in defense of principles of self-government and a system of justice, health, and education, according to its principles and values.

Between Nayra and Aimsa, a friendship in complicity of ideas emerged, intertwined with a mysterious spirituality, as if their destinies were linked by a light yet to be discovered. Aimsa also forged a strong alliance with Raúl, whom she introduced to Patxi and Kevin, for the necessary revolution in the Church for justice and nature. They began to correspond with another dissident priest in Buenos Aires named Jorge María, and together they started drafting an encyclical based on the simple life and natural harmony of Saint Francis of Assisi.

Already settled in Berkeley and a mother of two children with a Mexican descendant of Chilean and Basque exiles, Nayra delved into the reality of Latin American migrants in the United States through her work in social communication for the "Health Initiative for the Americas" program at the University of Berkeley. At that time, Nayra felt the pain of heartbreak with the father of her children, anger against the imperialism in which she lived, and the inspiration of the Zapatista movement.

Nayra flew with her children to Mexico City, the great Tenochtitlán, as she liked to say, and then they continued by bus to Chiapas to immerse themselves in the Zapatista movement, which she felt was pure and brave against the capitalism that invaded everything, especially where she now called home, the United States. She wanted her children to see another world of fewer comforts and securities and more community and commitment.

Nayra had met Tzeltal migrants in her work at the University of Berkeley and had supported them in their training as health agents in the central valleys of California, where they worked in vegetable harvesting. She formed a special friendship with a young health promoter trained by the Zapatistas, Xochitl, who introduced her to her family in the autonomous rebellious Zapatista municipality of Mayan Peoples' Liberty, in the border jungle, within the Good Government Council "Towards Hope" and the Caracol "Sea of Our Dreams."

Nayra spent three weeks living their simple life while her children played with Tzeltal children connected to nature. She could see how those brave villages had achieved almost total independence from what they called "bad government" of corrupt parties and alliances with capitalist power. They had already trained thousands of primary health care wokers who integrated allopathic and traditional medicine and an education system under the edifying program "Organization for New Indigenous Autonomous Education for Peace and Humanity." Additionally, they had managed to establish supply warehouses that nourished hundreds of community stores, autonomous cooperatives of organic coffee, embroideries, and handicrafts; a publishing house, and a regional radio station "Insurgent Radio, the Voice of the Voiceless."

One morning, after attending tasks in the cornfield, Nayra returned with Xochitl's sister and other Tojolabal, Tzeltal, and Mam friends, and saw how a group of villagers surrounded the mythical Subcomandante Marcos, with his face covered by a black wollen mask. They were recording a story for Insurgent Radio. Nayra was fascinated by his way of speaking and his calm and firm voice. At the end of the recording, Nayra, who stood out among her Maya friends and did not go unnoticed, approached the Subcomandante:

* Good morning, comrade, my name is Nayra, I am from Veracruz, I am a filmmaker, and I have made documentaries about injustice situations. Now I live and work, supporting Mexican migrants in California. I am learning from the Zapatista organization and their profound wisdom about nature and health. I have read your "Story of Colors" to my children, and we are promoting it among the children of Maya migrants in California. I follow your essays, writings, and statements with interest. I feel your courage.

Nayra spoke directly to all people, still with a sweet voice and a tender gaze. The Subcomandante paid attention to Nayra's gaze.

* Delighted, Nayra. I'm glad you like them and that they are being read outside of Chiapas as well.

Nayra knew of the alleged original name, Rafael Sebastián, and the rumors of his history before covering his face. They said he was born in Tampico, became a doctor in philosophy, a professor, even worked for a time selling clothes in Barcelona, and since 1992 fought against NAFTA.

* Call me Marcos.

Nayra didn't like to say or acknowledge any titles to anyone.

* Why did you say at the beginning of NAFTA that you hoped Mexicans could wake up one morning without the need for a mask to live and love? What is that mask?
* The one of competing to produce, competing to consume, competing to live, and for that, using disguises that allow us to climb the rungs of hierarchy and power.
* But you are part of a hierarchy, you are a "subcomandante." And you also wear a mask, don't you?

Nayra said.

* Yes, but to serve. And I will stop being one when they stop insisting that I am. I try to be the spokesperson for this dignified, noble, and brave people who got tired of serving power. But I don't want any privileges or protagonism. That's why I hid my origin, my identity, distanced myself from my family, burned my titles, and covered my face so that, paradoxically, they would see us. Before, we were invisible. I am just one more in the movement, Nayra, I assure you, that's how I feel.

Nayra knew she had touched a sensitive and contradictory chord because she did feel a certain desire for protagonism in this cultured and warrior, sensitive and brave man.

* Tell me: do you consider the Zapatista movement to be Marxist?
* I have often said it, Nayra, and since our uprising: our Zapatista National Liberation Army is not Marxist, although it is anti-capitalist. We really *do not pigeonhole ourselves* into any ideology or propose a global solution to all the problems facing the dispossessed. Zapata inspires me, who refused power, and Che, who did so shortly after the triumph of the Cuban revolution.
* Are you a revolutionary or a rebel?
* Nayra, I try to be a rebel. Revolutionaries transform things from above, taking power, and from above they try to change things. The rebel encourages the masses and transforms from below, without the need to take power.
* So, you disagree with the Cuban or Sandinista revolution?
* Every moment, every story, and every group of people have their reasons, their needs, their strategies.
* And tell me, are you a pacifist?
* My peace is justice, Nayra.

At that time, two events occurred that shook the balance of power: global economic speculation reached such an extreme that financial banks began to collapse, enriched by supposed guarantees on insurance and nonexistent funds. It began with the collapse of Lehman Brothers and was followed by other major investment banks. Also at that time, elections were held in the United States and won, with a discourse of social justice, by a young mulatto senator named Barack Obama.

* Marcos, does the collapse of financial banks and the election of Obama in the United States give you hope?
* I fear that power will bail out the network in which its interests and allies are well anchored with citizens' money. Regarding Obama, his speech is poetic, but it is nothing more than a sugar-coated capitalism, disguised as compassion and charity. I fear that everything will remain the same, Nayra.
* Tell me, Marcos, how can I help your cause?
* Nayra, if you want, come next February, we will march throughout the country to end up occupying the Zócalo in Mexico City. It will be a peaceful march for the ignored and crushed rights of the indigenous peoples of Mexico and the world, for the disappeared, for migrants, for the poor, for hope.
* It will be an honor, Marcos.

They bid farewell, the Subcomandante mounted his horse and continued riding through that Gaul in front of the empire, that stronghold of freedom and dignity, which inspired hope in so many others.

Nayra completed the three weeks learning about values, simplicity, harmony with nature, from the elders, the effort not to submit to the power of the alienating market, from the manipulative parties, from the polluting progress, respect for ancestors, their wisdom and their legacy, and the gradual serene and dignified peace, in "their noisy silence," that of the humble non-submissive voice.

The magical mix of races shone in an indescribable beauty and made many hearts tremble. Tall, with a figure between athletic and graceful, jet-black, and long hair reminiscent of Pocahontas, the Malinche of the North, a face with soft linear features, a complexion of Irish white sprinkled with southern freckles, a gaze between challenging and mystical, at once tender and intrepid, and soft lips that almost always lit up a luminous and puzzling smile.

# Playing to be God. Bulililamangwe, April 2009

Buhleve had already devoted herself in body and soul to the patients in Ukuzwana for seven years. Her relationship with Elias had been evolving into a beautiful harmony of souls, of complicity of ideas, and of professional alliance. Elias worked between Brunapeg and Ukuzwana, and together they breathed new life into the small hermitage that Jonay and Aimsa with Nour first, and Thanda and Cristina with Ángeles and Daniela later, had imbued with love.

Buhleve was convinced that she couldn't conceive after the harm she suffered from Smuts. Her fear in her genital intimacy was such that when she had her first, desired, relations with Elias, she felt pain, her entrails contracted, and they couldn't feel each other fully. Elias felt such admiration and passion for her that he provided tenderness, and even though they couldn't make love, they got used to spending entire nights embraced in a "spooning" position. Elias' tenderness melted Buhleve's armor, and a few months later, they managed to consummate their union. As a result, Buhleve became pregnant, and Elias asked the Cuban mission to stay in the country due to his family situation.

Cuba had a system as supportive through its thousands of doctors in the most remote corners of the world as it was rigid in rules and discipline. It was hardened in a constant struggle against real and figurative threats to its suffering revolutionary efforts, such as the constant defamation of its work by the United States' propaganda apparatus. Initially, the head of the Cuban medical brigade in Zimbabwe replied that he must fulfill his duty and return to Cuba as stated in his contract and as expected by his family, and that if he did not return as he should, he would lose the right to return to Cuba for eight years. Buhleve remembered how Jonay told them about Fernando's conversation with Aleida Guevara in La Gomera about the balance between the freedom of each person, each Cuban, and the commitment to contribute to public service and the common good, for which both Fernando and Elias had become doctors.

Haka, who had met the head of the Cuban brigade at a Sibithanda meeting in Bulawayo, went to talk to him. His name was Pedro, and he was a jovial man, with a sharp but sweet gaze, a Roman nose, a beard halfway grown, graying hair halfway combed, and a bit overweight. He agreed to meet him for dinner at the "Cape to Cairo" restaurant.

* Pedro, thank you for accepting the invitation; I need to talk to you about a personal matter, in case you can help me.
* Of course, Haka. You have all my respect in your struggles for just causes, and I will do what I can.
* Perhaps you already know that my daughter Buhleve is the responsible doctor at the Ukuzwana mission hospital.
* Yes, I know about her, and about her book Where There Is No Specialist, which is highly appreciated by all our cooperators in the country.
* I'm glad for your appreciation. She is a brave woman committed to the right to health. During my last trip fighting against child trafficking networks in Mozambique, Buhleve accompanied me thanks to the substitution of Dr. Elias from the Brunapeg hospital. During that month, Elias left a very humane and professional mark on Ukuzwana.
* That's how all our internationalists are, Haka, dedicated to saving lives, the purpose with which Fidel founded our "army of white coats."

Haka paused. There was a clear nobility in Cuba's internationalist movement across the world. It was the country with the most doctors per population and the most cooperating doctors in the world, a response and clear contrast to the country that never ceased to defame and block it, the United States, which filled the world with military bases, missiles, and soldiers.

What made him uncomfortable was when Cuba and other countries, ideologies, religions, and groups expressed mythomania: as if a few people were the recipients of most of the references and glories. To those few, deeds were attributed either exaggeratedly or that really corresponded to the anonymous sweat of many others, forgotten by history. Furthermore, in his life, he never ceased to discover anonymous heroes and giants with clay feet.

* Well, Pedro, not only does my admiration go to them, but they might also be part of my family. Buhleve and Elias have joined in a very pure love and are expecting a child.

Haka noticed tension in Pedro's body language and facial expression.

* Haka, Elias is the son of revolutionaries, and he knew that he finishes his four years of mission in two months, and his obligation is to return to Cuba to serve as a doctor among his brothers.
* Pedro, I believe he knows that and is very faithful to the principles of the revolution, but I don't think reason should dominate love, nor should it.
* Well, I'm sorry, brother, but Elias must fly to Cuba in five months to fulfill his commitment. Buhleve can fly, and they can marry and live there. Or if they decide, they can apply for a visa to travel elsewhere.
* Pedro, that's very difficult. Buhleve shouldn't fly in her condition. She suffered from the terror in South Africa, and pregnancy is delicate. If Elias leaves forcibly, you would break the much-needed mutual support at this time because of the distance. Besides, you know it's not easy for doctors to get visas to leave Cuba.
* I'm sorry, Haka. Those are the rules, and I must enforce them. It's the revolutionary duty, which is above individual needs or situations. If he doesn't fulfill his duty, he will lose the right to return to Cuba for eight years.
* Elias' parents are elderly. His father has diabetes and has already had heart problems. Elias will want to go see them, to take care of them. He will have to take care of his parents and his wife and his child, Pedro. It's natural, human, and just.
* I'm sorry, Haka, he must return to Cuba. There, I'm sure they'll consider his situation.
* Pedro, that's the problem, and that's what loses you: the revolution cannot be "above people," but to serve them. People, their stories, their aspirations, their dreams, their immense capacity to love and serve, that's what matters.
* The revolution has many enemies, Haka. I hope you're not one of them.

Pedro changed his air; it was stern, and his voice became more serious and firmer. It was clear that the soldier Pedro was speaking, obeying rules.

* I'll talk to your ambassador, Pedro. I do it for my daughter, her husband now, and my grandson. Nothing against the revolution, but for the people. And believe me when I say that I have defended the noble ideas of the revolution and its international solidarity as something beautiful and just in many forums and situations. But everything crumbles if it's by imposition, Pedro.

Timothy Stamps was no longer a minister; he was retired with his large family, giving lectures, some outside the country, and still doing some shifts in health centers. He had written some memoirs in which Haka collaborated on a chapter where Stamps attributed himself to the fight against child trafficking with South Africa. Haka didn't care, in fact, he preferred to hide his identity almost always, but he was saddened by the vanity that any situation of power or privilege provoked. He wrote to him telling him about Elias' situation, asking him to intervene with the Cuban embassy for the extension of his mission and his assignment to Ukuzwana. He attached a letter from Patxi regarding such a request. Stamps replied affectionately and said he would speak with the Cuban ambassador, with whom he was friends. Two weeks later, Elias received a message from Pedro saying that his request to extend his stay in the medical brigade for one year due to family reasons was exceptionally granted. It also stated that, at the request of the mission, he was assigned to the position of medical officer at the Ukuzwana mission.

Buhleve insisted to Haka and Helen that they go to Ukuzwana on the weekend, with the corn truck returning from Bulawayo. Haka agreed and kept the good news to share them in person.

Patxi prepared a celebration for Haka and Adam's birthday, as they shared the same day, January twenty-third. Haka was already seventy-eight years old, and his tremor and some difficulty walking had become more noticeable. Adam was sixteen years old and had prematurely finished school to learn the magical world of spirits and nature with his mother, NoLwasi. He also spent time inventing gadgets with Joseph, the latest being the inyoni-enkulu solar. Unai was still eleven years old, and his greatest hobby was climbing kopjes and scanning horizons; he liked silence and almost always showed a gentle and warm smile. They prepared sadza and chomolia and a sorghum stew with peppers, all from their garden. It happened that Thandiwe returned from Johannesburg, now twenty-five years old, who, following in Buhleve's footsteps, had studied medicine there, specializing in internal medicine and infectious diseases. Nothando, now nineteen, was studying music and philosophy in Bulawayo, where she lived with Joseph.

During dinner, Haka announced the good news of Elias’ extension and his assignment to the mission. Buhleve was already three months pregnant and couldn't contain her tears of emotion. Elias thanked Haka for his efforts; he knew it wouldn't have been easy. Buhleve told him that they would all go to Cuba afterwards. Haka felt a chill in his chest. Thandiwe said she had completed her specialization and was ready to return to the mission where she could replace Buhleve after learning emergency surgeries and obstetrics from her, which, as an internist, she had not practiced enough. Patxi felt that life continued to flow in Ukuzwana and offered a prayer of gratitude in Ndebele:

Great Spirit, Father and creator of all, from this humble mission, we give you our thanks for life, our deep love as children. Today we want to show you our deep joy in being together and feeling like a family, especially celebrating the lives of Haka and Adam, who give us so much love. We know that Jonay, Aimsa, Nour, Thanda, and their family from distant lands, our dear Anwele, and many brothers already by your side, will also be sitting at our table today. We want to offer you our efforts, in the fields, in studies, in the mission, in the villages of Sibithanda, in the adventure of discovery, in the sea of loving others; wherever life takes us, always give us the strength of love for life to transmit it to our fellow beings.

Haka was fifteen years old when his uncle Patxi blessed the food at Grandfather Agustín's last birthday celebration they celebrated together as a family. The prayer he had just heard was an echo of one from over sixty years ago in a Navarrese valley. Patxi would have been barely six years old then. Haka wondered, how could those words that came out, in Ndebele and shaped by times, places, and people, but with the same form, light, sense, and energy, have so deeply permeated his soul? Could it be true that they were all the same energy?

Thandiwe stayed two weeks with Buhleve and Elias, learning how to practice medicine with far fewer resources than the university hospital in Johannesburg, much more need, and putting all her heart into it. Just as Jonay had taught Thanda before, Buhleve taught Thandiwe how to perform cesarean sections, hysterectomies, laparotomies, amputations, and even craniotomies, so she wouldn't fear surgical emergencies. Thandiwe shared with them the latest knowledge on AIDS treatments and other infectious diseases.

One night, after dinner at Patxi's house, the three of them were on the porch of the hermitage-home, and Buhleve confided a concern:

* Elias, Thandiwe, I'm worried about my father. I think he shows signs of Parkinson's. He's so stoic; he doesn't want to go to the doctor because he says there are many others who can't go. Can you see him tomorrow before he returns to Bulawayo?
* Of course, we'll see him tomorrow," Thandiwe said.

Elias affirmed:

* In fact, I have something worrying to share with you: I've seen about five cases like Parkinson's in the last month. I've also noticed an increase in cancer in our district. While in Brunapeg, I saw more than ten cases of non-Hodgkin lymphomas in less than a year. I performed biopsies of lymph nodes and bone marrow, and I have no doubts. I sent them to the laboratory in Bulawayo, and they haven't told me anything yet. I only have cyclophosphamide and prednisone, and I'm treating them, but three have already died. I attended their funerals. Here in Ukuzwana, I've already seen two patients with that tumor in just one month. Yesterday, I attended the funeral of the last one, a forty-year-old woman. I noticed something that I now realize I also saw in the other patients' houses who died: there were several plastic buckets with a sign that said, 'round-up.' I also noticed cornfields very grown and very uniform, with the land completely free of other weeds.

Elias convinced Haka to study his tremor. He saw that it was typical of Parkinson's, that he had some muscle stiffness due to the "cogwheel sign" when extending his arms and legs, and difficulty walking. He had found levodopa and gave him a month's dosage, but Haka was reluctant to take it. Elias explained the situation to Buhleve. The night before Haka and Helen returned to Bulawayo, Buhleve spoke with her father.

* Father, Elias already told you that you have signs of Parkinson's and that you can improve with the medication he has obtained.
* Daughter, I am already old, and I have had my share of good adventures. Besides, I hardly notice the tremor, and I walk slower, but that way, I observe everything better - he said jokingly, but he noticed that Buhleve wasn't smiling.
* Father don't be stubborn. If not for yourself, do it for me. You are the most important person in my life, and I need you strong and by my side, especially now more than ever.

She said this while caressing her imminent pregnant belly.

* Besides, you will want to take your grandson on some adventures, won't you?
* I'll think about it, daughter.
* There's another reason, Father. Elias has been noticing more cases of Parkinson's and a type of lymphoma. In several houses of patients who have died from the tumor, he has seen that they are using a substance called "round-up." Can you investigate if there is any relationship and what might be happening?
* Of course! I still have the strength and heart for a few fights, daughter.
* But do it while taking the medication Elias told you about, okay? For me, for the fight, and for your grandson. And above all, for yourself!

Haka researched on the internet, at the public library, and through emails with Aimsa. Through Skype conversations, they began to uncover the roots of a worldwide poisoning network, so powerful that no one could stop it. After warmly greeting Jonay and Nour, he stayed talking with Aimsa:

* Aimsa, did you manage to find out which company owns the glyphosate herbicide, commercially known as "round-up," and what they do here in Zimbabwe?
* Yes, Haka. I did a search and talked to activists here in the United States who know about its tentacles: the company is called Monsanto. They have been expanding their sales in the southern Africa region for three years. On their website, they define themselves as a "life sciences" company and defend as noble their efforts in research and development of products to "meet current needs and preserve the planet for the future.
* What have they been up to?
* Before glyphosate, these "guardian angels" of humanity's needs had developed chemical triggers for the American army for the nuclear bomb that burned the lives of millions of Japanese in Hiroshima and Nagasaki and Agent Orange, which devastated half a million lives and left deformities in another half a million children in Vietnam. Monsanto also produced biphenyls for cooling, polystyrenes for food packaging, DDT as an insecticide, and dioxins as pesticides, all with carcinogenic effects. The company entered the world of food from its inception by producing saccharin as a sugar substitute in Coca Cola; aspartame as a sweetener in thousands of industrial foods, and a hormone, somatotropin, to increase milk production in cows, all of which also had evidence of cancer-causing effects for several decades. Despite so much evidence, their products were still being marketed in many countries and consumed by billions of people.
* Why are these poisons allowed?
* The people I've spoken to, who campaign against Monsanto, have told me that they have bought senators from both parties, even Obama. They finance their election campaigns and are convinced that they promote "American science" to "save humanity."
* And tell me, how have they been promoting genetic manipulation?

From their production phases of sweeteners, pesticides, weapons, plastics, and hormones, they moved, from the 1980s onwards, to their almost obsessive pursuit of genetically modified organisms. In their early genetic manipulations in laboratories in the 1970s, they cut genes from one organism and pasted them into others. Different seeds were manipulated, with Monsanto becoming the almost absolute owner of the global market for transgenic seeds. With the goal of making crops resistant to viruses, antibiotics, or modifying their fat composition, different seeds were manipulated.

* And what does it have to do with glyphosate, Aimsa?
* The most important manipulation that made Monsanto almost a global monopoly of seeds by the end of the century was developing seeds resistant to its fiercest herbicide, glyphosate. They killed any life that wasn't the modified seed.
* Great business while destroying nature.
* Not only that. The third element to make over a billion farmers in the world dependent on that great "life business" was to make those seeds sterile, so the plants that grew didn't produce fertile seeds, and the farmers depended on the perverse business.
* They are really like black holes of life, without flow, without recycling. All, again, for the greed of a few.
* That's right, Haka. "The struggle continues."
* Of course, Aimsa. And your help is essential. Tell me, have you been able to investigate their networks of alliances and influences?
* I will send you some documents I have prepared by email.

Aimsa had done a quick analysis of the networks that Monsanto dominated, its investments in businesses, insurance, and derivatives, its financing of politicians (Republicans and Democrats), its lobbies and funds to corruptly influence other countries, networks with other large "life sciences" companies, its patents, and the lawsuits they had managed to silence through bribes or settlements. She sent him diagrams, charts, and graphs of Monsanto's tentacles. It was linked to the same capital that enriched itself from drug patents, the military industry, diamond trafficking, so much human suffering. He learned from Rob that even Gates' "benevolent" philanthropy, also championing the fight against hunger through mineral-fortified flours, well-linked to US transgenic surpluses, was negotiating to acquire Monsanto shares. There was also another link that, when he sensed it, sent shivers down his spine: the manipulation of human genes. Once again, Aimsa saw the roots and networks of evil interconnected. This time, "playing God," altering the very basis of life.

Haka improved somewhat with the levodopa prescribed by Elias and set out to investigate Monsanto's plot and its glyphosate poison in Zimbabwe. He brought out his "steed," his BJ40, already recovered from its "fever" since his adventure with Buhleve in the racist Orange Free State. This time he didn't need to hide his Makarov.

Before leaving Ukuzwana the previous week, he had a conversation with Patxi, from which his soul still echoed:

* Haka, Anaya (brother in Basque), as Pablo Milanés' song says, "time passes, and we are getting older”.
* I do, Patxi, I have a few more years than you, but you're still a young man!
* Don't think so, Anaya, I've already turned seventy and I don't have the same strength. I must confess that I find it hard to keep up with the boys and even with NoLwasi. I admire your strength and courage, Haka, always trying to fight against injustice, but please take care of yourself, I say it with the "selfishness of love": you are very important to me.
* And you are to me, Patxi. If it weren't for you, I would still be in hiding and drowning in the hatred from which you rescued me.
* Don't blame yourself, Anaya. Everything you've done in life, I know you've done it for just causes, against dark forces. But take care, our strength is failing. Come here to the mission more often, to stroll, hence your name "Hamba-kashana," and to share talks, memories, dreams, and pass on the legacy to these young people full of strength. Look at the beauty and nobility in Buhleve, in Thandiwe, in Nothando and Joseph, in Adam, Unai, and far away Nour, Saidu, Moyes, Ángeles, Daniela... a beautiful wave follows us, we can leave peacefully.
* Patxi, when you prayed the other night, you almost repeated Uncle Patxi's prayer from over sixty years ago at the farmhouse. Did you memorize it?
* Not at all. I don't even remember it. I was only six years old. I was struck by the image of my uncle, do you remember? He wore a very tight gray cassock. I also remember Grandpa in his wheelchair, looking at him emotionally and hugging him after the prayer. And all the aunts were emotional too. I think that day a special light came to the family. At least to me. I only remember one word from Uncle's prayer: "fellow beings."
* Yes, Patxi, and you have devoted your life to love for fellow beings.
* I tried, Haka, although with many clumsinesses, and often selfishnesses. But it's because of that word that I'm having doubts and internal reflections that cause me some unease.
* Tell me, Anaya.
* A few months ago, I received a beautiful letter from Aimsa, through which I was put in touch with a priest from Mexico named Raúl. With him, another Jesuit from Buenos Aires named Jorge María, and with Kevin, we are talking a lot about the harmony of the human soul with nature as inspired by St. Francis of Assisi. We are very concerned about climate change because of the damage humans have done to nature. We were wrong for two thousand years in religion, looking at ourselves, believing we were superior, and believing that nature was at our service. Notice how "free" I feel now from the chains of religion, as you used to tell me, that I even think Jesus wasn't very aware of that and of the respect we must have for other forms of life, as valuable as ours.
* That's right, Patxi. In fact, we are worried now: Elias has been noticing an increase in cancer patients, and in some of those who have died, he has seen that in their "kraals," they are using an herbicide called "Roundup." We are going to investigate if there is any connection between that substance and cancer, and what is behind it. Aimsa is investigating and sending us information.
* Another adventure for you to engage in with passion, Anaya. Your courage gives us strength. I'll give you just one piece of advice, even though I'm your younger brother.
* Younger in age, older in kindness.
* You're wrong about that, and don't think of it that way. We all have kindness, and it flows in different ways. What I ask of you is that in the fight, use love, not violence, except if you must defend yourself. You know that it's with the truth and knowing how to unveil it that you have managed to win many battles.

With his unspoken feeling of fragility due to Parkinson's and his advanced age, and from that deep conversation with Patxi, Haka wrote a letter to the ETA leaders, through former comrades he knew were still in the armed struggle. He spoke to them about the strength of truth and peace, conscientious objection and fiscal resistance, Gandhi's example, the union of the peoples of the world without nationalism, homelands, or borders, and the need to destroy all weapons in the world, starting with their own.

Then, he went to Joseph's workshop where metals were melted and transformed into inventions. There, he melted his Makarov. He asked Joseph to transform it into a cross with reliefs of weaver bird feathers. He felt a profound relief in his heart.

Elias visited again the kraals where patients with lymphoma had died and those who were being treated. There were a total of twelve. They were all in the southern region of Bulililamangwe. In all of them, there was taller and more uniform maize, and they all said they were using what they called "fertilizer" from the brand Roundup. They were sold to them, along with Roundup+ seeds, by some young Ndebele people who lived in Soweto and had brought the products on their trips to visit their families. The following year, they would bring new supplies of fertilizer and seeds because the maize grains that grew wouldn't germinate. The cycle of life ended with each harvest. They made them dependent on that business, of which almost all the farmers in South Africa were already dependent.

Haka investigated throughout southern Matabeleland and identified more than three hundred kraals that were using Roundup and transgenic seeds. It was a lethal combination: one killed all other forms of life, and the other dominated over any form that could survive or even nearby crops. It was Hitler's eugenics applied to nature and sold as a supposed advancement of "life sciences".

He also investigated the legal framework: South Africa had yielded to the interests of large plantations, many still owned by white "Afrikaners", many of whom were racists. Monsanto dominated the seed and herbicide market. That perverse company and associations of large producers boasted that they had doubled the yield from ten to more than twenty tons of maize per hectare. Due to the blockade that the UK and the US exerted on dictator Mugabe, more due to their pressure to expropriate land from white landowners – "Rhodesians" who still dominated the economy and tobacco plantations – the dictator opposed Monsanto entering the country. Mugabe's rejection included offers from the US for "food aid" with surpluses of their transgenic maize. Mugabe, swollen with wounded pride, rejected such aid as "imperialist" interference and had since maintained, for political reasons, a blockade on the import of transgenic seeds and foods.

The opposition candidate to Mugabe, Morgan Tsvangirai, won the first round of elections the previous year and withdrew from the second round due to allegations of corruption and intimidation campaigns by Mugabe's troops, killing more than two hundred sympathizers of Morgan's party. Through South Africa, a unity government was agreed upon with enemies sharing power, Mugabe would continue, after more than forty years, as president, and Tsvangirai as prime minister. In that mediation, many other things were discussed, and it coincided that Zimbabwe began to import South African transgenic maize, although it still maintained the veto on the cultivation of transgenic seeds within its borders. A month ago, Tsvangirai had been in a car accident going to his hometown in which his wife Susan died. Considered a hero against dictator Mugabe, he was received by Obama at the White House. Upon his return, he began advocating for the legalization of transgenics in Zimbabwe.

Thus, the doors to Monsanto were gradually opening. The importation of South African and US transgenic maize was accepted. Monsanto was reducing, under pressure from several years of the Via Campesina and other global networks of farmers, the commercialization of its "terminator" seeds, of sterile plants. Monsanto entrepreneurs encouraged Zimbabwean migrants to introduce the lethal package of Roundup into their northern neighbor.

Around that time, Elias told Haka that a sixty-year-old small farmer, Nobantu Tshuma, suffering from non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, had died. Haka accompanied Elias to the funeral. Buhleve also attended because she knew the family from her childhood in a nearby kraal. At the funeral, the son, George Dube, who had brought the Roundup during his last visits, attended. After the funeral and after offering condolences, Haka approached George:

* George, my name is Haka, and I come from the Ukuzwana mission. I'm sorry for your loss.
* Thank you, Haka. Thank you for all the care you have given to our father. I know Dr. Elias did everything possible to save his life.
* That's right, George. I wanted to share a concern with you and ask you about it.
* Tell me, brother.
* I've heard that you have been bringing seeds and barrels of Roundup to help with the family's crops.
* Yes, and in the last two years, we have doubled the maize and sorghum harvest this way.
* But, George, you should know that there are suspicions that Roundup, besides killing all other forms of life except for transgenic seeds, may also cause illnesses in people.
* That's not true, Haka. In South Africa, almost all farmers use it, and they have increased their crops and their well-being. Even in this miserable and backward Zimbabwe, from which we young people must migrate, we have to buy maize from South Africa to survive. If I could, I would have brought more to have more income and to have been able to take my father to modern hospitals in Egoli where, yes, they would have saved his life.
* In several countries, it has been seen that this quick business ends up costing farmers more money, George, because they must buy seeds and herbicides from Monsanto every year. Besides, Zimbabwe prohibits planting with those seeds.
* On the day we bury my father, you come to threaten me for trying to help them in their miserable life? And you pretend to tell me to obey a government that opposes all progress out of the pride of its dictator?

Haka reflected for a moment while showing sympathy and sadness with the Ndebele clicks for what George was telling him. He had his point. The dictator Mugabe, who dominated his opponent Tsvangirai as prime minister in the supposed "unity government," imposed agricultural policy to resist the commercial interests of his international enemies, mainly the UK and its "big brother" America, and national enemies, the association, mostly white and racist, of tobacco farmers, eager for transgenic seeds and the illusions of progress and abundance preached by Monsanto.

At the same time, millions of people, especially in the forgotten Matabeleland, the so-called "Ethiopia of Zimbabwe", dry of water and youth, or emigrated through Soweto or sick or dead from AIDS, languished before false promises of prosperity from a government insensitive to the people's pain. Any stance against transgenics and their lure of progress was associated with support for the dictator, even with government spies.

* I understand you well, George, and I understand what you feel, what you think, and what you have done to help your family," Haka said, realizing that he was following Patxi's advice and example of starting from empathy and love.
* What worries me is that their uncontrolled use may cause diseases like your father's. Don't feel guilty about it, as you did it with the noblest desire and effort to help your parents, nor fear that I will cause you any trouble. I just want you to tell me how you got the seeds and the Roundup in South Africa. I want to discuss with the government and cooperation how to ensure safe use of it. I will never mention your name.

George remained pensive for a few minutes before responding:

* Agreed, Haka. There's a Monsanto office in Johannesburg, it's on the corner of Fourways Boulevard and Roos Street. It's managed by Johan Manmool. We have an association called 'Egoli Ndebele Miners', and we meet every month. A brother invited Johan to one of our sessions. He showed us a video about how they improved crops with their seeds and Roundup, and offered to donate a sack of seeds and a twenty-liter bucket of Roundup in exchange for information on where it would be planted in Zimbabwe.
* Thank you, George. Again, I offer my condolences. Feel your father within you for the love he gave you and that you gave him. Lisale kuhle (rest in peace)."
* Lihambe kuhle (go in peace).

George responded.

Haka was pensive. He was close to Ukuzwana and went there to sleep and talk to Patxi about a dilemma that troubled him. After telling him what had happened, he said:

* Anaya, by fighting against another trafficking that I'm beginning to discover, that of transgenics, will I be collaborating with the pride of a dictator and causing more hunger and misery? Ecological arguments are often championed by the 'well-off bourgeoisie', preaching to keep nature as pure and clean as barren and empty, whether due to climate change or where families languish without a voice other than the cry of hunger."
* Haka, I advise you to study very well the alternatives to those techniques that I feel dangerously play with the genetic basis of life and can bring very serious consequences and enormous privileges for a few.

They could then receive emails in Ukuzwana, and that night Haka read a message from Aimsa. She had contacted Nadine, and they had analyzed Monsanto's business in South Africa, which included connections and co-investments with De Beers. He asked her about connections with Executive Outcomes and Blackwaters, but Nadine said that since the scandals in Iraq, they seemed to have disappeared. Some power was controlling the media to cover up any investigation or public information about the dangers of transgenics and glyphosate. They suspected corruption and even involvement of members of the government of the once brave African National Congress, to whom Monsanto assured profits of more than two hundred billion dollars by spreading transgenics to every corner and every crop in South Africa.

That night, Aimsa found a report by journalist Jeremy Scahill revealing that, after the massacres in Iraq, Blackwater had transformed into a company called Xe Services and had once again become the largest contractor for the US State Department in 'security services', for which it practiced ruthless state terrorism. With Obama, none of that had changed. Scahill showed that Xe Services sold espionage services to the multinational Monsanto through two companies owned by Erik Prince, owner of Blackwater: Total Intelligence Solutions and Terrorism Research Center. It also had contracts with Chevron and the largest European banks, Barclays and Deutsche Bank.

Aimsa sent an email to Haka:

Haka, be careful. The mercenaries you pursued for trafficking in children and organs in South Africa and Mozambique are now working for Monsanto. They probably already know they're being investigated for their murderous businesses. They might be reading this message. Delete it and take all precautions.

Haka didn't feel fear but rather anger at seeing the criminal tentacles sprout again, this time directed not only against human lives but against any other form of life on the planet.

Nadine told him that the one who knew about it best was a young and brave Zulu woman named Pumla, leader of the social struggle organization Biowatch, with whom she had started a strong bond of ideas. She was also a friend of Lisy, who fought similar battles with Via Campesina in Latin America.

Haka thought about the whole network of politicians, police, customs, and traffickers that such a big business could be forging in South Africa and around the world. Even if it was due to the pride of a dictator, it was the exception that a country like Zimbabwe did not succumb to such a lure of riches.

He traveled to Durban to meet with Pumla and coordinate a complaint against the illegal campaign to introduce transgenics and glyphosate into Matabeleland. Pumla was in the hospital after being beaten up by unknown assailants. The night before, Aimsa had managed to contact journalist Scahill and discovered that Cofer Black, former CIA director and current executive of Total Intelligence, had traveled to Durban a few months earlier.

Haka prepared an article about the suspicion of actions by Xe Services, formerly Blackwaters, allied with Executive Outcomes, in turn the armed arm of the Boer apartheid, against environmental activists and in favor of Monsanto's penetration and its deadly toxins. In the same article, Nadine cited Lisy's source from Via Campesina, who denounced the Gates Foundation's purchase of Monsanto shares worth twenty-three million dollars.

While traveling back from Durban to Johannesburg, Nadine called him and told him that a miner friend of Thandiwe's late father had agreed to secretly record the next meeting of "Egoli Ndebele Miners", where there would be a new presentation by Monsanto.

Haka prepared three questions to ask Johan Manmool: How much will it cost us when we must buy it? Is it true that the corn grown from these seeds is sterile and we have to buy seeds from Monsanto every year? Is the use of glyphosate safe for health? Is its use legal in Zimbabwe? And can it be confiscated at customs? They divided the questions among him and two other colleagues to avoid suspicion. Manmool said that future purchases would cost them less than ten percent of the profits from better crops, that they had already made progress in transgenics whose plants were fertile, that it was safe for health and legal in Zimbabwe, and that they should contact Themba Ndlovu, captain of customs police in Beitbridge, if they had any problems. Everything was recorded.

Pumla, Nadine, Lisy, and Aimsa wrote another article about that trafficking and its effects on health and the environment. Aimsa's friend, Monique Perin, used that information for her documentary "The World According to Monsanto", which was spread on YouTube and social media. A few weeks later, there was a debate in the Zimbabwean parliament. Before that, Haka sent the information to former minister Stamps, who passed it on to the government. Tsvangirai oversaw the country's police and temporarily blocked Ndlovu's dismissal, but when the news reached the media, he had no choice but to dismantle the plot, declaring in turn that transgenics and their effect on Zimbabwe's well-being "should be legalized and not trafficked".

Even after the trafficking revealed by Haka, the national biotechnology authority, funded by USAID, pressed for the legalization of transgenics. This was echoed by the national farmers' union and the cotton growers' association, who advocated for the case of transgenic cotton in parliament.

The government defended its position, although based on political interests, with scientific and social arguments prepared by Pumla and Nadine and shared by Haka with Stamps. They declared their intention to sue Monsanto for illegal marketing and health damages. Monsanto's lawyers, experienced in covering up their shame around the world, reached a compensation agreement. Thandiwe wrote to Stamps with a proposal for those funds to be used for a cancer therapy program and thus improve chemotherapy protocols and start a study on brachytherapy, a technique of targeted radiotherapy with precision needles, which could save lives for many patients who were beginning to suffer the toxic traces of progress.

At the same time, the Gates Foundation created the 'Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa,' led by Robert Horsch, former director of Monsanto. This Alliance gradually infiltrated Zimbabwe, encouraging poor farmers to replace their traditional seeds with hybrid seeds, with the ultimate plan of introducing transgenic seeds.

Additionally, transgenic maize continued to arrive in the country for consumption. It was imported from South Africa and came to alleviate drought through the World Food Programme, dominated by funding and direction designated by the White House, which had been using it for some time in its AIDS support and prevention programs, closely linked to the ABC programs, with circumcision being one of them, to which Buhleve had opposed. The transgenic maize surplus from the United States arrived for families affected by AIDS and drought in large white sacks adorned with the American flag and the motto "Food Aid by the people of the United States."

From the recorded statements to Monsanto, it seemed that the "terminator" strategy (sterile seeds and peasant dependence on Monsanto) had resulted in semi-fertile maize. The problem was that this maize still required glyphosate and the dependence and toxic damage continued. But Haka also suspected another perverse strategy: contaminating fields with transgenic seeds that entered as food aid. He asked Thanda about Europe's policy regarding this.

Thanda inquired with several colleagues committed to agroecology within the European Union, which donated millions of Euros to the World Food Programme, including the humanitarian aid program for drought in the Southern Africa region. He managed to sensitize the government of Zimbabwe and support with mills in warehouses next to the airport so that the maize aid could be ground into flour upon arrival and could not contaminate Zimbabwe's fields with transgenics.

They did the same in India, where Beatriz prepared a report for the European Parliament on how the invasion of transgenics and the dependence on seed purchases had led to the suicide of hundreds of small Indian farmers, pressured by debts with Monsanto and by droughts that neither Monsanto's seeds nor glyphosate had managed to prevent.

Haka returned to Ukuzwana to talk to Patxi, Buhleve, Elias, and Thandiwe about everything that had happened. They connected via Skype with Aimsa in White Lake, Pumla in Durban, Thanda in Brussels, and Beatriz in New Delhi. Adam listened from a corner, pensive. For the moment, the door to these life poisons in Zimbabwe remained closed, but Haka felt, once again, that the fight left loose ends, and, above all, a despair in the dry fields from the fumes of progress, the same progress that sold a future of well-being with.

# ¿And the genes as well? White Lake, July 2009

Jonay, Aimsa, and Nour had returned to New York on James's sailboat from La Gomera, where they had been overwhelmed with tenderness in the eco-village inspired by John and Umbela. They reunited harmoniously with Yolanda, connected soulfully with Fernando, and supported the initiative of the eco-sovereign island. After collaborating with Haka in researching Monsanto's tentacles, Aimsa felt deeply concerned. The greed for power and accumulation was now extending to life control.

In the small cabin, where four other families lived communally, sharing, and meeting their food and energy needs together, Aimsa drew a diagram of the human genome. She pondered over the documents that led Francis Crick and James Watson to describe the double helix structure of life's foundation, DNA. A decade later, Frederick Sanger, also a Nobel laureate, developed automated techniques to sequence DNA, paving the way for the Human Genome Project initiated by the US government.

As Aimsa delved into the latest advances, she couldn't shake off her worry about greed infiltrating genome research. Genes were being patented without fully understanding their function. Thousands of genes had been monopolized for various purposes, signaling a growing knowledge linked to greed. The concept of personalized medicine was emerging, raising ethical questions about gene ownership.

Aimsa's research often led her to contemplate the consequences of patenting life's fundamental elements. She pondered the parallels between Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World" and Orwell's "1984," both predicting hierarchical societies dominated by technological control. The ownership of the human genome represented the ultimate control over human life, a prospect that sent shivers down her spine.

While Aimsa delved into the depths of human knowledge, Jonay asked her about her worries. Their conversation touched on humanity's relentless pursuit of competition and greed, exacerbated by the fear-mongering tactics of corporations. They discussed the desynchronization with nature and the atrophy of empathy, pondering the root causes of societal malaise.

Despite their deep connection and shared understanding, they recognized the importance of balancing intellectual discussions with emotional connection. As they rowed across White Lake, they understood that true harmony came not just from understanding ideas but also from embracing and connecting with each other's feelings.

Jonay reflected looking into the magic shadows of the lake and shared his thoughts:

* I believe everyone is correct. I would connect it in this sequence: the lack of empathy, living without human size and the "tempo piano" of getting to know each other, feeling each other, and understanding each other leads us to a feeling of "existential loneliness" that implies a constant degree of anguish, alertness, and an "unconfessable unease of not understanding" life, the before and the after. This empathy-less loneliness leads us to seek hierarchical relationships, of power or submission, and ownership, whether of a partner, parents, or social roles. We surround ourselves with structures of relationships, knowledge, and identity. We fill ourselves with imposed or self-imposed labels until we no longer know who we are. It's curious, for love in empathy flows our energy and dissolves into what surrounds us and the universe, while existential anguish flows our uniqueness to submit to hierarchies. One is surrender by consciousness, the other is escape by fear. This relates to constant peaks of cortisol that break our circadian cycle, which harmonizes us with the sun, day, and night. This constant alertness also prevents us, as Thanda says, from flowing shamelessly and fearlessly in our movements and sexuality, our free thinking, our unique creativity, and our affective expression. Without harmony, we leave room for cortisol to dominate our lives through competition. I believe all this has an epigenetic effect, it permeates our biology, and is inherited, at least in part.
* Thank you, Jonay. What you're telling me helps me understand it. I'm going to try to relate it to what I'm observing in the forms of dominance being woven in the world.
* What do you mean, Aimsa?
* Do you remember Haka's latest adventure about the trafficking of transgenics and glyphosate poisoning?
* Yes, and I fear that it's advancing and dominating the global economy and transforming the bodies of those who don't have the courage to grow their own food.
* The manipulation of genes has moved from seeds to insects, to laboratory animals, to farm animals, and now it's in humans. I'm afraid that humans are being genetically edited, Jonay.
* How sad. To believe we have the power to control our own existence. It could be used for noble purposes, like diagnosing and treating risks and diseases, but I fear the worst.
* That's right. It's been fifty years since the structure of DNA was discovered, and techniques have been perfected. The sequence of the three billion bases is known, a large part of the more than twenty thousand genes and how they interact and synthesize the proteins that keep us alive are known. Techniques were developed to diagnose genetic defects that increased disease risks. With this, economic interest began. There are already almost five thousand patented genes.
* How? Who can patent, that is, monopolize knowledge and its application, of the essence of my life?
* Well, whoever says they have genetically sequenced it and can apply that knowledge to a diagnostic or treatment utility.
* It's terrible. Before it was patents for medicines based on natural structures that were uncovered by students or scientists who were funded so that large companies could buy them, commercialize them, patent them, and become obscenely rich while those who couldn't afford their high prices died. They yielded on antiretrovirals against AIDS when they had already filled their coffers, but the same greedy ones, like Gilead, for example, and their friends in government, are now targeting the treatment of hepatitis C. When countries try to produce their affordable versions, they face pressures, lawsuits, and blackmail. First it was South Africa, Brazil, and lately Thailand. Thanda has followed it closely and is very frustrated with how the European Union protects the privileges and businesses of its companies above all else.
* That eagerness, as you say, to possess, may already be epigenetic.
* If you look back, it's always existed. We started by dividing the land, the mountains, and even the rivers, into feudal borders, then national borders, and then properties that are inherited. Some own, others work. Then it was the property of subjects by their kings, of faithful by their clergy, of slaves by their masters, of workers by their bosses, of wives by their husbands, and of children by their parents. Time passed, and people began to pretend to own the moon, rainwater, as Lisy told us in Cochabamba, and even the sun's rays, Thanda tells us that in Spain you must pay to transform sunlight into energy. Now genes. Human ambition knows no bounds.
* That's right, Jonay. But this new way of understanding and treating health problems will widen the gap even further. The next step is gene editing: cleaning up defects and even designing pure sequences to address risks, diseases, and even designing human beings from their embryonic stage. I've researched, and there's a biochemist at Berkeley, Jennifer Madoud, who's developing a technique that will allow gene editing. Besides its perverse use and the dominance of the new medicine, I fear it will soon become the target of patents and profits of power. I've asked Rob, and he says he knows her. I'm going to talk to her tonight.
* It certainly sends shivers down the spine to think about it. As we've controlled the risk of infections by ravaging nature and creating sterile urban environments and vaccines that protect us from major infections, the way of life with the blocks we talked about earlier and the high level of cortisol implies inflammatory, autoimmune, and degenerative diseases that require genetic changes to modulate these imbalances. The medicine of the future, if our sedentary, sterile, and toxic way of life doesn't change, will be based on genetic engineering. It's like advancing natural selection processes, the few who can afford it, due to our unnatural way of living and our damage to the nature in which we almost no longer live, in imbalance with the purpose of our bodies.
* And perhaps of our souls.

The evening was approaching, and although their loving glances caressed their hearts, they silently felt anguish for a Humanity that seemed to have lost its way. Their eyes filled with tears, and the silence was so sincere that it said it all.

At night, Aimsa called Jennifer on Skype. She was in her office at the Li Ka Shing building. Universities in the United States were flooded with the names of wealthy individuals who donated part of their fortunes to buildings, equipment, and even researchers' salaries. Aimsa thought about the labels Jonay had described, names, nationality, religion, titles, jobs, and properties, to which they added here who supported you from their fortune so you could research, of course, for the good of the system that elevated the powerful. That university, where Vietnam, racism, and inequalities were confronted, was now fodder for philanthropic magnates, academics submissive to the system, and students competing to climb the ladder. Li Ka Shing amassed his over thirty billion fortune by selling plastic flowers first and then speculating with office buildings in Hong Kong. His name shone in golden letters on the most modern and "intelligent" building at Berkeley University, the most important source of Nobel Prizes in the world. There was Jennifer's laboratory, which had been dedicated to understanding genetic replication for the past twenty years. Rob had met her at a bioethics debate where she advocated for genetic manipulation and the protection of it by patent licenses.

* Good evening, Jennifer.
* Good evening, Aimsa. Rob talked a lot about you. He's a good friend, although we differ in ideas about science.
* Thank you for your time. I know you're very busy, at the forefront of new knowledge that may allow human genetic editing.
* That's right. We're very excited, although we still have some tests to finish. We've found a DNA base sequence that's something like the genetic skeleton where we can anchor a molecule and then change bases in imperfect disease-causing genes.
* It's undoubtedly a great advance in human knowledge and the possibility of mitigating many diseases and the suffering they entail, but I have some concerns I want to share with you.
* Go ahead, Aimsa. Twenty-five years ago, I attended a conference with Michael Gottlieb, when the AIDS epidemic was unfolding, and I remember your courage in asking about the fears of the epidemic and how they would allow its spread. And that's what happened. We shouldn't be afraid to know and trust in human consciousness and goodness.
* Knowledge can open and expand our consciousness, and certainly I also believe in human goodness that acts through that knowledge. But there's a basic ingredient for consciousness to be directed towards the common good: empathy. This implies knowing and feeling with the other. If there's no empathy, the other is a competitor, and our work is perched on this constant competition. You compete by publishing before others, patenting before others, and getting grants, awards, and investments to keep in the wheel before others. We call that success.
* That's right, Aimsa. And with empathy for the next and with effort towards the common with those we can't know, we pour our effort and talent into breaking boundaries of knowledge.
* That knowing, when based on competing, reaches only a few, and can generate more inequality, more injustice, and more suffering. Gene editing can, if patented as its diagnostic uses are already being patented, be inaccessible to a large part of Humanity. I've heard that Myriad and Monsanto are teaming up, and along with Johnson & Johnson, Pfizer, and Roche, they're already monopolizing the patents and the business of this new medicine. Don't you fear the greed of these economic powers that have already destroyed so many lives due to AIDS?
* Aimsa, we must reward investment and effort. It's our way of life in this country. Reward those who strive and with Christian charity help those who lag behind.
* There's immense effort that barely manages to survive and speculation that without creating or sweating is the greatest source of wealth and power. Look who financed your laboratories: a real estate speculation magnate. I lived in Africa the pain of how millions died for the profits of a few pharmaceutical companies.
* They pay their taxes, Aimsa, with which we have light, the computers we're talking through now, health services for those who can't afford them, our children's education, the safety of our streets.
* I believe that from your world between Berkeley Hills and Li Ka Shing, you can't have empathy with those who are on the sidelines of the power of a few. Haven't you seen people sleeping in People's Park, on the streets of Oakland, under the bridges of the highway to San Francisco?
* I see it every day and I help through my parish and a foundation that supports shelters for the homeless, Aimsa. Frankly, I don't understand your aggressiveness towards me.
* It's not towards you. I admire your perseverance and audacity in advancing human knowledge. I'm just trying to share my concern that if your genetic editing technique falls into the hands of power and greed, there will not only be more inequalities but a dystopian world where "genetic impurities" could be cleansed and even humans designed through embryo editing. That eugenic group will concentrate economic power, and the majority will be left to natural selection due to high mortality rates and suffering from climate change and other side effects of progress.
* I don't see it that way, Aimsa. We'll try to ensure that genetic editing reaches those who need it and prevent eugenic uses of embryo editing.
* Thank you for your good intention, Jennifer. It will be an honor to stay in touch.
* We have a bioethics committee. I can put you in touch with its coordinator. Great opportunities for science and human well-being are coming, believe me, Aimsa.
* Thank you, Jennifer. I hope so.

# An Island for Hope. Eco island of Laurel, November 2009

The campaign for the local, insular, and regional elections in the Canary Islands ended in La Gomera with a third of the island's residents spending at least one day in the island's eco-villages, where another third of the islanders already lived.

The smear campaigns of the bosses who had been dominating politics, the economy, judicial decisions, and the media for three decades were countered with strong responses from Juan Antonio, son of the main boss, Luis, like the internist doctor on the island, and the testimonies of John, Fernando, and the leaders of the eco-villages, in addition to messages of support and inspiration from Aimsa Harris, Sven Hansen, the Dalai Lama, Noam Chomsky, Paulo Freire, and Nelson Mandela.

The elections raised great expectations worldwide for the possibility of creating the first region in the world without hierarchies, without police, without property, without exclusive religions, without animal cruelty, and without carbon emissions.

Was Thomas More's utopia possible on the southern island of the Atlantic that he had imagined half a millennium before? Was it possible to combine individual freedom without hierarchies and collective freedom without property, escaping the injustices of capitalism dominated by the market and communism dominated by control?

The elections for the municipalities, the island council, and the Canarian parliament resulted in a victory with two-thirds of the votes for the Movement for the Ecosovereign Island of the Laurisilva, MIEL. They thus had fifty of the sixty councilors in the six municipalities of the island, twelve of the fifteen members of the island council, and three of the four deputies in the Canarian parliament. The movement was reluctantly led by John Harris, the Welsh sailor who had shipwrecked on its shores fifty years earlier and who, along with Umbela, like the Guanche legend of Gara and Jonay, initiated the network of spiritual eco-villages and their extension worldwide. There were already more than twenty thousand eco-villages and almost eleven million people renouncing property to live together in spirituality without hierarchies and taking care of nature.

John was already eighty-three years old, moving slowly, speaking calmly, and looking deep. He didn't want any protagonism and felt uncomfortable being the representative of MIEL and the president of the island council, after decades, really centuries, of bossism. According to the Cabildo Law of 1912 of the Canary Islands, they had the functions of governing and providing the services of the Canarian community on the island. It consisted of seventeen members, twelve of whom were from MIEL, three from the Socialist Party, and two from the Canary Coalition.

 The inherited system had areas of presidency, economy and finance, information and transparency, territorial development, sustainability, tourism, industry, commerce, sociocultural policy, historical heritage, and youth, infrastructures, transportation, emergencies, and civil protection, agriculture, livestock, and fishing. In addition, it administered Canarian services on the island for health, education, unemployment protection, disability, pensions, justice, and local police. Almost five thousand civil servants worked on all of this, forty percent of the active population, with three hundred vehicles and fifty-six buildings throughout the island.

John had to put Umbela's decalogue into practice, which inspired MIEL's commitment to its voters, and never let himself be seduced by power, avoid privileges, and serve all islanders in their well-being and harmony. He began by creating his workplace in simplicity. John still lived in his small, assigned house in the El Cabrito ravine, a spiritual eco-village of Tenderness. He went two days each week, in the boat with old Tomas, whose place was gradually being taken by Martin, to San Sebastián, to meet with other members of the council, and with representatives of communities, who came to discuss tasks for the common good.

Many names of reference and use on the island changed: La Gomera, named after one of the Berber villages, the Gomer, who inhabited it, would be called "Ecoisla de la Laurisilva," diminutive "Eila," almost like "moon" in Arabic, the language of the Berbers, its first inhabitants, "moon" in Turkish, "tree" in Hebrew, and "torch" in Germanic.

The president would be called "server of all," and mayors and other positions would be servers of their place or task. The island council, from the Roman capitulum where religious leaders debated canons, would be called the "common house of eco-villages." The meetings to discuss and decide on the common good, previously called plenary sessions, were advised weekly in the eco-villages, monthly in the mayor's offices, and quarterly in the island council. They would be called "forums of feelings, thoughts, and actions," and that's how the agendas were shaped.

Streets and squares stopped having names of a few individuals, often distant saints or leaders who abused their power. They started having names of feelings like joy, love, harmony, wonder, calm, compassion, trust, pleasure, delight, serenity, hope, loyalty, empathy, gratitude, and many others that the inhabitants decided on.

The fourteen priests of the island met with John. The Catholic Church had twenty-three churches, forty-five hermitages, and twelve parish halls. Jeremiah, the parish priest of the main church of La Gomera, a young man from Palencia, son of farmers from the wheat fields of Castile, had arrived on the island ten years earlier and had formed a deep friendship with John. He had a sincere and complicit correspondence with Patxi. He confronted the bosses when they evicted Tenderness, welcomed Africans who arrived in boats to the Church, sold a good part of the gold and silver tabernacles, chalices, and crosses to help needy people, and celebrated masses by adapting rituals and combining them with meditations, songs with guitar, and melodies from John with the harmonica. He denied any mention of the existence of hell and purgatory. He changed the Creed to the "song of life," speaking of love and harmony, and not of "one holy, catholic, and apostolic church" but the union of all people and forms of life in harmony and gratitude for the "mysterious gift of life." He did not hide his life in love with a woman from Galicia.

The Bishop of Tenerife and six of the other priests, already advanced in age and rigid in their thoughts and in their faith, reproached him for deviating from the orthodoxy of Rome, but the rest, younger, were opening the doors of the church, breaking down its hierarchical walls, and melting with tenderness its dogmas of fear. They joined other churches on the island of Jehovah's Witnesses and a mosque to meet in what they no longer called "masses" but "union in gratitude for life."

The offices of the previous government of the presidency, information and transparency, historical heritage and youth, sociocultural policy, economy and finance, and tourism, together with the former courts and police, were integrated into an area they called "harmony in coexistence." Those of territorial development, sustainability, industry, commerce, infrastructure, transportation, agriculture, livestock, and fishing were called "harmony in nature." Those of emergencies and civil protection, together with Canarian health services, unemployment offices, and pensions, were called "harmony in wisdom”.

They began by converting the buildings of the island council, the government delegation, and the fourteen ministries into community forums and housing for people in precarious situations, refugees arriving from Africa, and community centers for art, imagination, meditation, and holistic healing. They softened every corner with adobe curves and painted both the exteriors and interiors in uniform colors with shades resembling those found in nature, eliminating almost all doors, which they repurposed into tables for growing vegetables on the terraces and rooftops. They removed the cobblestones from the central square of Las Américas, now called the "embrace of Eila," and fertilized the soil, which had been suffocated by cement for so many years, by planting all kinds of fruit trees and vines of spinach, blackberries, and tomato plants.

The twelve MIEL members on the council renounced their salaries, and in the first forum, with three out of the five members of other parties voting against, they approved gradually reducing their salaries by one-third annually while sorting out the usufructs of housing, land, and electric vehicles, and ensuring the food basket. The same happened with the salaries of mayors, councilors, and deputies. After this decision, two of the three council members, four councilors, and the deputy from other parties who voted against resigned.

They offered the same plan of gradual salary reduction to civil servants, coupled with reducing their working hours and voluntary work by all islanders in all "common good tasks." This led to tough dialogues, aggressive demonstrations, and highly insulting expressions in public and in the media. The main trade unions sent letters to John citing labor rights and conventions of the International Labour Organization. John replied that work for the common good would be equal for all islanders, and there would be no more civil servants, wage earners, or unemployed.

From all over Spain, there were volunteers from the fields of health, education, and justice who, being civil servants in other regions, requested transfers to the island due to their conviction for communal and ecological living. They could organize exchanges of positions with those reluctant to their salary privileges and their desire for properties.

The most difficult issue was gradually turning all property into public property. They studied the cadastre of rural wealth, the property registry, and the island council of La Gomera's water council. They published their data, like all documents, meetings, and decisions, online. They presented a plan for progressive expropriation starting with large landowners, at fair prices paid with public salaries sent from the Spanish and Canary Islands governments to representatives and officials, which they donated through a document of "voluntary salary decline for use in the common good."

To present the plan for expropriation of private property, John had a debate on television, which was also broadcast on Spanish television with an alarming title: "the local communist government expropriates the inhabitants of La Gomera of their lands." Such a title had alarmed even the US embassy and the Popular Group of the European Parliament, and there was high anticipation. Cayo, with the support of the Socialist Party, started the debate:

* Mr. Harris, the people of La Gomera, the Canaries, and Spain must know that you plan to expropriate the lands of the Gomerians, which they have earned with their sweat for so many generations. During our socialist government, we expanded the area for the conservation of the Garajonay laurisilva forest, and we granted a good part of the municipal lands for the villages and crops where the communities of your movement live. Your plan to expropriate the lands and assets of the rest of the Gomerians goes against all our rights.
* I hear your concern, Mr. Cayo, but I believe that despite having governed the island for almost thirty years, you lack data or do not want to see them: The island that takes care of us and that we take care of, which is not ours, has thirty-seven thousand hectares and twenty-six thousand inhabitants, on average, we would have more than one hectare per inhabitant. Do you know how they are distributed, Mr. Cayo? Do you want to explain it?

At that moment, the representative of the Canarian Coalition, speaking on behalf of the People's Party, a right-wing party in Spain, took the floor.

* Mr. Harris, in our system, it is irrelevant who owns the land but how it is owned: if it has been obtained through effort and legally, that's how it should be.
* Let me tell you that this "legal way" of gradually obtaining ownership of the land has led to this situation that we analyzed on the first day of our government: about six thousand hectares are municipal public lands or belong to the Council, and four thousand hectares belong to the Garajonay National Park. Cayo, you know Juan Manuel Bethancourt well because you have businesses together, and he funded your campaign, spreading defamatory publicity about our movement in all media and even this television program. Only he owns more than eight thousand hectares, almost as much as all the public lands on the island. He doesn't cultivate food on them, but he has built twelve apartment buildings, nine hotels, the buildings and land of the airport, restaurants, multiple shops, and a casino. You, Mr. Cayo, have thirty properties on about five hundred hectares, twenty of them on the island, the rest on the mainland. Do you think that's fair? Do you think it sets a good socialist example?

Don Cayo was furious and interrupted with shouts:

* Mr. Harris, every one of those bricks and every pound of those lands is the product of much effort, they generate employment, income for the islanders, and are the foundation of their well-being! Furthermore, our socialist government imposes a progressive tax to redistribute wealth and pay for public services for everyone.

Gracian also intervened, agitated:

* You, Mr. Harris, not only do not respect others' efforts, but you will also ruin the island's economy because no company will want to operate or invest in our progress.
* Like the Norwegian shipping company Olsen, Gracian, which owns, in addition to buildings in the port and the three ferries to Tenerife, five thousand hectares and twenty-six buildings, including fourteen hotels and three golf courses?

Gracian interjected:

The fact that there is a successful entrepreneur and a company that bets on tourism and the island's progress is not a sign of injustice; it is the way our society rewards effort, Mr. Harris. We will not allow you to destroy our way of life!

* It's not just those two cases, gentlemen, there are another seventeen landowners, whom you know well because they support your parties and share luxurious trips and lavish dinners, who accumulated another fifteen thousand hectares, mainly dedicated to tourism, eight large banana plantations, and nine vineyards with their wineries.
* Without the effort of these entrepreneurs, we would not have income, tourism, or well-being.
* In addition to all the hotels, apartment buildings, golf courses, ferries, and buses filling the island, about a thousand hectares, mainly in the south of the island, have been sold to about two thousand foreign tourists who come in the winter months. All this causes enormous damage to the island's nature.
* That tourism, Mr. Harris, is the basis of the economy. You demonize it, and without it, our fellow islanders will live in poverty.
* Well, your system of accumulation by a few leaves most islanders in a marginal situation: about two thousand people own a total of a hundred hectares of small private plots, generally small extensions on the terraces of the steep valleys where they barely grow a few potatoes, vegetables, and alfalfa for some goats. The rest, those who do not live in the eco-villages, live in small apartments in multi-story buildings, often renting from the landowners.

Don Cayo, more pensive about the panorama that John was describing and concerned about the revelation of his many properties, said:

* Mr. Harris, in addition to offering all islanders housing, health, education, social protection, jobs in tourism, communications, and the pride of a rich historical and natural heritage, we offer them other alternative ways of life, often against our customs and values, lands in usufruct for their free well-being on our island. Doesn't that seem enough to you?
* Well, Cayo, let's be honest now that we are in public: first, we have always insisted on not owning the land, almost eight thousand community members from the sixteen eco-villages live on six hundred hectares, 2% of the island's land. No ownership, only usufruct. We produce half of the food healthily and take care of it with care and love for nature. That's what we propose for the island. Second, we pay our taxes for what we produce from agriculture, craftsmanship, or hosting visitors, who contribute voluntarily, and with that, we pay our taxes. And third, and you know it was like this: for reporting a drug network, you suspended the usufruct of the Ternura community overnight, and we were exiled from the valley for two years. You tried, with the island's largest landowner, to turn it into golf courses and luxury hotels, without respecting its classification as a biological reserve.

Don Cayo quickly changed the subject and defended his thirty years of government and progress, and property taxes to reduce inequalities.

* Mr. Harris, you know nothing about public management. Our socialist government has a property tax system to prevent extreme inequalities while maintaining a vibrant economy with opportunities and progress.
* Cayo, in thirty years, this is what you have achieved: that almost three-quarters of the land belonged to about twenty families, about two hundred people, less than one percent of the islanders, most of whom do not even live on the island, their wives shop in Tenerife, Madrid, and London, their children are boarding school in France or England, and the titled entrepreneurs travel and speculate with their fortunes. Three percent of the island is owned by foreign tourists. We, in the eco-villages, take care of two percent of the land and show that with three times more, we will be self-sufficient, and if it's ten times more, we will have three times what is needed and can receive eco-tourism for everyone's benefit, not big hotels for the enrichment of a few. And what hurts us: only 0.2% are small plots cared for by 7% of the inhabitants, and the rest, almost two out of every three islanders, live in apartments in multi-story buildings with urban plots that barely account for 0.01% of the area. In other words, two hundred people have an average of over 100 hectares each, two thousand tourists have half a hectare per person, eight thousand community members less than 0.1% and in usufruct of public property, two thousand small landowners about 500 square meters each in small plots, and the rest, sixteen thousand people, barely live on ten square meters of urban soil per person. This is the shameful reality that we must change, Cayo, Gracian: that the dominant one percent has, in land, and surely in all kinds of power, a hundred thousand times more than the majority, who live crowded in apartments. All islanders have the right to cultivate the land, smell its fragrances, taste its healthy, chemical-free food, enjoy the pleasure of sharing, feeling, caring for, and loving nature.

Don Cayo wielded the nationalist sentiment knowing that it would strike a chord with many viewers.

* Mr. Harris, you are a foreigner, and so are most of the hippies who inhabit your communes. Do you believe you have the right to snatch away our lands and customs, the sweat, and tears of so many generations of noble effort, of your devout faith, of your deep-rooted connection to the land and history?
* Cayo, we believe that we are all equal, no matter where we were born, what color our skin is, or in what language we were told tales and sung lullabies. It is true that almost half of our community members in the eco-villages were born outside the island, they come from a total of eighty different countries, and in our diversity, we learn from and inspire each other, with a profound love for nature and rejecting any belief that seeks to marginalize others or condemn anyone to any fire or pain, neither in life nor in another form of existence.

Don Cayo began to fade without knowing what to respond. Then Gracian attacked more forcefully:

* If the entire island were, as he claims, eco-villages, we would have neither electricity, nor phones, nor medicines, nor surgeries, nor would anyone drink a beer, a glass of wine, or eat Manchego cheese; we could neither leave the island nor see other worlds nor care for art, music, and traditions. If we don't stop it, we'll go back to the caves by his hand.
* You know so little about us, Gracian. I invite you to spend a few days in an eco-village. It will be an honor to live with you and learn from you. In our community, we have astronomers, engineers, doctors, anthropologists, historians, agronomists, biologists, and artists of many forms. We don't care about titles but about passion and, above all, humility in knowledge. You will see that we have solar power, that we communicate through phones without coltan and free internet access, that we have medicinal plant gardens and pay taxes for the medicines and surgeries we need. I had cataract surgery three years ago with profound gratitude. Perhaps we don't drink beer or eat Manchego cheese, or only on a very special occasion, but we make very delicious ginger beer and goat cheese. Yes, we sail to explore and exchange with other worlds, but without polluting; and although we enjoy listening to music and seeing art from other places or times, we prefer to create ourselves and thus share feelings.
* That's your utopian speech. Tell us the reality: are you going to expropriate the land from its owners on the island, yes, or no?
* We will do it gradually, Gracian. Already, a third is living in usufruct, and another third voted for us knowing what we propose, so we assume they are prepared to yield or request land in usufruct. We will propose at least half of the island for natural protection without human activity, a quarter for public spaces, roads, and buildings, which we will call communal, and the other quarter for lands in usufruct that, through agroecology, can provide healthy food for three times the population of La Gomera.
* If you proceed with such massive expropriation, we will denounce you before the National Supreme Court and the European Court in Strasbourg.
* Don't worry, Gracian, Cayo. We will do it progressively, raising taxes on those who have more, using those revenues to pay a fair price for the progressive expropriation of part of the lands accumulated by a few. We will invoke reasons, according to the expropriation law of 1954, of public utility, for island food eco-sovereignty, social interest, and fair land distribution for usufruct in agroecology.

After that debate, John and the movement decided not to attend any more media debates but to hold them in community forums. They began the progressive land expropriation plan, not allowing the "hoarding limit" of more than ten hectares of land and five hundred square meters built per person and in transitory ownership until usufruct. Property taxes paid for the progressive expropriation. Lists of usufructuaries were made around new projects of eco-villages of about five hundred people and sixty hectares each. In this way, twelve more eco-villages began to be created. Gradually, six eco-neighborhoods were also created with five hectares each of parks or nearby lands where communal gardens could be cultivated. Fruit trees were planted, and green roofs with more gardens were made.

There were already twenty-eight eco-villages and six eco-neighborhoods, with a total of about seventeen thousand people, two-thirds of the islanders, sharing communally and based on land stewardship.

Little by little, they began to make the use of money in coins, bills, or credit cards disappear as it was deemed unnecessary. With no lands or buildings to buy or sell; with enough organic food available and exchanged between villages through barter; with essential medicines provided free for all; with no sales of books as they were available in public libraries; with no plastics or chemicals allowed, avoiding all business from agribusiness, drugstores, and the vast majority of plastic-based gadgets; by sharing and exchanging in barter at craft markets, which they called "creative parties," textiles, clay, and wicker in all their forms; with the system that was developed to provide each family with two eco-friendly mobile phones and one computer per community of several families; by promoting care and transportation by horse, bicycles, motorcycles, and electric tricycles, everything made money redundant.

There was no need to buy and sell. For economists, Eila had a nonexistent gross domestic product. Banks naturally disappeared. Coins were melted into sculptures of sentiments. Only payments in installments for expropriations remained, which were made with donations from officials' salaries and property taxes, which gradually disappeared as well, also deemed useless. Tourists voluntarily contributed to a fund with which factories were set up and essential electronic components and solar cells were imported to manufacture, along with local wood and ceramics, solar panels, windmills, and mobile phones, computers, and electric vehicles allocated according to needs and under the regime of "community sharing."

John paid special attention to those who did not agree with MIEL's vision. He organized special sessions with groups of different opinions, which he called "sessions of tolerance and understanding." Those who did not want to donate all their land or buildings were allowed to keep part of them, below the hoarding limit, but they could not sell them. Those who wanted to continue their orthodox cults were allowed, with like-minded priests, to continue their cults, although they were asked not to speak of hell. Those who wanted to continue using money were allowed to do so, although, except for tourists, they had less and less to sell and less to buy on the island.

Gradually, the transformation towards the eco-island of laurisilva in ecological, vegan, spiritual, communal, rural, and libertarian harmony began. Without property, banks, salaries, or money. Without plastics or carbon emissions or chemical fertilizers. Without more cement or asphalt. Without hell for humans or sacrifices for animals. Without laws or police, judges, or prisons. Without teachers or titles, without documents, and without borders.

They received a public letter signed by over two million eco-villagers from around the world. Messages of support and affection also came from the Dalai Lama, Noam Chomsky, Paulo Freire, and Nelson Mandela, among many others. It was drafted and proposed through the Avaaz network by Aimsa:

To John Harris, "servant of all," and all the inhabitants of Eila:

With your courage and tenderness in human and natural harmony, we feel inspiration in many corners of the world for how you have been banishing the pain of oppression and destruction, and hope for your light to spread in communities around the world that believe in hierarchy-free harmony and well-being without destroying other forms of life on this beautiful and magical planet. We will be vigilant to ensure that no power from outside Eila undermines your beautiful dream. From the network of spiritual eco-villages, we will see Eila as the vanguard of a New Humanity that steps out of the caves of oil and money into the light of nature and sharing.

# Health Equity. Brussels, mayo 2010

Thanda had already been in Brussels for six years, the last two in the company of his daughters. Ángeles was in her final year at the European school, already fluent in English and French, played the flute, and had a Scottish boyfriend who spent a lot of time at the family cottage in Hoeilaart. Daniela enjoyed her adolescence and singing in the school choir. During this time, they rehearsed the songs from "Les choristes," and Thanda loved, literally, hearing her hum them around the house.

With their point system, they had maintained a good organization of responsibilities, cooking, cleaning, taking care of Homeless, Satia, and Chaplin. They watched movies together on the living room sheet. They sang by the fireplace. They took long walks through the Foret de Soignes and cycled to the Chateau de La Hulpe, which inspired Hervé's Moulinsart castle from Tintin's adventures. Sometimes they ate a durum at Aisha and Mohamed's shop in the village of Hoeilaart. Some Saturdays, they cycled on bike lanes along the road to Overijse to swim in the public pool.

Thanda's greatest happiness was being with his daughters and feeling them passionate about life, something contagious and, Thanda said to himself, the greatest responsibility as a parent. To give Ángeles more privacy because of her age, especially when her boyfriend came home, Thanda gave up his room to Daniela, to whom he made a "princess room," so Daniela had the big room to herself. Thanda settled for a bed in the narrow basement, where he enjoyed having a space of simplicity. He had invented several machines in the garage, including a washing machine that operated by pedaling the bike resting on a tripod, and a dynamo that charged while he pedaled to work, and with it powered the light on his desk. He insisted to the services of the European Commission's administration on having pedals to charge the computer, thus avoiding electricity consumption, but they did not respond.

Cristina had come to Brussels three times to spend weekends with her daughters. Thanda would leave them the house and go on bike excursions through the Ardennes with his friend Javier. In that year, Javier, tired of European bureaucracy and the political intrigues that were tainted with arrogance and interests in cooperation, was able to apply for early retirement to devote himself body and soul to his great passions: Buddhism and animal rights. On the day he had to accept the transition to retirement, he invited Thanda to his office to click together the "freedom" mouse. Javier said to Thanda, "I'll see you on the other side, my friend." But Thanda couldn't think about it for the moment: he had challenges to fulfill within this labyrinth of power and wanted to give his daughters the best educational opportunities by getting to know the world.

His complicity with Sergio Galán, the Canarian doctor who returned from Mozambique to coordinate Spanish cooperation in health, became a cherished friendship. Anna, Aimsa's Catalan friend, also frustrated, like Thanda on the Board, by the narrow vision of Médecins Sans Frontières, had joined Sergio's team in Madrid. After Sergio and Thanda discussed during council discussions about the midterm assessment of millennium goals and raised the challenge of including in the agenda of the first "Spanish presidency of the European Union" in 2010, the adoption of a "European policy for global health," Thanda wrote the first draft.

With that council napkin on which he noted the "excess deaths due to inequity," Thanda prepared the ethical argument for health equity and its consequence in the redistribution of funds with budget support to countries that did not have sufficient funds to pay their doctors, nurses, and essential medicines.

For health equity, he devised a "4x4" scheme of fair health systems: four principles (universal right, community participation, intersectorality, equity in contribution and access), four pillars (infrastructure, human resources, medicines, and equipment), four major service areas (maternal health, child health, infectious diseases, non-communicable diseases), and four management schemes (healthcare by health levels, equity indicators, base budget, and contingencies); all aimed at universal coverage and equity. In his cottage in Hoeilaart, with the wooden drawers of wine crates he collected from the streets, he made a bookshelf with the "4x4" elements and began to collect books and documents on each aspect of them. This way, he could more easily see when a cooperation proposal was partial and unbalanced.

The previous year he was invited to the annual ABRASCO meeting in Salvador de Bahia, Brazil. He defended the level of health budgets estimated by the macroeconomics and health commission for millennium goal priorities. After the conference, an activist from the Workers' Party named Armando di Negri, who led the Sao Paulo Forum on Health, approached him. He said that limiting cooperation to those services, those funds, and those diseases went against the universal right to health. He reminded Thanda that the World Bank did the same thing in the nineties with the Alma Ata strategy. Thanda told him it was a first step, with the goal of health equity they were proposing in a draft European policy.

They agreed to speak in more detail at the World Health Assembly months later in Geneva, where he met two leaders for the right to health, Paolo Buss and David Chiriboga, from Brazil and Ecuador, who led a new movement for universal health in South America, alongside a wave of progressive governments united around UNASUR. With them and with Sergio Galán and Anna, representing Spain, they marginalized the United States, which opposed mentioning the right to health, with ethical arguments and coherence with the fundamental charter of human rights. They managed to approve resolutions presented by David on nutrition, against poisoning by agribusiness corporations in global trade, by Paolo on access to medicines, suffocated by pressures from the American government and pharmaceutical corporations, and by Sergio on health professionals, who, from the meager budgets of the South, were seduced by rich countries to leave their countries.

In early 2010, he was invited to a conference by Jeffrey Sachs at the European Parliament. The room was full of students from his university at Columbia, where he led the "Earth Institute," and representatives of NGOs who applauded him almost like a rock star when he spoke of the need for more cooperation. He presented "his" millennium villages and "his" strategies to control malaria, AIDS - well aligned with PEPFAR's ABC-D, Thanda thought. He criticized the little European support for health and its frequent route as budget support, to the delight and applause of NGOs, mostly funded by the Gates Foundation. He went so far as to say provocatively, (or not?): "Don't waste your money on corrupt governments, give it to us, we know how to use it to save lives." The American messianism was received in the heart of Europe with a red carpet. At that moment, Thanda raised his hand.

Jeffrey, my name is Thanda, I coordinate the global health section of European cooperation. Your words concern me. For some time, I have referred to your estimate in the macroeconomics and health commission of minimum funds to progress towards millennium health goals, and I have insisted in the European Commission, this parliament, and the council, to increase our health cooperation. But when we reviewed our strategy to support millennium goals, halfway through, two years ago, I was able to analyze that excess mortality in the countries we cooperate with is, compared to mortality rates in the European Union, almost twenty million, more than four times the one proposed in millennium goals and in the priorities of the macroeconomics and health commission. There are very serious health problems also in adult populations, in non-communicable diseases, in mental health, and many others that we have forgotten. Have we perhaps made a mistake by dazzling ourselves only with the diseases and social groups that are most supported by health cooperation lobbies?

Thanda, those priorities were discussed for years with all countries and experts. They were based on cost-utility and externalities analyses by which it was decided that they were the most priority, the ones that could save more lives.

I believe those analyses were biased, Jeffrey. Some vaccines in childhood have a huge impact on preventing loss of healthy life years due to deaths at that early age. Safe childbirth prevents maternal deaths with devastating effects on the family. But the infections that were chosen, which are also prioritized in the global fund and which account for eighty percent of cooperation funds, only account for twenty percent of the excess mortality I was referring to. Moreover, AIDS treatments, especially with American patented drugs funded by PEPFAR, are very expensive, much more than those needed for diseases like diabetes or hypertension, from which many more people die, without anyone's attention. All lives have the same value, Jeffrey. With these arbitrary choices, the universal right to health is squandered.

There is no such right just with words. Solidarity is needed. While we are talking, children are dying from diarrhea, women from complicated childbirths, and men from AIDS. The United States needs to increase its cooperation in general, and the European Union needs to increase its health funds. There are thousands of projects and, more importantly, millions of lives waiting.

He knew how to raise applause and cheers from American students imbued with his vision of "just do it" and European NGOs, eager for funds for "their" projects. Among them were Frazer and Rafael, who cast inquisitive glances at Thanda.

Jeffrey, I know it very well. You are an economist and have always lived in New York talking about poverty and cooperation. I am a doctor and have felt that need and urgency in rural Africa. I have had children dying in my arms, and I do not forget it. I have seen thousands of unjust deaths, while another part of Humanity swims in abundance. That is why we must go beyond a few diseases and a few projects. Furthermore, such actions are arbitrarily chosen by the "industry" of cooperation in which we live, with salaries much higher than health workers in those countries who fail to meet their basic needs, and by the bills for medicines that largely go to pay patents of already billion-dollar companies. That is why we advocate for budget support, yes, direct to governments so that they can pay decent wages to their workers, buy essential generic medicines, and develop their universal health systems as permanent services and not transient projects and for all diseases, not those decided in New York or Brussels.

There was a murmur, and Thanda left the room. Sergio and Anna attended the meeting and the three of them went to the house in Hoeilaart to finish drafting the first draft of the European global health policy, based on the "4x4" scheme and with the aim of health equity, the clear and firm way to measure the universal right to health. For a year, they worked tirelessly. They shared drafts with Jonay, Aimsa, NoLwasi, Buhleve, and Thandiwe. They incorporated other key "directorates-general" to limit the brain drain of doctors from the South to the North, to increase research towards global public goods, and to limit European pressures against patent waivers for essential medicines.

They then took the drafts to multiple debates. Sergio coordinated the discussions with representatives from the twenty-five EU member countries in the European Council. Anna coordinated debates with civil society. Thanda organized a "global health forum" in the meeting room of the "development and cooperation policies" building on Science Street, to which they invited all of them, diplomats from the North and South, activists, and academics.

After two years of work, forty-six drafts, and thousands of hours of meetings discussing every word and comma, the European Union's global health policy was ready. By then, the Czech Republic was the last to ratify the Lisbon Treaty, the "patch" of the absence of a constitution, but which at least agreed on certain common policies beyond trade. One of them was foreign policy: a European minister for foreign affairs was elected, a European diplomatic service was formed, and they would meet with all European foreign ministers to approve European policies in their relations with the world. The council chose Lady Ashton, an English laborite with aristocratic airs who defended British interests, often closer to Washington than to Brussels.

The Foreign Affairs Council held its first session on May 10, 2010, approving the European global health policy. It included commitments to equity, universal and free services, and European policies to prevent the brain drain of doctors and abusive and unaffordable patents in the South. Thanda celebrated what could be the beginning of a new cooperation based on justice and dignity for people. He had a Kriek beer in the Grand-Place with Anna and Sergio, and they went to sing "La belleza," by Aute, at the house in Hoeilaart with their beloved daughters Ángeles and Daniela. Two weeks later, the three met Paolo and David at the World Health Assembly and forged an alliance of friendship and complicity for the right to health.

Around that time, he was contacted by a headhunter company to offer him a position: the directorship of the Gates Foundation office for Europe, which would be in London, where, they confided, the Gates couple would move. He allowed them to interview him to learn more details about their plans, but intelligence systems should work poorly not to have detected Thanda's criticism of philanthro-capitalism in general and that Foundation in particular. It was the most powerful in health cooperation. They saw justice as charity and responsibility as a supposed moral superiority they boasted about. All of this came from immense fortunes amassed through speculation, including the recent purchase of much of Monsanto's shares.

Thanda traveled with his daughters to Madrid and told his father about the effort and the result of the European global health policy, after the one three years ago for children's rights.

* You fought, dad, and you are cured. I fought, and the ideas I believe in are now European policy, I hope it serves for something.
* The important thing, son, is to fight nobly, with solid principles, a humble attitude, perseverance in effort, and always to flee from glories and victories, as Kipling says in 'If'.

"If" was like a creed for his father. Thanda had it written by him in his wallet and reread and remembered it at every step, especially the verse that said: "*if you can meet with triumph and disaster and treat those two impostors just the same*." In fact, his soul felt so much peace from having overcome the deep tear of divorce as from having achieved the approval of that European policy, one only in dark shadows, the other under the spotlights of the capricious world of politics.

A few days later, Gerard, one of the national experts assigned to his team, told Thanda:

* Thanda, yesterday at the council of ministers of the French government, President Sarkozy, linked to the business world of insurance and pharmaceuticals, criticized his foreign affairs minister for allowing the approval of the global health policy 'with commitments against patents and against payments for medical services.

Thanda thought of what Don Quixote said to Sancho: "They bark, then we ride."

He continued to ride his bike to work every morning, although his daughters no longer said effusive goodbyes as when they were little, and almost preferred to go alone to the school bus stop. During the hour-long bike ride, often on the cold mornings of Brussels, among the winter snows, the autumn rains, the spring daffodils, and the green chestnuts in summer, he listened to his favorite music, country, Celtic, and Cuban trova, especially to cheer himself up on the slopes. In the afternoons, while he returned, he called his daughters and reviewed some tasks while he pedaled. He felt a lot of strength pedaling in his firefighter uniform along the walks and streets of Brussels. At the same time, he felt nostalgia for his parents, for his teenage dreams, for his life in simple solidarity in Africa, and for his longing for a home, now turned into a dream of broken pieces, although the most beautiful, his daughters, awaited him every day upon his return from the hard day's work.

What saddened his heart the most was the loneliness of being intimately alone so many years. He felt "orphaned of caresses, shipwrecked of hugs." Although his life was beautifully intense in taking care of his daughters and home, and in fighting for the values he believed in at work, he longed for the embrace of a soul mate with whom to share passion, complicity, and adventures.

Since the brief encounters with Sara in Barcelona, he had not had any approach to any woman. He only kept one secret to himself: every day when he rode his bike to work, halfway he crossed paths with a woman who was also cycling, but in the opposite direction. On an old Dutch bike that he identified as a "gazelle," the first one his parents gave Thanda during their time as immigrants in Holland, she pedaled every morning around seven-thirty, at the tram station on Tervuren Avenue. She was a woman of athletic build and at the same time very feminine, with loose red hair in the wind, with a sweet gaze from eyes that, despite the fleeting crossing, Thanda felt were gray, like the ones he had dreamed of since his adolescence. She almost always wore blue pants and a checkered brown shirt, on rainy days a gray trench coat.

Thanda awaited that crossing of a few seconds that inexplicably brightened his day. After several dozen crossings pretending not to see her, he dared to look her in the eyes. A few weeks later, their eyes met. By the time the daffodils bloomed, and spring arrived, one day she smiled at him. Her smile illuminated that sweet face even more. Thanda speculated whether she was married, or in a relationship, or what her job might be, or what she would think if he stopped one day to greet her, with any excuse. He even thought of pretending to have a flat tire and asking for her help. But such a trick would have seemed a very bad start to a relationship. One day he decided on the following plan: after crossing paths with her, he would turn around about two hundred meters, without her seeing him, and follow her to her destination. He did so, discreetly. He saw her lock the bike in front of an office building in Audherghem. He left her a note in English tied to the handlebars: "Every morning your smile brightens my day."

The next day, when they crossed paths, she smiled at him, but at the same time showed him a wedding ring on her left hand. Thanda made a gesture in jest as if he were shooting himself in the head. Deep down, he felt happy. The key to life was to risk it for love, for passion, and for ideas. Whether triumph or disaster. He felt happy. His partner would come when the magic of life said so.

# The last adventure. Mosi-oa Tunya, July 2010

Buhleve gave birth in December 2010 to a boy they named Haka-Sibindi ("Hamba-Kashana-far away-Haka, Sibindi - brave), nicknamed Hasi, in honor of her father. Elias had worked with Buhleve until she gave birth, and with Thandiwe afterward, once his training in South Africa was completed.

Haka managed to stop the traffic of glyphosate and strengthened the arguments for Zimbabwe to resist pressure to open its doors to GMOs and thereby the toxins that ravaged all forms of life except the commercial ones. Helen remained by his side, but somehow, passion gave way to a form of loyal friendship and complicity. Although Haka’s Parkinson's tremors had improved with the levodopa prescribed by Elias, her gait and speech had deteriorated, causing her great distress.

For Buhleve's delivery, Helen brought her in a wheelchair, and upon seeing her grandson and holding him in her arms, her face, barely expressive due to Parkinson's, filled with tears. Barely babbling, she told Buhleve that she would have wanted to go far away, "hamba-kashana," with him, and show him the many adventures to dive into with bravery. Buhleve told her that, even though not physically, the example of her adventures and her fight against evil would always guide Hasi's steps.

Adam, who was already seventeen, had been discovering with fascination the magic of his mother NoLwasi's knowledge. She had been teaching him ways to connect with ancestors, with spirits, and how divination bones could indicate his destiny and make harmony with healing magical plants and trance states strong and luminous.

Adam, who enjoyed going on multi-day adventures in the semi-dry forests of Bulililamangwe, discovered some mushrooms that, in very low doses, allowed him to see nature in different dimensions, almost to speak with it. He hugged trees, could spend hours watching the slow walk of a beetle or a chameleon, talked with butterflies from the amacimbis with their big tiger-like eyes, and felt a deep energy and peace with sunsets and contemplating the stars.

He also felt a complicit connection in inventions and flying in the solar inyoni-enkulu with his brother Joseph and Nothando, a deep thoughtfulness of feelings with Thandiwe, and immense affection for his brother Unai, who was still drawn to adventures and climbed the kopjes every afternoon to look at the distant horizons and guess the mysteries of life.

Elias had to return to Cuba after the one-year extension granted by Haka to the Cuban brigade, in September 2010. Although Elias said he would apply for a visa to return to Zimbabwe, he and Buhleve knew it could be delayed for months or years due to Cuban and Zimbabwean bureaucratic and political sensitivities, so they decided to start a new stage of their lives as a family, Elias, Buhleve, and Hasi, in Santa Clara, Cuba.

May was approaching, and Buhleve felt a tearing in her heart as she saw Haka becoming more and more immobile. He spent long periods on the porch of Patxi's house. Helen only came on some weekends. She remained very active in the Anwele foundation and the Sibithanda network throughout the country, as well as traveling to Johannesburg where she worked with Nadine in an "anonymous stories" editorial collecting stories from elderly people and recording the dreams they never confessed or fulfilled.

Haka had a small radio where he listened to BBC World News and a classical music channel that gave him great serenity. A month before Buhleve's departure with Hasi and Elias, muscle stiffness led him to a state where he could no longer dress, wash, or eat alone. Buhleve, and Thandiwe, Adam, and Unai, helped him with love, but Haka felt deep anguish about his condition and his inability to express himself.

Elias tried other associated treatments and increased the levodopa dose. The effects lasted for a few hours, but then he fell into a deep sleep and a state of confusion. NoLwasi tried in vain several treatments with herbs and songs that, although alleviating his anguish, did not improve his almost total immobility. A few days later, he had a choking episode while eating, and Thandiwe had to sedate him, intubate him, suction the secretions, and treat him for aspiration pneumonia.

The constant anguish in his gaze broke the hearts of the entire family, especially Patxi and Buhleve.

During one of the short periods when the high doses of levodopa were effective, Haka wanted to talk to Patxi and Buhleve. They knew the effect would last only about twenty minutes, and even then, he had great difficulty expressing himself. With great effort, he spoke to them in this way:

* Anaya (brother) Patxi, dago (daughter) Buhleve, I want you to listen to me carefully. My life no longer makes sense. I suffer because I cannot speak and because I depend on everything to live. I live in fear of choking again. I know, Patxi, that in your faith it is not accepted, but I want you to help me end my life with serenity, with dignity, and being able to tell you how much I love you all. I've had a beautiful life, especially since I came to the mission, Patxi. And the most beautiful thing that has happened to me is being able to rescue you, Buhleve, and see how you have become a good, brave, generous, intelligent woman, and giving me a precious grandson in whom I feel my life will continue in some magical way. I need you to understand my anguish.

Buhleve could not speak due to her deep pain. She was kneeling in front of his chair with her head on her legs, not knowing what to say. Patxi looked at her with eyes clouded with sadness and responded, filtered through his beliefs and perhaps taboos:

* Anaya, I understand you, I understand your pain and your anguish. If there is life, there are magical expressions of love, and we can and want to take care of you. Buhleve, are there any anxiolytics that can relax his muscles and his anguish?
* Yes, baba wami (my father), there are medications that can calm your anguish. Let us take care of you, you have given your life for us, you have risked your life for me, just one look from you gladdens my heart. Hasi loves you and always wants to be in your lap. I will not go to Cuba with Hasi until you get better.

Haka fell silent, and tears ran down his face, now almost expressionless due to rigidity. To his already inert state was added the feeling of being a burden to others and hindering the family life of his beloved daughter, who had to fly. Patxi asked him.

* What do you want your next adventure to be, Sibindi?

With barely any strength left, and knowing that the next one would be the last, he said:

* Vic Falls.

Haka was fascinated by the power of Victoria Falls, especially the Devil's Viewpoint, where the Zambezi River fell forcefully off the hundred-meter cliff, as if transcending all that energy into a new existence.

Adam had heard the conversation from the door. He adored Uncle Haka, his strength, his adventures, his affection, and his generosity. He approached when Buhleve and Patxi let him into his dream, with classical music playing in the background.

* Uncle, I can give you a mushroom that will make you feel connected to everything. Do you want to try it? I think it will help you feel peace.
* Yes, Adam, please help me.

The next day, Adam went to talk to Patxi.

* Aita, yesterday I heard you talking to Uncle Haka. He's suffering a lot. I think the mushroom I've discovered, which produces a very deep connection with nature, can help him.
* Son, thank you for caring and loving him so much. But Buhleve, Thandiwe, and Elias are already taking care of him in the best possible way.

Adam didn't insist; he knew that anyone who didn't dare to feel the deep natural connection he had felt wouldn't understand. His mother NoLwasi had tried it and could understand him.

That night, they all dined on the porch. Haka was very drowsy. Patxi told them they would all go on an adventure with Uncle Haka in the BJ40. To Victoria Falls. Everyone knew it would be the last.

Buhleve said she had spoken with Elias, and he would stay on duty at the mission. They notified Helen and Joseph and Nothando. A week later, they set out as a family on another adventure, one they all knew would be the last, of the brave Haka.

Patxi was driving. Haka was in the front seat, with Helen embracing him. In the back were Buhleve with Hasi, NoLwasi, Thandiwe, Nothando, and Joseph. Adam decided to go with Unai in the solar inyoni-enkulu in short jumps of one hour, using the battery's autonomy, although they had the kerosene engine in case the batteries failed. Ten hours later, the car reached Nantwich, within Hwangue, and they observed together the fifty-kilometer horizon and the herds of elephants. They waited a day, and Adam and Unai arrived from their flights, united in deep brotherhood, and fascinated by seeing so much beauty in the wild.

They left together for Victoria Falls by car and inyoni-enkulu. Adam convinced them to let him go in inyoni-enkulu with Haka, who expressed his approval with his last smile. While the BJ40 arrived at a lodge in the national park, Adam flew with Haka over the Zambezi River to the immense waterfalls. Seeing from the flight the drop of the "Devil's Leap," Haka felt the vertigo of life falling into an immense void. The immense cloud of vapor rising to the sky, called "Mosi-Oa Tunya" in the local Kololo language, roaring vapor, was the memory he left behind in those he loved. The flow of the river between the cliffs made him think of another possible existence with other adventures to deliver his soul. Before returning to the family, Haka put his trembling hand on Adam's, at the helm, and, with barely any strength left, said to him:

* Hamba kashana umntwana wami" (Fly far, my son).

As the evening approached, they landed in front of the lodge. After dinner, Nothando played melodies on the violin. They ended up holding hands and listening to Jonay's favorite, "Schindler's List."

That night, Haka fell into a deep sleep. The next morning, his eyes were closed, his breathing very shallow, and he did not respond to anyone speaking to him. It was still dark. Everyone was around him. When his breathing became irregular and he seemed to choke on his own saliva, Adam said to everyone:

* I have some mushrooms that will make Uncle feel very peaceful.

NoLwasi nodded. Patxi and Buhleve felt confidence in NoLwasi's serene acceptance and Adam's love. They knew his end was near and wanted it to be in the deepest and most magical peace.

Adam suggested they take him to the garden where they could see the stillness of the Zambezi River, before it fell over the majestic falls into the cliff. He offered everyone a dose to feel connected to Haka on his journey, which they knew would be the last. They held hands around Haka, lying on the ground with his head resting on Helen's lap and his hands joined to Buhleve's and Patxi's. Hasi fell asleep on his grandfather's chest.

Each of them felt, in their own way, in harmony with his breathing, which became rhythmic and complete. They felt an energy that seemed to emanate from their bodies and intertwine with the water, the plants, the earth, the air, and the deep murmur of the falls. They felt as if in that state they could remain for eternity. A kind of serene trust in a "luminous void" flooded them and filled them with a sense of peace by simply surrendering, overwhelmed by their senses, and stripped of thoughts and judgments, to so much beauty. They fell asleep in their embrace around Haka.

When dawn broke, they began to wake up. Helen and Buhleve sobbed as they hugged Haka and felt that he was no longer breathing. There was a semblance of profound peace on his face and a faint smile. That was, surrounded by nature and love, the last adventure of that great heart full of courage and generosity.

They returned with him, his inert body now free from rigidity, to Ukuzwana. Patxi drove in silence. He thought about where all lives went and the refuge of religion where flashes of uncertainty filtered through. Haka was already resting from so many battles in the arms of Helen and Buhleve, who caressed him and talked about the beautiful memories that would forever remain in their souls. They all felt a mixture of deep emptiness and immense gratitude for having been companions on the journey of such a wonderful being.

They buried him under Nour's jacaranda, which was already fourteen meters tall, one meter for each year since he was born.

There was a celebration at the mission for Haka's life. People came from all the villages of Sibithanda, which they decided to call "Haka-villages" from then on. Children rescued thanks to Haka came with Nadine from South Africa. Jonay, Aimsa, Nour, John, Umbela, Beatriz, Meimuna, Moyes, Fernando, Saidu, Thanda, Cristina, Ángeles, and Daniela sent words of deep love and admiration. They also received messages of appreciation and gratitude from government officials, now at peace, from Sierra Leone, from Mozambique, from organizations fighting against child trafficking, organ trafficking, diamond trafficking, and financial speculation that Haka had exposed, along with Aimsa, in books that would inspire many more struggles.

Haka had left Buhleve a box with a note: "open it when I am no longer here." A note written in shaky handwriting said the following:

Dear family,

I know that out of your love you would like to keep me here for a long time with this fragile thread of life that remains, but I must go to another dimension. I don't know if it will be as you say Patxi, or with the ancestors NoLwasi, but wherever it is, I will wait for you because my paradise is your love. Take a long time and have many adventures. I will send you messages in dreams and with memories of so much lived, and you will feel my embrace with gentle caresses of the wind.

It has been an honor to live this adventure. I put my heart into every step. I risked my life for every noble reason that crossed my path. And so, I would live all the lives that I had to live or, perhaps, the ones to come.

I love you from the depths of my being, and for that love, I remain in you forever.

Jangoiko naiva du (in Basque: God willing).

Inside there were several packages:

One with a heart-shaped emerald stone for Helen, another with the "I'm looking for this Angel" T-shirt for Buhleve, his compass for Unai, his flashlight for Adam, his canteen for Thandiwe, the keys to the BJ40 for everyone and with a note for Joseph: "make it solar," a seashell from the Basque Country for Nothando, and with a note "for my Anaya" and wrapped in his beret, there was a metal cross with tree shapes. Joseph explained to them that before his last adventure, he melted his Makarov into that symbol for his brother. Patxi gave it to Buhleve to always accompany Hasi, and he put on the beret. He would never take it off again.

A week later, Patxi received a letter with no sender:

In memory of the gudari Unai and his bravery in Euskadi and around the world, and inspired by his nonviolent struggle, we have decided to abandon our armed struggle and pursue our dreams of a free Euskadi without violence. Eskerrikasko, Anaya.

Iñaki, who guided Patxi to the Atzarte gorge forty years ago, oversaw ETA. Haka had sent him a letter through contacts, to talk about the nonviolent struggle and to encourage the strength of freedom to fight, with the strength of revealing the truth, against the networks of evil in the world beyond borders. And so, he left the physical life they knew, a wonderful being who left their hearts imbued with courage to all who knew him.

# The storm of injustice. Llanes, Asturias, Februaryo 2011

Moyes had then finished his studies in economics at the prestigious London School of Economics - LSE. Thanks to Beatriz's salary from New Delhi, he was able to pay his tuition and cost of living in London, the most expensive city in Europe. In that school, on Gower Street, next to the Senate House of the University of London, there were students from over eighty nationalities, the vast majority from affluent families and many from wealthy backgrounds. Some were scholarship recipients from more humble backgrounds, which Moyes quickly identified. He felt more at peace with them. Alongside a boy from Mozambique named Soizinho, a Turk named Ahmed, and a Chinese named Lee, he shared an attic apartment in a white-peeled Victorian house facing the central Quaker house, Friends House, which Aimsa and Jonay recommended he visit. He bought a second-hand bike at the Camden Town market and began exploring that magical melting pot of worlds, one of the most cosmopolitan cities on the planet.

He developed a special bond with Soizinho, his friend from Mozambique. He was tall and strong, though somewhat awkward. He had a somewhat swollen face, with scars from adolescent acne, and large eyes that often looked both amazed and mischievous, subtly provoking his interlocutor. He said that his name, Soizinho, solitary in Portuguese, was his destiny because he couldn't get the company of any woman. He had a deep sense of being discriminated against because of his color and constantly felt attacked.

When Moyes arrived in London, Soizinho had already been living there for a year while attending, through a British Council scholarship, courses at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) helping to translate the Bible into the Shona language. He continued to attend African economic policy courses at the African Center in London, taught by a portly Professor Babu, who had been Tanzania's Minister of Economics for six years and then spent the next six in prison. His political opponents said it was for corruption; he claimed it was due to envy and intrigue among tribal clans.

During that year, Soizinho moved from house to house where people let him sleep on a couch for a couple of weeks because he couldn't find anyone to rent him a room. He showed Moyes his collection of "polite decline" letters. Soizinho had met an economics professor who understood the world differently and had developed a team for analysis and proposals for what they called "development economics." Moyes and Soizinho attended evening courses with the SOAS group to, as they said, cleanse themselves of the "mainstream economics" from the adjacent building of the prestigious LSE. There, economics was only understood through Adam Smith's invisible hand of the market, growth, and the primary goal, individual profit. Personal or corporate success, primarily through compound interest, of which Einstein ironically said it was "the greatest force in the universe."

Moyes had spent four years of intense experiences and reflections between the theories of "assumption of power" and "rebellion against injustice," between LSE and SOAS, separated by just two hundred meters.

That's how he finished his studies in June 2010 and earned his degree in economics. Beatriz was already retired from the European Commission. Her brother Agustín had passed away five years earlier, and shortly after, his widow died. Neither of their two children wanted to live in the family farmhouse, and they were at odds over dividing the inheritance. With savings and a pension from the European Commission, Beatriz bought the old family house and renovated it with plans to create an eco-village with the surrounding farmhouses and an ecumenical reception center for "unbiased love." Beatriz reunited with a childhood friend, Eneko, who lived in a neighboring farmhouse, and they held grief therapy meetings with deep empathy.

As a culmination of his studies, Moyes gave a talk on "the great global casino" for his friends and open to the "development economics" students at SOAS. He invited the universe of people who had been part of his life in London: housemates from Endsleigh Gardens, regulars from the neighborhood to the Quaker sessions at Friends House, friends from an amateur dance group at The Theatre, classmates from evening courses he had taken at the Africa Center, students and professors from LSE and SOAS, and even several vagabonds and buskers - street musicians - with whom he had shared conversations, music in Covent Garden, and even lighthearted talks standing on a soapbox in Speakers' Corner.

Beatriz and Meimuna, Thanda from Navarra, and some friends from the European school in Brussels came. A girl named María came from a town in Asturias called Llanes. Beatriz noticed that she watched him with special tenderness.

Moyes explained with human and endearing details how he had delved into the complex world of the global economy during those years, the dominance of the virtual dollar, unsupported by gold reserves and magically adored by everyone. Interestingly, it was inscribed, quite literally, on the bill of that mythical paper that dominated the world: "In God we trust." In this faith in the dollar, in alliance with the clergy, feudal hierarchies, then nations, and seasoned with military, corporate, and financial dominance, 90% of international transactions rested, representing 60% of global monetary reserves.

The economy then suffered the consequences of what happened at Bretton Woods, just after World War II, with the creation of financial institutions for the reconstruction of a devastated Europe. At that time, the dollar was backed by the gold reserve. In 1971, Nixon broke that relationship between the dollar and gold, and its value was left in the "trust of society" in the American government. It wasn't an anecdotal alliance that such "hypnosis" of "In God we trust" was hand in hand with the American dream disseminated by Hollywood and the military dominance that kept the United States free from wars on its territory, from where the Pentagon and the CIA spread violence worldwide.

Shortly afterward, the oil crisis led, due to speculation in prices by producing countries, to a large accumulation of dollars. Those "petrodollars" were invested in the "development" of the Persian Gulf economies and the indebtedness of Latin American dictatorships. Those military dictatorships had been supported by the Monroe Doctrine that Roosevelt brought, from the sinking of the Maine to a well-organized new imperialism. All this was exalted by the myth that Hollywood sowed in the minds of everyone: the myth of the good American against the evil communist rescuing the poor victim. Most of the dictators and CIA allies on the continent, which confusingly bore the name America with the country that shamelessly dominated it, had graduated from the School of the Americas.

Then came the crisis of the eighties, from which the financial institutions created forty years earlier at Bretton Woods began to dominate the indebted economies of "underdeveloped" countries and impose the rules of the game of "developed" countries. Monetary power was accumulating in few hands, those playing in that global casino of financial speculation and its powerful game of "compound interest," the weapon that Einstein cited.

Moyes began drawing on the old and extensive chalkboard in the conference room a large scheme of world money, its hiding places, its flows, its "derivatives," and that "faith to have faith" that moved a global economy. No one fully understood, but it had a clear effect on the accumulation of a few and the marginalization of the majority, whose lives were at the mercy of those who amassed more and more through speculation.

Marx had lived, a century ago, just a few blocks away in Soho. He wrote Capital three hundred meters from where Moyes spoke now. Moyes used to go to read and make his diagrams at desk 07 in the British Museum library, where Marx thought and jotted down his ideas. Moyes thought that Marx's theories could no longer explain a world where the means of production remained in a few hands, but real power resided in financial capital that dominated everything, and whose tentacles were so widespread that it diluted who and how exercised power and oppression.

He drew on the board a large bag, containing all the money in circulation or bank liabilities (available): about eighty trillion - million millions - similar to the world's gross domestic product. He represented the exchange value between money and goods. Each dollar changed hands, on average, once a year. That's how the economy was measured, with the flow of money, and it was called gross domestic product. That flow was very unequal. Some dollars changed hands a thousand times a year and others, more than half, never. That seemingly "still" money was very powerful. It generated the "cancerous cell" of compound interest.

At the same time, there were about one hundred sixty thousand tons of gold with a selling value of about 50 dollars per gram, that is, a total value of about eight trillion. Between the backed, real value of eight trillion and that of the money in circulation, eighty, there were seventy-two trillion "green papers" with the phrase of Faith and the Masonic sign of the "luminous delta," ninety percent, with a tacit, mythical, arbitrary value, imposed by a few and accepted submissively by the rest.

Just as much of the money was related to a scarce metal to which value was assigned, 90% of the money of "futile value" was assigned "derivatives": agreements for exchanges, for future payments, insurance on said funds, insurance on insurance, and so on, up to more than ten layers of assumptions of rights over that false money, which amounted in total to ten times the value of all the money in the world. Those derivatives changed hands twenty times more than "real" money. They did so at a rate of five trillion per day, one thousand eight hundred trillion per year. That is, only one dollar out of every ten in financial derivatives, which changed hands twenty times a year, was backed by money in circulation. And only ten percent of the money in circulation, which changed hands once a year, was backed by gold, which barely changed hands. Moyes paused and looking at the audience said: "It's a great game of lies that no one seems willing to contradict, and we all keep playing."

He went on to say that the economy was not just money. It served to buy and sell natural or transformed products and services, people's time. A part of the world worked with its sweat, transforming nature into "raw materials" from the surface, food, water, wood; and from its subsurface, fossil fuels - coal, oil, and gas - and minerals. These "raw materials" accounted for one-fifth of the so-called world gross domestic product. Half of it was fossil fuels extracted from the earth's bowels. Twenty million tons of coal, eighty million barrels of oil, and thirty million cubic meters of gas per day, which were burned and were suffocating the world with global warming. One-third was mining, forty million tons of minerals also ripped from the earth every day, half of it in iron. Another fifth were foods, enough for all of humanity, perhaps the clearest example of unjust human distribution: while a third ate in excess, a sixth lived in hunger. Smaller quantities in other direct extractions from nature completed man's destructive relationship with nature, such as wood, deforesting at a rate of twenty-two million hectares per day.

These raw materials were processed in factories resulting in millions of manufactured goods of all kinds of consumer products. Human factories polluted the air, soil, and water with about a hundred and fifty thousand types of toxic substances. They also intoxicated the bodies of men, animals, and plants. Consumption allied with plastics, which wrapped most of the manufactured goods. One million tons of plastic per day were invading the land and sea, where soon there would be more plastic than fish. These manufactures, largely poisoning the planet, were sold for a global value of fifteen trillion dollars.

But the sector that had progressively been dominating the buying and selling were not goods, natural or processed, but services, which already accounted for two-thirds of the global economy. Some services transmitted knowledge for the common good, such as health or education, and were thus recognized by some countries that, like the United Kingdom, with exceptions like the prestigious LSE, from where he had obtained his shiny diploma, defended them with universal coverage paid for with equitable taxes. But very often, the service economy was simply transporting, storing, distributing, redistributing, seducing consumption, and selling unnecessary and inflated goods and services.

Missing from all this was a factor in the equation: the speculations of transactions in financial instruments and derivatives. That evolution of compound interest, as Einstein predicted, had become the most powerful monster that dominated, if not the universe, then the lives of the already seven billion people. The network of derivatives, with the simple objective of changing hands frantically and making profits, generated about a hundred and eighty trillion in profits, three times the gross domestic product of tangible wealth in goods or services.

To summarize, Moyes made a chart with drawings: for a kilo of coffee, ten cents were paid to the sweat of the farmer, forty cents to the factory workers who ground and packaged it, a dollar to those who stored, transported, and sold it in stores or served it in cafes, and up to three dollars for those who "bet" on those profits with rigged cards at the big poker table that the world economy had become. This was also how the economy worked by countries and regions, some with their sweat and hands, others with overalls and machines, others with business with calculators, and others with speculation from intelligent software on computers and carpeted offices, with air conditioning and background music.

From the most rural to the most urban, from the fields of Ethiopia to the towers of Manhattan, from meagerly paid to obscenely paid. Sixty percent of the world's population, about four billion, mostly in southern countries, worked in agriculture in rural areas and received three percent of the gross domestic product for it, that is, a dollar and a half a day. Twenty-five percent, one billion, worked in peri-urban factories with average wages of about twenty dollars a day, up to ten times less in lower-income countries. Fifteen percent, a much higher proportion in high-income countries, were engaged in services and received salaries of about fifty dollars a day, again, huge disparities between countries. And less than one percent of the world's population engaged in speculating with their own and others' capital, earning about forty thousand dollars a day, and increasing their wealth of lands, houses, means of production, and capital, and the media, their chips in the perverse world casino. Extreme differences from one to forty thousand in income and from one to one million in assets. Thus spread the powerful myth of property and money, the human species.

A dissident professor from the LSE named Thomas Piketty attended the talk, and at the end, he approached Moyes and told him that, with another group of equally alarmed people about inequalities, they were considering the idea of the International Institute of Inequalities, to which he invited him to participate with his ideas.

Meimuna and Beatriz went to the hotel Moyes had reserved for them: the legendary Russell Hotel, in the square of the same name, two blocks from SOAS and another two from the British Museum. He had given Meimuna The Conquest of Happiness and Beatriz Why I Am Not a Christian by the philosopher after whom the square was named. Friends said their goodbyes, and about ten meters away stood a shy and aloof young woman, shorter than tall, with curly black hair that tousled on her forehead, round glasses that made her look like a bohemian intellectual, and freckles that seemed to reveal innocence and a thirst for adventure. What shone when she smiled were her eyes, behind the lenses, a honey-green color that seduced and an ineffable tenderness that caressed the soul. At least that's how Moyes saw her. He had met her in the courses at the African center. Her name was María.

María was born in Llanes, Asturias, a town that was once inhabited by fishermen and was now predominantly devoted to tourism. It was a clear example of the economy he described, transitioning from rural to urban, from food to "services," from the sea to hotels and restaurants for tourists. Every summer, people from Oviedo, Madrid, and increasingly from outside Spain, flocked to the town in search of its mythical and marvelous thirty beaches, some of which were still almost untouched. She studied teaching in Oviedo, and shortly after graduating, she went as a teacher with a modest salary from Spanish cooperation to support literacy tasks carried out by the Federation of Religious Teaching (FERE) in Bata, Equatorial Guinea. She witnessed firsthand the corrupt dictatorship of Obiang and its alliance with the United States through Exxon's oil exploitations. She wanted to better understand those perverse networks of enrichment for a few and destruction of nature. With the money she saved as a cooperant, she supported her parents, who could barely afford to pay the mortgage. She traveled to London to attend the African Economic Policy course at the African Center, known as the "capital of Africa" in Europe.

After meeting in that course taught by Professor Baba, Moyes, captivated by her mysterious and warm gaze, invited her for a walk in Covent Garden and escorted her home, which she shared with a German student in Camden. They grew closer and confessed their stories, desires, and fears. In the fall of 2009, they traveled on a cheap Ryanair flight to Santander and from there to Llanes by narrow-gauge railway. Moyes felt a similar fascination for María's sweetness as he did for the landscape of Asturias. He met her family. Her father, and at least three generations before him, had been fishermen. Her mother took care of the family, and when fishing began to decline, she cleaned houses for bourgeois summer vacationers from Oviedo and Madrid. They lived with the grandmother, her parents, and two younger brothers in a humble sixty-square-meter apartment in front of the fishing district of La Moría, which they paid, or rather attempted to pay, under a thirty-year mortgage through a loan from Banco Santander.

After his graduation and lecture in London, Moyes moved to Spain. He first went to the Beloki farmhouse in Navarre, where Meimuna and Beatriz were already settling in. A week later, he continued to Llanes, where María had returned with her family. He wanted to walk there, following the Camino de Santiago. He stopped at Romanesque hermitages to meditate on the world and his future. When he arrived in Llanes, he had an emotional reunion with María.

Moyes and María walked along the coast to María's favorite beach, Torimbia. The day was wrapped in a serene fog, as if it had been brought from London. After crossing the town of Niembro, they followed the path westward and climbed a steep walkway. When they reached the top, María asked Moyes to close his eyes and guided him to a high point overlooking the beach. She told him to open his eyes. Moyes was mesmerized by the beauty before him: towards the horizon, there was a pristine and lush hillside covered with ferns, and at their feet, the white and clean sand of a shell-shaped beach that disappeared into the mist and blurred its end. Despite the fog and the cold, both outside and inside the ocean, Moyes and María undressed and entered the sea. They spent the day embracing, discovering each other's bodies, and merging as if eternity had found a moment when nothing else mattered.

They decided to walk together from Llanes to Santiago de Compostela and seek spiritual and natural inspiration for their union and their future. Upon their return to Llanes, María asked Moyes to talk on the Paseo de San Pedro, a beautiful walk of meadows and heather on rocks against which the Cantabrian Sea crashed fiercely.

* Moyes, I have to tell you a deep concern: my family's income has been decreasing due to cuts in fishing quotas for Spain and the depletion of fishing banks. The Santa Ana fishermen's guild, to which several generations of my family have belonged, has been disappearing. Only a few boats remain as ornaments for tourists, and the feast of Our Lady of Carmen on July sixteenth, patroness of sailors.
* Do you think Zapatero's government is turning its back on the people?
* Well, he actually won the elections after Aznar's alliance with the big lie of Bush in Iraq and its aftermath in the Atocha bombings. He started with the dignity of withdrawing troops from Iraq and expanded social services for dependent people.
* Yes. He also legalized marriages between homosexuals, and my mother and Beatriz were able to get married. Besides, we know from Haka, who has already left us, that he was instrumental in ending ETA, finally last September.
* But Moyes, since the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008, the economic crisis in Spain has brought the government to its knees in front of the banks.
* That's right, María. The banks, which had speculated with mortgages, the real estate bubble, and financial derivatives, began to see phantom money disappear, and with it their big businesses. Unemployment and a decrease in exports led the government to a public deficit and commercial debt. The European Union, more concerned about its finances and trade than its people, pressured, especially from the economic and financial power of Frankfurt, Spain and the countries that began to be called "PIGS" (Portugal, Italy, Greece, and Spain), to adjust their spending and reduce their deficit and debt, so as not to affect the value of the Euro. Then the "rating agencies" Fitch, Standard and Poor's, and Moody's began to take center stage, the same ones responsible for the financial collapse that led to the global economic crisis, and that rated public debts and therefore debt interests. People are more focused on the risk premium than on the weatherman!
* Why have the banks been allowed to suffocate our lives?
* You're right. They rule through the global financial web. An increasingly larger part of the budget that countries collect in taxes from their citizens is allocated to paying off debt interest. Under European and international pressures for "macroeconomic stability", in this big fictitious casino, millions of honest workers, with reduced incomes or salaries or unemployed, with more flexible layoffs and reduced pensions, cannot meet their debts and mortgages.
* It's just as you say, Moyes. It's leading to thousands of personal and family dramas. My father has received an ultimatum from the bank, that if he doesn't pay the mortgage arrears, they'll proceed with eviction.
* It's horrible, María. Something must be done against this injustice. The same banks that granted toxic mortgages and increased demand and thus the prices and profits of builders and speculators, their great friends, and of the government, have begun to evict families like yours who can no longer afford it. Furthermore, the remaining payment of the mortgages is much higher than the market value of the houses after the real estate bubble burst.
* My parents still owe nearly two hundred thousand euros, and the current sale value of the house is only a hundred and thirty thousand. Even if they sold it and ended up with nothing, they would still have to pay the bank for the rest of their lives, most of their pension.
* The economic crisis has crushed all timid social principles. The government is "rescuing" speculative banks with sixty billion euros so they can continue their speculative game, which includes loans to the government itself and the purchase of treasury bonds. It's sad to see indebted families like yours, María, "paying a fictitious debt, for a fictitious value to banks that the government rescues with their taxes so they can evict them from their homes.
* And what can we do, Moyes?
* I feel a deep connection to you, María, for the first time in my life. And I want us to be strong and united in this fight. Let's resist the abusive threat of eviction from your home.

That week they traveled by bus to Madrid and joined the demonstrations that led to the general strike in Spain against labor and pension reforms. There they stayed with Pascual, whom Thanda put them in touch with, at the Santa María de la Paz hostel. They carried a banner that said, "It's indecent. Houses without people. People without houses," as the beautiful song by the Catalan singer Isabel Pérez Cruz said, which they liked to hear.

With young people they met during the demonstrations, they created a page on Facebook, "I am a Spanish youth who wants to fight for their Future," which later gave rise to the blog and movement "Youth in Action." They met Ada Colau, a Catalan woman who couldn't finish her Philosophy degree due to economic hardships in her family and who strongly led the "Platform of Mortgage Victims," founded in Barcelona.

Moyes and María, collaborating and living together at the Santa María de la Paz hostel, dedicated themselves to launching the "Stop Evictions" platform. With the help of lawyers who volunteered to collaborate, community mobilizations, and demonstrations in front of the homes of politicians and bankers, they managed to stop the eviction of María's parents. In the following year, they would help stop two thousand more evictions, traveling throughout the country. They mobilized neighbors, chained themselves to walls and doors, prepared legal resources, tried to talk to bankers, and if everything was impossible, raised funds for rent in other apartments. They began to receive inheritances of flats and donations from all over Spain for this purpose.

Moyes and María were very united in fighting against injustice. They read the book "Indignez-vous!" by the French writer and diplomat Stéphane Hessel, one of the drafters of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, which called for an uprising "against indifference and in favor of peaceful insurrection." As he rightly said: "Nazism was defeated, thanks to the sacrifice of our brothers and sisters of the Resistance and to the United Nations against fascist barbarism. But this threat has not disappeared, and our anger against injustice remains intact.

Moyes was sharing these feelings with Thanda, who posted a video on the web at 10 a.m. on October 10, 2010, calling for a revolution of sharing, banishing the absurdity of competition and blind consumption.

The threat to justice no longer wore military uniforms; instead, it was financial speculators whom almost no one knew. They didn't shoot rifles but rather public and private indebtedness, toxic and alienating consumption, savings linked to natural and social destruction, and evictions of homes for the humblest. Hassel called for peaceful insurrection against mass media that encouraged mass consumption, disdain for the weakest, and excessive competition of everyone against everyone.

They celebrated Christmas in the humble home of Maria's family in the fishing village of Llanes, where they no longer fished. Maria's father had prepared his small boat and went out into the rough Cantabrian Sea to bring them a monkfish that her mother cooked with a delicious sauce of parsley, onions, and lemon. Moyes, who didn't eat "anything that smiled," reluctantly broke his radical principles, surrendering to the stew of such epic catch and such love in the kitchen. They celebrated as a family that they still maintained their home, which Moyes and Maria would help sustain with the new mortgage plan agreed upon with the bank. From the Asturian viewpoint of old wood weathered by the sea salt, they watched a majestic storm break over the tip of Bruño, which, strong like the united family, resisted the fierce onslaught of the sea.

A few days after Christmas, on January 4, 2011, a young Tunisian, Mohamed Bouazizi, due to his economic plight, set himself on fire. This triggered a strong wave of demonstrations in Tunisia that eventually led to the overthrow of the government and spread to other countries in what became known as the Arab Spring.

Injustice permeated all aspects of society, but the youth of the world were *beginning to rise, undaunted*.

# “Dogflutes” by the Sun’s Door. Madrid, May 2011

Patxi and Nolwasi continued their mission in Ukuzwana. Since the departure, kashana-kakhulu (very far) from Haka, Patxi no longer spoke Basque with anyone. He felt a deeper nostalgia for his roots and the company of his brother. His beloved and brave Anaya. He always wore his txapela -basque beret-, and his last words at night were in front of Nour's jacaranda tree, where his physical essence nourished every leaf and every flower: "*Until we meet again*," Jangoiko Naivadu (God willing).

Unai was already thirteen years old and remained enthusiastic about his climbs and adventures, now also with the solar inyoni-enkulu, which he had learned to pilot skillfully. Buhleve and Elias had moved to Santa Clara in Cuba, where they both worked as doctors and watched Hasi grow. Thandiwe had already taken charge of the hospital in Ukuzwana. She was assisted by Marco, a volunteer doctor from an Italian NGO linked to the migrant struggle in Trastevere. "There must be some 'virus' in Ukuzwana," Patxi joked, as it seemed that as it happened with Jonay and Aimsa, and with Buhleve and Elias, something seemed to ignite between Thandiwe and Marco.

After Haka's transition, as he liked to say, and the family's connection with him even more conscious with the mushrooms, Adam had delved deeper into the knowledge of the plants of Bulililamangwe. Aboard the solar inyoni-enkulu, he traveled throughout the district, making maps, taking notes, and drawing hundreds of types of plants and their effects in a notebook. NoLwasi shared with him the knowledge of the connections of plants with ancestors and with the energies that blocked and manifested in diseases, as Thanda also thought. His eagerness to learn more and more about plants was passionate. Patxi and Lolwasi thought he could advance in that vocation if he studied biology at some university. They asked the "family-around-the-world," and it was Moyes, his cousin, now settled in Madrid with María, where they fought against evictions and other injustices, who encouraged him the most to consider studying in Madrid. He could also live with them in the house that Thanda offered them in the mountains of Robledo, an hour from Madrid. Beatriz offered to support with the trip and tuition expenses for her nephew. One night, Patxi and NoLwasi stayed talking with Adam after dinner.

* Son, we love to see you passionate about plants and their effects on people's bodies and souls. You made us feel a magical reality united with Haka in his last adventure in this dimension."

Said Patxi.

* That's right, son.

Continued NoLwasi.

* You have a special gift in that connection. At first, I thought it was the knowledge I inherited from my grandmother Masora. I was excited that you could continue my dedication to health here in Bulililamangwe. To continue the deep connection with our ancestors and spirits. But I think your world is broader. It also has Basque roots, which you should explore. That's why we thought maybe you'd like to travel to Spain and study biology and world botany at the university there. What do you think?

At that moment Unai was silently spying behind the porch door. In the dim light outside the pale kerosene lamp. His eyes filled with tears because his love for his brother was very deep. He felt he could go far away. But his tears came from eyes also arched towards the sky for the joy of his brother's flight beyond the leaps with his inyoni enkulu.

Adam responded excitedly.

* Thank you, baba, mama wami (my father, mother). I am very happy that you feel my passion and happiness in the connection with the magical world of plants. I know they can help change Humanity and make it more sensitive to the beauty and knowledge of nature.
* That's right, son. You are called to a noble mission through a profound knowledge, ukulwasi (soul knowledge). That's why your mother and I thought about offering you to go to Spain to study biology and world botany. There you will also get to know your Basque roots and another world so that your knowledge can be nourished by other lights and voices and illuminate other homes and paths.

Adam felt a tightness in his chest upon hearing those words. He also saw his younger brother at that moment and guessed his eyes were filled with tears of love.

* Thank you from the bottom of my heart, dad, mom. But I am from here and I don't want to be separated from you or my brother. Nor from Thandiwe, Nothando, or Joseph. You are my family. Without you, I am lost.

Patxi and NoLwasi were moved to hear so much love and intertwined their hands. Paxti said:

* Your feeling is noble, son, but think about it well. When you fly in inyoni-enkulu, your soul sees the world from above, and then you return to the earth understanding it better. So, you can think of your flight to Spain, to the world of universities with people from many different places learning from many diverse ideas. It's just a flight, son, your home is always here. Jonay, Aimsa, and Nour flew; Thanda and his family; and Buhleve, Elias, and Hasi. And we remain deeply united.

At that moment Adam thought of Haka. He had also flown, but much further. And on each adventure, everyone felt with him, and upon his return, the world was larger, more magical, and full of hope. And he remembered his last message: "Hamba kashana, umntwana wami" (*walk far, my son*).

Unai entered the porch and hugged his brother and said:

* My brother, go far away. You have many adventures to discover. Come back later and tell us. I will grow up to wait for you, looking from the kopjes. And if you take too long, I'll come looking for you in inyoni-enkulu.

The next morning, while sharing their breakfast of sour-milk and honey from the mission, Adam told them he had decided to leave. He did so with the wrench of physically moving away but not in his heart. With gratitude for their lifelong support. He would take the "inyoni-enkulu-enkulu" (very big bird) to explore more worlds. He left hoping to feel very close in the distance. He would be waiting for reunions. His commitment was to make the most of each day's adventure of learning and doing good to others and to nature.

Patxi and NoLwasi gave him the greatest treasure, cared for, and kept since his birth eighteen and a half years ago: the diary of his life since NoLwasi revealed his arrival to Patxi in the Black Eagle Lodge. Patxi had been writing it with deep love and detail, explaining what was happening around him at that time that we do not remember. He told him on each page how they felt him inside NoLwasi's womb and hundreds of tender details as he learned to walk and talk. Adam looked at it fascinated: covered with a brown cloth, his "*beginning diary*" had stories of his history, his life, his ancestors, a little bag with his first haircut, the celebrations at the mission when he was born, and his parents' reflections on the magical adventure of living. He couldn't think of anything more valuable.

So, Adam traveled to Madrid in May 2011. He felt a mixture of disguised fear and fascinated awe as he boarded the plane that would take him to Madrid via London. He was welcomed at the airport by Moyes and María. He arrived with just a simple backpack, his childhood diary, some clothes, a cotton sweater knitted by his mother, Haka's flashlight, his notebook of Bulililamangwe plant notes and drawings, and some very special farewell gifts: his father gave him a hemp pendant with a small wooden cross on which he had written in small letters "lihambe kuhle" (*walk in peace*), his mother gave him her divination bones, and Unai gave him a small rock from "his" kopjes on which he wrote "nigyakuthanda ubudi wami" (I love you, my brother).

Adam was already eighteen years old, a tall and athletic mixed-race young man, with curly dark brown hair, a rounded and smooth forehead over two slightly bushy eyebrows that protected a gaze of ineffable tenderness. Adam always looked at the world with fascination and at people with affection. Below his left eye, he had a scar from when he was barely a year old and, walking on his uncle Haka's shoulders, he scratched himself with the thorn of an acacia. Fortune or destiny made it so that, instead of losing his sight, his warm smile was highlighted by that slight scar that he proudly displayed and reminded him of his brave uncle. The nose was between Basque and Zulu, strong lips towards a firm chin and a cleft chin.

Moyes had only briefly met him at Jonay's farewell when he traveled to Ukuzwana with Beatriz and Meimuna. He was very happy to have a piece of Ukuzwana in Madrid, another European city crazed by cars, haste, competitions, and consumption, but with souls awakening to that madness and clamoring for new and clean horizons.

They took the metro, another reason for wonder for Adam, traveling kilometers underground to Chamartin train station where they continued their journey to Robledo de Chavela. During the journey, Adam was amazed at how the El Prado prairies, once owned by dictator Franco, dry from severe heat and drought, resembled his fields of Bulililamangwe. The thorny acacias there were holm oaks, and the impalas were deer. He identified several similar plants and many other unknown ones that he looked at excitedly and seemed to welcome him.

They arrived at the small, abandoned station of Robledo and walked down the slopes to Thanda's house, "Casa Garay." An entrance with a metal gate led to a walkway of lilac trees, dried out by the August heat, from which he saw on his right a small plot of land, the hut of what looked like a well, and a few pine trees, like the ones in Brunapeg that provided shade and nests for weaver birds. A tall tree that he recognized from his readings of the books in the Bulawayo library as a cedar of Lebanon, cast shade over a white stone and lime house, Arab tiles, and green-painted metal shutters. About twenty meters away was another smaller house.

They entered the house with four small rooms, one of them occupied by Moyes and María, and they gave him a choice between the rest. Adam chose the smallest one at the back where there was a bed, an old wardrobe with a figure of a worried clown, and a chair. Through the window, he could see the garden and the well hut. He took a cold shower while María and Moyes prepared a potato omelet for him, which he tried for the first time, and cut a watermelon, very similar to those in Matabeleland. Moyes gave him, on behalf of Beatriz, his aunt, a laptop, and a mobile phone, almost indispensable now to live in the world he had arrived in and useful to stay in touch with his home and roots in Ukuzwana. They had a welcome chat while dining at a table and two stone benches, in the light of a lantern from a back alley.

He arranged his room and his few belongings. In the drawer of a small table next to the bed, he reverently placed his childhood diary, Haka's flashlight, the "nature notes" book, his brother's stone, his father's cross, and his mother's divination bones. On the bedside table, he placed a photo of the large family from Ukuzwana. He meditated that night giving thanks for life.

During the first week, Adam looked for some work around the train station neigborhood, where there were about two hundred houses, half of which were only inhabited during weekends and holidays by families who lived and worked the rest of the time in Madrid. He found three houses where he could take care of the gardens one day a week and thus earn some money for his expenses.

He began the tedious process of residency and enrollment at the Autonomous University of Madrid. He took the train to Madrid and during the one-hour journey, he made notes about the world of plants, from which he never ceased to discover magical secrets every day. During the first week, he registered for the entrance exams for foreign students for the biology degree at the Cantoblanco campus of the Autonomous University of Madrid. Ángeles, from Brussels, sent him the syllabi by email, which she was also studying to complete her "international baccalaureate" and join the same university in architecture studies.

He made a work and study plan. He combined days taking care of the garden of the house and the others in the neighborhood he attended and studying history and literature from the perspective of Spain and Europe, Newtonian physics, theoretical mathematics, and his passion, biology. He also made a daily schedule from sunrise to sunset, which included, in addition to tasks and studies, connections with his parents and siblings in Zimbabwe every day and once a week with Nour and his parents in White Lake.

Moyes developed a very special friendship and complicity with Adam. The tone of his skin, the heroism of his mothers, being between two worlds, and natural and social sensitivity, made them connect with great empathy. Adam began to feel in those first weeks like in a new home and a new family.

A week later, Thanda arrived from Brussels. They went to meet him at the train station. Upon arrival, Thanda hugged those three brave young people who now occupied the house that he could not turn into a home as he would have liked. They had dinner together at the stone table. Moyes and María told him about their struggles against evictions and economic injustice in Spain. Adam talked about his fascination with the harmony keys and revealing experiences of plants. Thanda told them how, after fighting for a fair global health policy, he had been marginalized in the European Commission. He managed to obtain a position as a visiting professor at Berkeley, where he would go in a few months. Moyes and María went to bed, and Adam stayed up talking with Thanda.

* What a joy to have you in this house, Adam.
* Thank you for welcoming me, Thanda. Tell me, how did you get here?
* I'll tell you: I think it comes from my roots: my maternal grandmother, Amama in Basque, came from a beautiful farmhouse in the Basque town of Garai. She was also my godmother. She was a courageous mother who, despite living in waiting for a migrant husband and later a anarchist partner, took care of her daughters with enormous effort, giving them, scrubbing and sewing, the noblest values and the best education opportunities. Since I could drive, I took her to the farmhouse every summer; she told me about her epic life, and among the green mountains and the orchards on the slopes, I felt my roots. But my parents "gave birth to me" in Madrid, where I grew up and studied. In the city, I met the mother of my daughters and began to work. It was through Jonay, a study companion in medicine in the Canary Islands, that I learned about Ukuzwana. Although I was only there for two years, that time changed my life. I exchanged consumption for simplicity, ownership for sharing, career for commitment to justice, and urban and technological for rural and natural. "De-urbanizing" is a slow process. Upon my return from Ukuzwana, I faced the most painful tear of my life: the separation, due to rejection, from the mother of my daughters. I sought a place to offer my daughters a simpler and more natural home than the artificial sophistication of the city. I began to encourage the cooperative association, to meet and help homeless people, and to ally with brave and simple firefighters who risked their lives without hesitation every day for others. I needed to have my place with open doors and heart. Through an ad in the hospital where I did shifts, I found this place, which was abandoned by a family in dispute over their inheritance. I see that you have taken the nice and small room in the back. Did you see the worried clown looking obliquely at the sky?
* Yes. And I suspect it has a story. Tell me.
* Well, it was because of that clown that we are here. When I saw these houses, then with their collapsed roofs, surrounded by wild vegetation, the bramble covering the entire lower part, hundreds of shoots of tree of heaven and elms, the almond trees in bloom, and the leafy lilac walkway, I doubted the effort it would take to rebuild them. I entered the small house and saw that a beam of hazy light through the dust of the collapsed roof, illuminated like a spotlight on a stage, the clown that is now in your room. As you can see, he is looking scared upwards and with one hand on his head, protecting himself from something that seems to be falling on him. When I saw him, that's how I felt: the world of the home that I always wanted to take care of for my daughters was falling apart, and with it the confidence in the values of fidelity and generosity that my parents taught me. I felt that this was the place to open my afflicted heart. My father, newly retired, helped me buy it, and the little house next door belongs to them. I started to rebuild it, to repair the roofs, to clear the bramble, to plow the orchard, to put electricity and stoves, to whitewash its walls, and to paint it inside with shades of natural dyes.
* What a beautiful story, Thanda. And why didn't you stay here?
* I did for a while, Adam. I combined taking care of my daughters in the times when the cold and cruel law outcasts us separated fathers, in my case rather repudiated. I worked in several hospitals, supported a missionary organization, a homeless shelter, encouraged the health volunteer association, and even studied for firefighter, doctor in the Canary Islands, and European Union official exams. They were turbulent and lonely years, so I couldn't give this house the warmth, color, and flavor of the home I dreamed of. That's why having you all here warms my heart, Adam. I feel you as a son.
* And I feel you as my father in this world far from ekhaya (home). I'm going to take care of it with all my affection, Thanda. How are Ángeles and Daniela? We remember them fondly in Ukuzwana.
* And they remember you, Adam. They have come with me from Brussels, but these days they have stayed with their mother. On Sunday, they will come with my parents to see you. You can't imagine how excited they are to see you. The divorce was hard for them. Seeing their parents suffering and making each other suffer. I suppose they were torn between my illusion of keeping the family together and their mother's determination to start a new family life. Now she lives with another man she met while I stayed a while longer in Ukuzwana.
* Yes, Thanda, I remember how hard it was for you to see them return to Madrid.
* That's right, Adam. I don't want to pass judgment on who is right and who is wrong, or on who is the executioner and who is the victim. Love sometimes fades away, and there is no strength that can put it back together. I can say that it seems unfair to me that if someone can no longer love, they try to keep the other away from their children and ask for their effort for their life away from him or her. That takes a lot of courage. But everything passes, Adam. Nine years have passed since that tear. Ángeles and Daniela have shared their lives with their mother and me, between Madrid and Brussels, where they are now. They are beings full of hope and gratitude for life. They love their mother as much as they love me. Even from the darkest shadows, life brings us back to the light of hope.
* How happy I am to hear you, Thanda, facing new horizons in an unknown place. I feel the same, far from home and family, but open to whatever life wants to show me here. And tell me, what will Ángeles and Daniela do?
* Well, Daniela will continue her secondary studies at the school she attended before coming for the last two years to Brussels, near the apartment where she will live again with her mother and her husband. Ángeles is finishing her international baccalaureate and exams to try to come to the Autonomous University of Madrid, like you, to study architecture. She is very excited to see you again, Adam.

Adam remembered with great tenderness the walks with Ángeles along the paths and kraals near the mission, with the then young Unai and Daniela.

* I will also be very happy to see her again. She has already sent me study materials for my university entrance exams. I'm sure we can share many adventures again, ten years later.

Thanda felt a special affection for Adam. He already felt it at the mission. He was a being of goodness and light. His expression, especially his gaze, bathed everything in soft tenderness and generous kindness. He felt, in an unconfessable way, that in him beat the son he never had, and that he would be very important in his life. Knowing him, with Moyes and María, living in the house where he dreamed of his home, was a magical wink from destiny.

The next day, Thanda's parents and sisters came, and they all ate together some delicious potato omelets and croquettes that his mother had prepared. They were already eighty years old and filled with sweetness. They seemed very close. Adam felt a special bond with them. He never knew his grandparents and felt that the void in his soul awaited a light that seemed, unconfessably, to see in them. Enrique, with his silver hair resisting the advance of a furrowed forehead surely marked by many ideas and dreams, had a gaze that exuded a magical mixture of appreciation and respect, a brief and gentle nose leading to thin and brief lips, as if all of it were a tribute to humility. Adam gradually discovered from his first contact with him an intelligence as astonishing as it was humble. Carmen had the vigor and courage that Thanda had told Adam about his Amama, a sweet and tender expression, and an autumnal beauty that time was unable to cloud. Lourdes, Thanda's sister, was a woman who breathed love and joy for life. She lived alone with her daughter Celeste, a lovely girl who enjoyed playing the violin and dancing. Carmen, the youngest daughter they called Chiqui, was tall and very beautiful, with a deep artistic sensitivity inherited from her father, and a dedication, with her English husband Mark, to the care of three little ones who ran through the countryside eager for adventures.

Ángeles and Daniela arrived shortly afterward. Their mother and her husband brought them by car while they went to have lunch at the neighboring and monumental monastery of El Escorial, once the center of the Spanish Empire that subjugated half the world with the sword and the cross. The reunion was very emotional. They ran the entire lilac walkway until they embraced Adam with deep affection. Cristina also approached, while her husband discreetly waited outside. She greeted Adam warmly.

It had been many years since Thanda had come face to face with Cristina. The tearing of his heart, the judgments, the financial demands, and the distance from his daughters, sometimes imposed and cruel, had caused Thanda to avoid any possible encounter, even when Cristina went to see her daughters in Brussels during the last two years.

Ángeles and Daniela watched with a mixture of emotion and fear as their parents, separated for so many years by pain, greeted each other cordially. Finally at peace. Cristina seemed to act very naturally and gave a box of chocolates to Thanda's parents, who courteously thanked her. Thanda, feeling his legs trembling as if a decade of pain were concentrated in a few seconds, offered her a wordless hug.

Ángeles and Daniela embraced that hug. It was a fleeting moment, as sometimes the most magical strokes of life are, but its effect was healing on those four beings united, each in their different destinies, by life.

Ángeles and Adam felt a very special connection that afternoon. They talked about their lives since they said goodbye the last time at the age of eight in Ukuzwana. They shared a past of tenderness and a future discovering knowledge at the same university and perhaps new horizons and life adventures.

Cristina picked up her daughters at dusk. Ángeles and Daniela asked Moyes, María, and Adam if they could come to stay in Robledo with their mare Spirit, the dog Homeless, their kitten Satia, and the bunny Chaplin because it would be difficult for them to take care of them in their mother's apartment, or for Thanda to take them to Berkeley. The three of them responded with an enthusiastic yes. Thanda felt that, by strange twists of fate, that dream house of his was finally starting to have the warmth and color of a home.

In the early morning, Thanda would take the train to the airport to return to Brussels and prepare for his departure to Berkeley. Sitting at the stone table of "Casa Garay," Moyes explained his concern about the injustice of the global economy.

For Adam, used to surviving in the dry savannah of Bulililamangwe and barely seeing a few donkey carts and the mission store with no more than a dozen cleaning items or legumes and grains, it was difficult to understand the concept of "crisis." He was surrounded in Madrid by roads full of cars, train tracks, subways, and all kinds of transportation and shops, even in the village supermarket, with thousands of different products. Of course, it all depended on having money, but he, without recognized qualifications in Spain and speaking very limited Spanish, already had some odd jobs and a plan to help his parents.

* But you have all kinds of foods, tools, transportation, and communications. Why are people so sullen?

At that moment, María intervened:

* We have everything if you can buy it, Adam. Without money, there is nothing; hardly anyone cultivates, and hardly anyone manufactures their furniture, instruments, or machines. And money is controlled by the banks.
* And why do people trust them?
* Well, because to pay for some things like a car or especially a house, like my parents', you must borrow from them and pay them back little by little.
* Too bad, it would be better to borrow that money from family or friends, don't you think?

Thanda then intervened:

* Yes, and above all, to share. People live in their apartments, with their families, and competing so that each one has their own.
* Yes... Hopefully it will change like what John and Umbela are doing in Eila.
* Yes, that's the hope. The utopia of sharing.
* And meanwhile, what happened with the banks here?

María explained, with the pain of her parents' history:

* Well, since the banks were left without the savings of honest citizens, unemployed or with precarious jobs and low wages, because they had been playing speculative games with them, most countries took funds from the taxes of those deceived citizens to save the banks' accounts and allow them to keep functioning. It was called 'the bank bailout.'
* Can people stop paying their taxes to the government to avoid contributing to that robbery?

At that moment, Thanda intervened again, fascinated by listening to those pure and brave souls talk about justice.

* It's difficult, Adam; they are already included in the salaries you receive or in the prices of what you buy. Besides, when you don't live sharing in community, like in the eco-villages, the fair system of distribution so that some don't have too much and others too little is through taxes. That said, in equity, redistributing wealth. Now the richest hardly pay taxes, and the poorest have nothing to survive on. Within countries and between countries. Look at the contrast between Madrid and Matabeleland. Moyes added:
* We believe that justice will only be possible through a strong citizen movement that forces the government to change the laws.
* And how can we make that movement gain strength? This is as unfair as racism in South Africa.
* Well, here there's something like an economic apartheid. Some hoard wealth while others live in debt. Tell me, Adam, have you heard of Iceland?
* I know where it is, but I barely know anything about its history.
* Well, it's a very northern island, between Europe and America, and between its capitalist-industrial models and survival in the North Pole and fascination with its magical nature.

Thanda added:

* That magical nature of glaciers and volcanoes already sparked the imagination of Jules Verne in "Journey to the Center of the Earth." Have you read it?
* No, I would love to, and other novels that could help me understand this world, new to me.
* Of course, I'll get it for you, and it will be my welcome gift.
* And what happened in Iceland?

Moyes continued:

* Well, there a citizen assembly movement was formed that opposed the use of their taxes to pay off government and bank debts. They started holding bankers and politicians accountable. A constituent process started from the grassroots.
* And here in Spain, have people also united in struggle?
* Yes. The brave example in Iceland has inspired consciences in Spain, unions, and thousands of civil associations fighting against injustice. A general strike was called against labor and pension reforms about a year ago, which María and I attended from her parents' house in Llanes, Asturias, under threat of eviction.
* In summary – said Adam – money is being taken from the humble and given to rich bankers.

Thanda reflected:

* That's how clear it is, Adam. I'm studying how this injustice takes years off people's lives. I've managed to propose it in a European policy. Now I'm going to study it in more detail at Berkeley and even propose changes within the United States, the epicenter of that unfair way of living on one's knees before the market, competition, and inequalities.

Adam concluded this heartfelt conversation in the light of the yellow lantern at the stone table:

* As the Zulus and Ndebeles say in their struggles for justice and against racism: "Amandla!" (power).
* "Awethu!" (with us).

Thanda responded with a raised fist.

During the week, as Adam began his tasks and studies, Moyes mentioned the following to Adam:

* María and I are very involved with the platform against evictions and the calls of the outraged citizens in the neighborhoods and in Puerta del Sol (Sun’s door) in Madrid. Right-wing parties and friends of the banks call us “perroflautas” ("hippie losers”) because there are many groups that live alternatively, with few possessions, with music, and love for animals. They also sometimes call those who promote eco-villages, like in Eila, that. A couple of months ago, the internet groups calling for mobilizations started joining together in the Real Democracy Now platform, where we can send political proposals for Spain. A large demonstration has been called for next week, on May 15th. Do you want to come?

Moyes gave Adam a copy of the book "Time for Outrage!" by the old French fighter and official Stéphane Hessel, in which he called for uprising against indifference and in favor of peaceful insurrection.

May 15th arrived, just ten days since Adam's arrival in that world that never ceased to amaze him, and he went with Moyes and María by train to Atocha. There they met Pascual, Thanda's friend, and other companions from Santa María de La Paz, shunned by the money-driven society.

Adam had never seen such a crowd. Puerta del Sol and the streets leading to it were filled with people protesting the growing inequality and injustice of the system and its rulers. After multiple speeches and testimonies of injustices, "the sun was setting on Puerta del Sol," and a hundred people set up tents. Pascual decided to stay; he was familiar with nights on the streets. Adam returned with Moyes and María to Robledo on the last train of the night.

They heard on the radio that the police forcibly evicted the Sol encampment, and there were about twenty arrests, including Pascual. Another demonstration was called two days later, and this time, many more people set up tents. The government decided to allow it. In response, hundreds of encampments sprang up in the squares of most Spanish cities and spread throughout the world. It seemed that there would be a change, and it could be reflected in the elections on May 22nd, where, amid distrust of the ruling socialist party, the right-wing, bank-friendly party won, especially in Madrid. Adam couldn't understand how so many people standing up in the streets for such a clear reason as more social justice didn't reflect in the polls. Something strange was happening with the so-called "democracy."

Faced with a government deaf to the voices of the outraged, and the Sol encampment evicted, the struggle shifted to popular assemblies in the neighborhoods and towns of Spain. Moyes and María called for an assembly in Robledo, but barely twenty people attended. Moyes went the next day as a spokesperson for the Robledo assembly to what was called the People's Assembly of Madrid.

With Moyes and María involved in social struggle and Thanda and his daughters back in Brussels, Adam focused on studying for university entrance exams and caring for the plants, finding the serenity and harmony that seemed lost in that society gone mad with "progress."

#  Amidst the untamed beauty. White Lake, July 2011

Aimsa was on the porch of the White Lake house, now part of the eco-village of "Serenity Lake." She felt as if *some of her warrior soul had been left behind, numb, sad, in transition*, with Haka's departure. But at the same time, she knew well that her legacy was the courage and strength to continue fighting against webs of pain.

Furthermore, since the founding of the laurisilva eco-island, the network of spiritual eco-villages had the new aspiration of transitioning from isolated eco-villages, albeit interconnected and collaborating with the states where they were located, to converging into eco-regions. The proposal for areas free of weapons, emissions, plastics, toxins, and ownership of land, water, and animals and their cruel sacrifice grew stronger.

Aimsa continued to follow in detail the webs of genetic manipulation of seeds, food, and people. She also kept track of debates and advancements against emissions and climate change.

In the fight against transgenics, which was almost equivalent to the fight against Monsanto, the identification of cases of non-Hodgkin lymphoma and its possible relationship with glyphosate had been extended from Zimbabwe to the United States. Such cruel merchandise remained intact due to economic pressures in collusion with political corruption. Alongside this poison, the use of seven hundred fifty different products was allowed, which were sold with impunity in the country and infiltrated the waters, food, and bodies of people.

Aimsa remained in heartfelt and conspiratorial contact with Nayra, who, after her commitment to Zapatismo, alternated her time between her children and work at the University of Berkeley with noble peasant projects and struggles in Mexico. Nayra had learned of Haka's brave fight against Monsanto and alerted Aimsa to what was happening in her beloved Mexico. In contact with the rebel bishop Raúl Vera, they learned of reports from the National Commission for the Knowledge and Use of Biodiversity; the National Institute of Ecology; and the National Commission of Natural Protected Areas. They had analyzed the scientific evidence and consulted with social organizations like "Without Corn, There Is No Country" and with indigenous communities. With reason and feeling, they had expressed a negative opinion on Monsanto's request to plant transgenic seeds in the country, where they were already being cultivated in what were paradoxically called "released polygons." They argued the possible leakage of agrochemicals such as glyphosate into aquifers or the adjacency of released polygons to protected natural areas and priority terrestrial, marine, and water areas. Despite this, the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (Semarnat), which studied these concepts, gave the green light to transgenics. Washington's hand was firm on the decisions of the Mexican government, whose economy remained at its feet. Monsanto began planting transgenic soybeans commercially that year on more than 253,000 hectares distributed in Mexico.

After her time in Chiapas and before returning with her children to Berkeley, Nayra visited peasant communities in the Yucatán Peninsula, until now a territory of jungles almost as pristine as when only Mayan villages inhabited it.

There she met Leydi Pech, a Mayan indigenous woman who, with her family, took care of bee colonies on two hectares, part of an ejido in the state of Campeche. Like many other members of the community and like their ancestors from remote times, they cultivated honey from the delicate melipona bee, which did not have a sting and therefore could not defend itself against its predators. A clear sign of what was happening in humanity. Nayra collaborated with the Ma OGM organization in filing a request for amparo (legal protection) to indigenous people and peasants from all over the Yucatán Peninsula. They requested the suspension of transgenic soybean planting in the region by Monsanto and demanded consulting indigenous peoples on any decision in this regard. Brave local judges accepted the request and ruled in favor.

After this decision, Monsanto declared that "the impact on soybean producers in the region is unknown, as they have the right to access better agricultural technologies voluntarily for the benefit of their families." Of course, it was not mentioned that transgenic soybean seeds with fields devastated by glyphosate were "terminator," meaning their crops were sterile, and farmers were condemned for life to continue buying each year the lethal combination of robotic seeds and destructive herbicides. The soybeans would be exported mainly for animal feed to China, hungry for meat diets alongside its incipient consumption alienated, in the arms of the fiercest capitalism. Monsanto would surely challenge the decisions of the judges from Campeche and Yucatán before a higher court, which with calls from Monsanto's headquarters in Cre Coeur, Missouri, to the White House, from there to Los Pinos, and from Los Pinos to the corresponding judge could order the resumption of soybean cultivation. The good thing was that any change in the decision should consult indigenous peoples and in their Mayan language, in their assemblies of each community and ejido by uses and customs. One would have to remain very attentive to this constant threat.

Nayra told Aimsa about the message of the ejidal assembly of peasant caretakers of meliponas: that one should not let the bees die, that one should always defend them because bees not only serve to make honey but also to pollinate food and give them life.

Aimsa thought about the richness of pollination, diversity, about the example of bees caring for nature, about honey, as was the name of the movement that led to the laurisilva eco-island, and about the symbol of the meliponas: lacking a sting, not causing harm but doing good. Vulnerable but generous.

She thought about the polarities between bonobo apes, small, peaceful, and cooperative, and chimpanzee apes, large, noisy, aggressive; between melipona bees, small, tolerant, diverse (in their pollination), and peaceful, and "apis" bees, large, sometimes selective in which flowers they pollinate and aggressive; between muscular, carnivorous, competitive, and aggressive peoples and individuals with high levels of cortisol and others less muscular, vegetarian, collaborative, and peaceful.

The empire in which she lived, the United States, was aggressive against other countries. Like an "apis" bee, it showed and threatened with its sting. The most potent: nuclear weapons.

Aimsa attended a conference by Noam Chomsky at the New York Public Library in honor of the International Day for the Total Elimination of nuclear weapons. He mentioned the "doomsday clock" and how the danger of accident or nuclear war combined with global warming had moved it to six minutes before midnight compared to every day, hour, and minute of a year in a state of peace without risks. Upon leaving, she approached him and thanked him for his support of the eco-village network and the establishment of the laurisilva eco-island. Chomsky was very enthusiastic about the example of Eila and invited her to share a coffee at Dunhill’s.

* Noam, do you think the world is slowly moving towards disarmament and stable peace?
* I'm afraid not, Aimsa. There are more statements than actions, and since the end of World War II, we have been moving towards less ambition and commitments in peace and human rights. Some say that today there would not even be a consensus on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is not even binding. The first resolution adopted by the first United Nations General Assembly, held in 1946, was about the commitment to nuclear disarmament shortly after the genocide in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But fifty-five years have passed, and we are much worse off than then. Since the Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1968, which was not binding, only those who did not have weapons have complied, except for some like Korea, and there is fear in Iran. Those who have not really complied are those who are already armed, threatening each other."
* How is it possible that only a minority of countries have the rest of the world threatened by their nuclear weapons?
* Those are the dynamics of power. In fact, they are the same ones who have the 'divine' privilege over others to have a permanent seat on the Security Council and veto power over the rest of the world. In addition to being 'the bullies of the playground,' Israel also has nuclear weapons, protected by the United States; India and Pakistan threatening each other, and North Korea, claiming, with quite a few reasons, to defend itself from the United States.
* What is the nuclear destruction capacity of the world now, in so few and selfish hands?
* The bombs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki had about twenty kilotons each. They killed more than two hundred thousand people, and their radioactive effects lasted for several generations. Today there are bombs of up to eight hundred kilotons, and there are already more than fourteen thousand bombs worldwide. At an average of one hundred kilotons, and well-directed, as they all are by 'smart' missiles, they would destroy twenty times the world’s population of human beings and almost all life forms on the planet. And that's just part of all the military spending to destroy lives: about two trillion dollars, twenty times more than the spending on cooperation and mutual assistance among countries. I don't think there is any other animal species capable of such absurd atrocity.
* And if we propose not a binding treaty, not of 'non-proliferation' but of prohibition and immediate destruction of all nuclear weapons?
* Good idea. And hopefully, the madness of nuclear energy in general would also end. There are more than four hundred nuclear power plants, a quarter of them in the United States, which, along with France and China, account for half. They generate more than three hundred thousand megawatts installed, less than 8% of the total installed energy in the world. It is not necessary and leaves radioactive risk for thousands of years. But there are military interests in it. France follows the argument of the United States because half of its energy is nuclear. Again, the permanent members of the 'Security Council' are the ones who subject the rest of the world to the most risk, also because of this energy with horrible potential risks and for many generations. Look at the disaster a few months ago in Fukushima, with twenty-two million Japanese affected by radioactivity and exposed to cancerous effects and malformations. It had to happen for countries with a certain conscience like Japan and Germany to shut down their nuclear energy programs. But others, especially the same countries on the Security Council and with nuclear weapons, continue to increase their nuclear power plants and dump their nuclear waste elsewhere, also in unsafe places, where radioactivity, for example, from plutonium, can last more than forty thousand years. At least since 1993, it was prohibited to throw it into the ocean, although they take advantage of the weakness of some countries, like Somalia, to do it without permission. "Noam, we have to put an end to the absurd veto power of five countries over the rest of the world. For several years now, I've been collaborating with various groups of countries within the halls of the United Nations here in New York. Two years ago, we managed to pass a decision to open negotiations for reforming the Security Council, which includes the issue of the veto and permanent membership. But it's sad to see that large countries like Germany, Japan, India, Brazil, as well as the Arab League and the African Union, are all struggling to have the veto power too. The rest have lukewarm positions. It requires two-thirds of votes in favor from all countries but guess what: the permanent members can veto it! It's the perversion of perversion.
* And furthermore, they're all sitting here in their mansions, with their luxury cars, in a country that not only protects its superiority veto over the rest but is also the only one to have dropped atomic bombs, has over three hundred military bases worldwide, spends more on armaments than the rest of the world combined, has exercised its veto power the most - forty-three times - almost all related to the Middle East, allowing its ally Israel, influenced by the powerful political and economic lobby in Washington, to massacre the Palestinian people time and again; it has opposed commitments to fight climate change despite being the biggest polluter and hasn't ratified any human rights conventions, not even the Convention on the Rights of the Child, while imposing that its chosen nationality directs many United Nations agencies, including UNICEF, responsible for promoting the convention it refuses to sign. It's incomprehensible, Aimsa.

Aimsa and Noam agreed to prepare the proposal for the United Nations, although few countries were ready to confront the military and economic power of that Empire, one real and cruel, the other, as Moyes analyzed, fatuous and tacit. Meanwhile, the world was being held hostage by one country's fear of losing its supremacy and privileges, and the rest of the world was fearful of turning its back on it.

She returned on the train to White Lake and pedaled to the cabin in the eco-village of Serene Lake. Jonay was pensive on the porch.

* How did it go with Noam?
* Very good bond. But I am amazed at how perverse the knots of interests in weapons and power and the intrigues in the so-called United Nations are.
* I can imagine. Keep fighting, darling, keep fighting.

Aimsa continued to feel the colors of auras and saw a blue aura around Jonay. Something was troubling him.

* I feel you're sad, Jonay. Do you want to share your feeling with me?
* While you were in New York, Clara, a friend of Nour's, fell off a horse and broke her arm. It's nothing major, and I immobilized it, but her mother took her to the hospital, naturally worried. They did X-rays, anesthetized her, immobilized her, and when she mentioned feeling dizzy and they suspected a head injury, they did a cranial CT scan and put in some IVs. She stayed under observation for two days. This morning they received a hospital bill for twenty-three thousand dollars. The family doesn't have health insurance because they've been dedicated to crafts and gardening. They fear they might lose their cabin because of this debt. This country is very unfair, both outwardly and inwardly, Aimsa.

They were discussing it when Nour arrived from the forest, galloping on her mare Rasta. Shortly after returning from Eila, Jonay learned through Jeremy about a mare they were going to sacrifice because she was no longer "productive" in the races at Monticello racetrack. He went with Nour to see the mare. She was a cross between a thoroughbred and Holstein, jet black with a small white cross on her forehead, slender and strong legs, a muscular back, but somewhat tense and with a shy, elusive gaze, yet with a gleam of tenderness. They connected with her with the same reverence that Nour had as a child when she connected with Dakota's mustang and continued to do so with all the animals she knew. They took her to the house where they built her a stable. Nour felt that the mare, whom they named Winner, was physically and spiritually exhausted from being treated for so many years like a racing machine under the pain of the whip for the business of a few and the bets of many others.

Nour devoted almost three months solely to communicating with that mare. She spent the day by her side, walking together through the forest without riding her, talking, observing, looking at each other, and at night she slept with her in the stable. Jonay and Aimsa watched in amazement at that connection, without time or codes, without any purpose other than the harmony of souls. Such was their devotion that Nour didn't even brush her mane, just caressed it. That's how they began to braid the lower part of her mane. Nour felt that of all the music she shared with her, the one she liked the most was "Redemption Song." For both reasons, she named her Rasta.

After a month of walking by her side, observing her fears and anxieties, discovering her likes and passions, trust and complicity grew between them. There were other girls her age with horses in the valley, but she still didn't want to go with them on their rides. It was gradually that Nour, after sleeping on Rasta's back several nights, felt that their bodies matched with gentle harmony. One morning, Nour was lying on her back on Rasta's back when Rasta got up with Nour still half asleep on her. She sat on her, grasped her dreadlocks at the base of her mane, and Rasta walked out into the forest following the path they had walked together so many times. That's how they spent several days walking, returning to drink from the lake and to the stable to listen to "Redemption Song," eat hay, and share discussions with their parents. One day she started trotting and shortly after began to gallop gently, as if dancing a waltz. That's how Nour built a magical bond with Rasta.

Nour was fifteen then. Jonay and Aimsa thought of her brave commitment to freedom outside of a strict, gregarious, and often alienating education system. Since then, four years ago, Nour had shared hundreds of discussions with her parents and friends about life and the world, they had built a house, crossed the ocean, and had known the souls of animals in their spiritual depth.

Jonay felt a serene happiness to be among three such beautiful and untamed souls.

# Holy virgin of the Knee. Berkeley Hills, December 2011

It was already mid-December 2011. Thanda was writing the last page of "Brave Tederness," magical memoirs of the second half of the twentieth century, in the living room of a house on Regal Road, in the Berkeley mountains. Through the window, the sunset behind the Golden Gate could be seen. Just a few millimeters from her right knee, another knee throbbed in harmony, though they didn't yet know it.

After the approval of the European global health policy at the end of 2010, Thanda had proposed periodic dialogues with the United States, which, together with the European Union, accounted for ninety percent of global health cooperation. He developed a close friendship with the representative of the American embassy in Brussels, Kemy Monahan, although reconciling positions with her bosses in Washington was not easy. He tried to propose forms of health cooperation that were neither selective for diseases nor for population groups, and that facilitated free access to medical services, based on the universal right to health. Based on this premise, a group was created within the World Health Organization called the International Health Partnership, but it was very complicated for countries to let go of their interests in controlling funds, paying their NGOs and consultants, buying their medicines, and boasting about how "they saved lives." Cooperation seemed to be more at the service of governments' image to attract votes than addressing the needs of countries marginalized by the global economy.

Shortly thereafter, a brutal administrative reorganization took place in the department where Thanda worked: over three thousand officials received a message informing them of their new work assignment, without considering their training, professional experience, or aspirations to contribute to cooperation. The team that Thanda had managed to form with colleagues from many countries, passionate about the right to health, was dismantled. Perhaps her ideas were closer to global justice than to the interests of Europe and its rich allies, perhaps Thanda's refusals to "dance to the tune" of the G-7 or the philanthrocapitalism of Gates, Soros, and others, had stigmatized her in front of the hierarchy. He was assigned to deal with governance issues in North Africa, where social mobilizations were spreading due to the Arab Spring. Around that time, Thanda learned about an open call for thirty thousand European officials to become visiting professors at one of the eight most prestigious universities in the world.

In those days, Thanda was invited by the influential school Science-Po in Paris to give a lecture on European global health policy. After the lecture, a woman in her sixties, stout and with very clear eyes and a tender gaze, approached her. She introduced herself as Susan Warren, a professor at the University of Berkeley. Since his youth, Thanda had been inspired by the movements that had originated from that libertarian stronghold in Berkeley in the seventies, against the Vietnam draft and later for the rights of women, blacks, disabled, gays, and all kinds of injustices. His favorite movie at that time, "The Graduate," was filmed there, and he felt in those sunny images and in the tender music of Simon and Garfunkel or James Taylor and the protest songs of Dylan and Baez, a kind of mythical destiny where she could move consciences that resonated in the world.

He discussed it with Ángeles and Daniela, and they enthusiastically encouraged her to apply to go with her to California, a myth for them too in so many Hollywood movies. He submitted an application, which included a research project on the comparative analysis of cooperation between the United States and the European Union, and teaching on the challenges of global health, and requested that it could be at the University of Berkeley from where Susan sent her a letter of invitation. Thus, Thanda was selected and managed to escape letting her passion for health sink due to hierarchical and abusive interests in the European Commission. But then, his daughters, after talking to their mother, decided not to go. Ángeles would start studying architecture and Daniela would continue her high school studies, both in Madrid with their mother and her partner. Although it broke his heart to stop living with the three of them in their "little house in the forest," it was only for a year, and her father advised him again:

You've fought nobly, you've opened a door to your career and your life, your daughters are already teenagers, more concerned with their friends than with your company, and they will always wait for you and love you. Fly, son.

Thanda was amazed to see the gleaming skyscrapers, although he could barely see any trees. He remembered the song by Cat Stevens, now Yusuf Islam, "But Where Do the Children Play?" They stopped in front of Alcatraz Island, famous for its prison surrounded by a sea of ​​sharks. Joe told him that a triathlon was held there in December, and Thanda considered training for it and celebrating his fiftieth birthday with that anonymous "self-achievement.

They arrived at the house he had rented remotely, still believing that Ángeles and Daniela would come. The owners, John and Kathy, a retired and charming couple, were there. It was too big for him alone. It was on Regal Road in Berkeley Hills. You entered a room with a chair in front of the fireplace and a large window at the back from where you could see, hazy at that time of year, the legendary Golden Gate Bridge. A study room, a kitchen, and a dining room on the ground floor, a rundown basement on the lower floor, and three rooms with beds adorned with multiple quilts and pillows made up a house that seemed to come out of a 1950s film set.

As Joe left, Thanda felt a vertigo at the beginning of a new stage in his life without any company. On his last trip with the commission to discuss global health policy in Chile, his laptop had been stolen. In addition to his "4x4" library, he only had a few CD discs with information from his writings, a photo album of his parents, his daughters, and his memories of Ukuzwana, the journals he had written to his daughters following Jonay's custom, and very little clothing. He wanted to simplify his life, and except for the books, which he hoped to give away, he traveled light. He managed to persuade John to lend him a bike and a guitar. He set himself three goals: to switch from vegetarian to vegan and get in shape by biking up the steep hills of the Berkeley hills every day, to study global health equity and compare European and American policies on the right to health, and to write a novel: Courage and Tenderness.

He gradually adopted a simple vegan diet, cereal in the morning, nuts during the day, and usually rice with vegetables at night. He decided not to pollute with soaps, washing himself only with cold water, wearing simple clothes that he washed when he showered, and using hardly any other electric light than that of the computer for his work and novel. This way, he could feel and enjoy each sunrise, each sunset, and the starry nights more. He rode up the steep Euclid Street to his American home at the end of each day, as beautiful as it was empty.

He was assigned an office in an old building facing the Campanile called Moses Hall. Every noon, that mythical bell tower rang, and he saw the hive of professors and students in the place that concentrated the most Nobel Prizes and advances in knowledge worldwide. Next to where he locked his bike, a sign read: "Reserved for Nobel laureates."

He pinned to the corkboard in front of the computer the napkin with the data he presented at the European Council on the unfair excess of mortality in the world and set out to unravel global inequity: what it was about, what its causes were, its magnitude and trends, and what solutions could be proposed. Moyes, who had become involved in the movement that led to the May 15th demonstration in Puerta del Sol in Madrid since his struggle with María on the platform against evictions, sent him graphs of his global economic analysis. Jonay, now in the same country but on the other coast, sent him his analysis of health injustice within the United States. Aimsa shared her diagrams of the unjust oligarchy of world power even in the so-called United Nations, the plots of pain in the world that she had been drawing for twenty years with Haka, and the harm to nature that she and Nayra were revealing. Luis from Eila told him how health flowed in eco-villages without natural damage. With Anna, Sergio, Cristina, David, and Paolo, he discussed the right to health and its global laws and in each country. He filled an entire wall of his office in Moses Hall with interconnected factors with arrows, data, graphics, and, in red, many questions.

Thanda had meetings and debates with the leaders of thought in public health at that university and was able to understand what had shaped American and international thought in global health. Susan Warren, who had facilitated his arrival as a visiting professor, was the co-author of the reflections and articles that in the 1980s reduced the proposals of Alma Ata to a few key interventions in childhood such as family planning, monitoring growth, promoting breastfeeding, vaccinating, giving vitamin supplements, and treating malaria and diarrhea, which could prevent more than half of the then ten million child deaths in the world each year.

These "vertical" ideas, coming from American academics and with a vision of saving lives with science and projects, had restricted the comprehensive health spirit of Alma Ata. Through a clear collusion between UNICEF and the World Bank, both institutions well controlled by the White House, structural adjustments were imposed on indebted governments. Already more dependent on the budgets imposed by the World Bank, restricting social spending and taxes on northern corporations, than on the lukewarm recommendations of the World Health Organization, already dominated by Gates' philanthro-capitalism and pharmaceutical foundations.

Inspired by that article by Susan, a decade later the World Bank closed the century by inventorying, using the "cost-utility" method. For this, they compared expenses, always in dollars, with the recovery of "healthy life": years of life lived without physical or mental disability. They had classified more than two hundred disease conditions and assigned them a degree: from a five percent loss due to a cold to a ninety-five percent loss in a coma state. The most controversial aspect was that not all years of life "were worth" the same. More value was given to working years because they were productive for the economy. After all, what could be expected? It was a bank "playing" with global health. This is how they calculated how many lives each dollar saved, depending on the type of health intervention, from the most "efficient," such as vaccinating against measles, to the most expensive, such as maintaining chronically ill patients on dialysis.

From those studies, the World Bank proposed that countries with lower "gross domestic product" (money movement) limit their health expenditures to interventions costing less than fifty dollars per year of healthy life saved: this helped Thanda understand that in the previous century, after the post-war human rights declarations and the supposed agreements, which no one complied with, on such rights, it was financial institutions that, dominated by capitalist imperialism, began to impose economic and social policies and "put a price on life," of course, in poor countries.

In rich countries, it was different: in the same year of "fifty dollars per year of a poor person's life," Thanda found an article where in the United Kingdom, spending on a new type of medication that aimed to alleviate entire lives of sedentary lifestyle and nutritional abuses resulting in hypertension, obesity, and diabetes amounted to five thousand dollars per year of extended life. He could note on his board: accepted price of human life: fifty dollars per year in poor countries, five thousand in rich countries, in a ratio of one to one hundred.

With the alarm of the beginning of AIDS in San Francisco, on the other side of the bay, and of which Aimsa had witnessed twenty years before in that same place where Thanda was now seeking answers, ABCD prevention and AIDS treatment were added to those lists of priority interventions. Thus, the nineties led to Sachs' millennium goals restricted to pregnant women, children, and three diseases, later sanctioned by the great global fund of Fronz.

The turn of the century led, even to the power of pharmaceutical companies led by Rumsfeld's Gilead, to accept differential prices for AIDS treatment in poor countries. The big business was concentrating on chronic diseases caused by sedentary lifestyles of consumption and stress from competitive cortisol, and cancer from toxins that, led by Monsanto, permeated the bodies of a mad humanity.

He also had conversations with leaders of scientific advances like Eva Harris, a proud "McArthur hero" with over five hundred publications and at the forefront of understanding the ins and outs of the dengue virus and the new virus epidemics beginning to spread in the world due to urban concentration and climate change effects.

In the most modern laboratories of the "hyper-intelligent" Li Ka Shing, a few meters from those of Jennifer Madoud and her gene-editing experiments, Eva investigated the genomes of lethal viruses. Eva, the daughter of an economist who had written about social economy, on which Chomsky based his premises, had combined her studies of viral genomes with projects in Nicaragua, where she identified with Sandinism, and in El Salvador, where she fell in love with a fighter from the Farabundo Martí Front.

In the contrast of subsidies and scientific recognitions of a criminal government and commitment to justice, Eva coordinated a center, more virtual than real, of Global Public Health. After learning about Thanda's ideas and studies, she began inviting him to give lectures in university halls and in the homes of the most eminent professors, selectively inviting young people with great mental agility who challenged Thanda with all kinds of nosological, philosophical, political, logical, and mathematical questions. From those meetings, several students like Laura and Michelle, with a very keen critical sense, joined Thanda's cause and study.

His American friend from Brussels, Kemy Monahan, now held a position as coordinator of the health program within the State Department, which, under Obama, was led by his great opponent and former first - and humiliated - lady, Hillary Clinton. Thanda asked if he could spend a week exchanging ideas between European global health policy and U.S. policy, which was coordinated from the State Department, where PEPFAR and other programs were coordinated, which were then implemented by USAID, NIH, CDC, and others. It was going to the heart of the largest global health cooperation and where the absurdities of PEPFAR, ABC, and programs linked to drugs protected by American patents came from.

Thanda had been so clear in his conferences in Brussels and in many countries about the incoherence of vertical programs and the perversion of strategies like PEPFAR's ABC, that he assumed any entry into the almighty State Department would be carefully analyzed by the CIA and such access would not be allowed. To his surprise, when Kemy told him he was welcome for a week to share his experience and learn, from the inside, about American politics. Knowing the European bureaucracy, which required up to ten signatures to invite a visitor for coffee, and the sensitivity it would entail for a "mere official" to delve into the belly of American power, he decided not to inform or ask for permission and would include it in his final report as "academic activities."

Every day he rode his bike with Kemy through forests that surprisingly survived in the center of world power. After three strict checks at the entrance, he arrived at a gym and showers where he exercised and cleaned up, but above all, he listened to the conversations of State Department officials, some looking like burly marines with rectangular haircuts. He could hear intrigues about Libya, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and how they were closing in on Bin Laden, which sent shivers down his spine.

One night he was invited with Kemy to dinner at the chief of staff of Hillary Clinton's apartment for a "brainstorming session" on how to "achieve in one hundred days" that her legacy as secretary of state would go down in history for having "eradicated maternal mortality." Hillary excused herself at the last minute and, in addition to her staff, experts from USAID, CDC, NIH, and a group of expert advisors from PEPFAR, whom Thanda could identify as from the McKenzy clan, attended.

When asked and Thanda responded that maternal mortality could only be prevented by public and free healthcare systems, with enough nurses, midwives, and doctors, with shelters in the last two weeks for mothers living far from hospitals, transportation of severe cases to referral hospitals, and adequate public budgets; he was marginalized from the conversation. For them, it should be clear that governments did not save lives, but the United States did, in fact, Clinton herself.

He returned to Berkeley where he combined his studies with attending debates at the university on the state of rights, economics, politics, and new frontiers of knowledge in some of the more than a hundred daily conferences with people from all over the world who, in a more casual manner than in Europe in dress, speech, and expression, presented all kinds of studies and proposals. This quantum and utopian thinking contrasted with the harsh reality of a country anchored in the fiercest individualistic capitalism. That bubble of brilliant minds and a privileged youth able to access expensive tuition and demanding admission grades, theorizing in their lectures and publications, lived a reality very different from the rest of the world.

Thanda began to see it in the homeless in People’s Park, in undocumented migrants, and in African American minorities. In constant communication with Jonay, Thanda compared the health of the European Union and the United States and concluded that with one-third more economic power, the United States had an excess mortality of eight hundred thousand deaths per year, due to an unjust system based on deep and growing inequalities and a healthcare system based on immense profits for insurers, providers, and pharmaceutical companies, which largely shared the same capitalist owners, well interconnected by speculative financial derivatives. The Arab Spring, the 15M movement in Spain, the calls for uprising by old freedom fighters like Stephane Hassel in France, Saramago in Portugal, José Luis Sampedro in Spain, and Eduardo Galeano in Uruguay, encouraged the Occupy movement and the encampments in front of Wall Street.

He attended several neighborhood assembly meetings in the militant Oakland, where he presented his estimation of the price of injustice in health in the United States. He had progressed in his comparative analysis of values, history, and legal frameworks between that country and Europe, and saw how the most essential difference was the absence of any reference to the role of the state as guarantor of the right to health, a word completely absent in the founding charter of the settlers of a country that in "We the People" only recognized as a right, the right to bear arms.

In four months, Thanda had filled the walls of his room in Moses Hall with thousands of interconnected elements, had written over eight hundred pages of comparative analysis of the right to health and global cooperation between the United States and Europe, and had been invited to give lectures on it in Montreal, Quito, Bogotá, La Paz, Rio de Janeiro, and Washington. Meanwhile, from Brussels and the savagely reorganized commission he fled and where he was generously paid for that sabbatical research and teaching stay, no one answered his messages with drafts of his analyses and studies.

He noticed with sadness how he tried to contact Ángeles and Daniela every day, but the nine-hour time difference, the distance, and adolescence made those contacts he longed for less and less frequent and less extensive. He did, however, maintain a daily conversation of affection with his parents, who showed their happiness to know him enthusiastic about his studies and struggles.

Despite so many studies, conferences, trips, and debates, Thanda felt a profound loneliness in the house on Regal Road, where only the echo of his typing on the computer could be heard, and what Thanda thought were crickets that had gotten into the rooms, only to find out weeks later that they were warning sounds indicating that the smoke detectors had low batteries. After weekdays of intense study and climbing the hills of Berkeley, he began to prepare for the Alcatraz Island triathlon and trained long routes swimming, running, and cycling.

One afternoon as he climbed the steep hills, he thought of his Amama and her solitary life, intimate and fighting for her ideas and dignity: after marrying young with a man from another farmhouse in a nearby valley, his Amama became pregnant and shortly after her husband emigrated to Idaho. She waited many years without news. Neither widow nor single, her life, under rigid customs based on Catholic morality and her obsession against sexual freedom, was limited to waiting.

So, his grandmother confronted her parents and went to explore the world, meeting an idealistic cobbler with whom she joined "in sin" and had three beautiful daughters, the middle one being Thanda's mother. The cobbler was arrested for his libertarian ideas, and his library of utopian books, including his favorite, Don Quixote, was burned. Amama and her daughters followed him to the concentration camp in the Catalan mountains, and once again, she was left waiting for years without knowing anything about him and fearing he had been shot. Despite her hard life of waiting, she devoted herself to sewing and sometimes cleaning floors and stairs, to taking care of her daughters and giving them the best study opportunities. And so, they grew up in Madrid, got married, and gave him grandchildren, Thanda was also their godchild.

He always longed to return to the farmhouse and its green mountains. So as soon as Thanda could get his driver's license, he took her back to her roots every summer and listened to her epic stories of love, adventure, and struggle against prejudices.

With those memories, Thanda began to write a story about his grandmother, mixing reality and fiction, changing names and places to avoid hurting sensibilities, but maintaining the essence of the epic life that his Amama transmitted to him and in which he felt the script of his life was inspired, guided by his father's values.

At the same time, he wanted to write about the stories he had known of NoLwasi, Jonay, Haka, Aimsa, and so many people, who, with other names, dates, and details, had marked his life. He advanced one chapter each day, from the mid-century towards the end of the century, dreaming of the characters, and taking refuge in a magical world where he poured out his memories, ideas, and dreams, as if collecting broken pieces of dreams and recomposing them into stories not so real, but perhaps in some sense more real than reality itself, at least within his lonely soul.

But the most meaningful of those months were neither the novel nor the studies. At the end of October, Susan transmitted to him the invitation from the dean of the School of Public Health to a reception at his house in the countryside, in a place surrounded by vineyards called Sebastopol. She offered to take him along with two distinguished visitors who had been Nobel Prize winners in medicine. Upon arrival and after greeting the many attending professors, he stayed talking in a smaller circle when he noticed a shadow on the high wooden ceiling with skylights and instinctively opened his hands.

At that moment, an unconscious hummingbird fell into his palms, which Thanda supposed had hit the glass in search of freedom. The scene astonished the attendees who looked intrigued at Thanda. Hoping that the life of that beautiful hummingbird with bright green feathers would not end in his hands, he covered it with his hands and gave it a constant and gentle cardiac massage. Gradually, the attention of the attendees returned to the conversations of their groups, except for a woman with clear eyes, a tender gaze, and dressed in Mayan fabrics that Thanda noticed watching him from a distance. After a few minutes, the hummingbird recovered and flew again. The woman approached him and said her name was Huitzi, hummingbird in Nahuatl, and that if he wanted, they could drive back together to Berkeley. Thanda bid farewell to the renowned academics politely and gratefully and set off on the journey back with Huitzi.

During the trip, he told her about his life, of Guatemalan origin, raised in Mexico where she studied and married a French intellectual from whom she later, as a mother, divorced, emigrated to Berkeley where she created a program for migrant health care and fell in love with a professor from the University of Davis. Thanda talked about his life, his enthusiasm for the ideas he defended, for the expression of the soul that he now poured into the novel, and about the loneliness in the house in the Berkeley hills, to which Huitzi said that a colleague from her work was looking for a room and was a person of great heart.

Thus, he met Luis Javier, a Mexican immigrant to the United States. They agreed to meet at a café on Telegraph Avenue one evening after work. He was someone who smiled with his eyes, sparkling with tenderness and wonder, and had a tremendously musical way of speaking, which inspired great confidence in Thanda. They talked about their lives and dreams and from the first moment felt a beautiful harmony. Thanda asked him if he wanted to see the room he could occupy in the house and Luis Javier said it was not necessary, that knowing him he was already interested in moving in. And so Thanda began to live with Luis Javier. Two weeks later, Thanda traveled to give a lecture in Quito. Upon his return, as he walked up Euclid Avenue and entered Regal Street, he noticed a commotion coming from his house. Luis Javier had organized a party with friends from the Latin American community in the Bay Area to liven up Thanda's lonely life. Upon arriving, tired from the journey, Thanda sat in a chair at the back, facing the window where he could see the nighttime lights of the Golden Gate.

He watched in amazement at the cheerful hubbub when he felt his heart skip a beat. From the door, he saw a slender and graceful woman enter, greet Luis Javier, and approach him. Her movements, almost floating in natural sensuality, hypnotized him. As she drew nearer, he saw long jet-black hair embracing a face of linear and haughty beauty like that of the pharaoh Nefertiti, but radiating kindness, a warm gaze, and a sincere smile.

* Hello, Thanda, my name is Nayra. Thank you for inviting me to this party.
* Pleasure to meet you, Nayra. It’s Luis Javier who organized it. I just got back from a trip.

They talked for an hour, unable to tear their eyes away from each other. A magical complicity emerged. When Nayra spoke of her two young children, Thanda felt as if something in his heart cracked at the thought of her being with the father of her children. But something inside him, which he didn't quite understand, told him that Nayra could be the companion he had been waiting for all his life.

# Mission acomplished. Flying over Greenland. March 2012

On the day of the "*virgen de la rodilla*" (Holy Virgin of the Knee), Thanda finished the novel in which he poured his soul through memories, imaginations, and dreams of a Humanity as tormented as it was latent with love and light. It was truly like releasing and sharing with the world the deepest parts of his soul. In a way that he understood as "*collecting little pieces of broken dreams*." So many broken dreams every day. Composing them into mosaics with painted voids of desires, imagination, and visions of a world in which he wanted, needed, to believe. That was his story. His gift to the world.

From that moment, Nayra and Thanda felt a very deep connection. Thanda began to learn about Nayra's magical world: her diverse origins, her passion for nature, for justice, for caring for the body, for stripping away inhibitions and codes, for love of family, for so many things in which they felt the deepest complicity, never mutually felt before in their lives.

Initially, Thanda was very discreet and even distant because he felt a physical and spiritual attraction like never before, but at the same time, he assumed she was in harmony with the father of her children. He subtly wrote to her on social media from a conference in Bolivia:

* Do you happen to have an unmarried twin sister?

And she replied:

* I'll take her out of myself.

A few days later, Nayra shared with Thanda that she had been without feelings or a partner for several years, although she shared a home with the father of her children for their well-being. On the last night at Regal Road before returning to reunite with her family for Christmas in Madrid, Thanda and Nayra merged their souls. Nayra said to him:

* My life is complicated. Perhaps this is the only time I can join you.
* I hope not. And if it were so, I will remember it all my life.

He returned at Christmas and gave copies of the novel, printed by a self-publishing company called Bubok, to his family and friends. Except for his father, hardly anyone paid attention. He returned to Berkeley three months later to complete his studies and teaching.

Upon his return to Berkeley, he reunited with Nayra, and the union of their souls was discovering a magical universe. Still, Nayra asked Thanda for discretion because she had not yet reached an agreement with the father of her children to separate. Thanda felt at the same time a profound love, after ten years of loneliness since the break with Cristina, but he had a strange sensation in having to hide, especially from Nayra's family and large circle of friends, such pure and brave love.

Meanwhile, Thanda had made progress in his comparative analysis of global health between the United States and the European Union. The final book of this analysis concluded with the title: Global Health is Global Justice. In it, Thanda further elaborated on the concept of the "price of injustice in human lives" that he had scribbled on a napkin at the European Council a year earlier.

From his dialogues in Brussels, studies in Berkeley, time at the Department of State, and trips to Canada, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Brazil to discuss the concept of global health and the union of all countries in it, he concluded that only one concept and commitment were common to all of them: the constitutional article of the World Health Organization, adopted in 1947, to which all countries in the world had since adhered.

That article committed all countries to strive and collaborate for "*the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health by all people*." Thanda found that, in sixty-five years of existence, no one had measured that, the only shared goal of global health. In a meeting in Brazil, he even said it provocatively, but subtly and with humor, to the Director-General of the World Health Organization, Margaret Chan.

Margaret, you don't earn your salary, nor does anyone in the World Health Organization: you don't measure how progress is being made on the common goal of ensuring that "the highest attainable standard of health" reaches everyone, the organization's fundamental mandate.

* Chan, who did not understand that subtle humor from her Chinese culture, reacted furiously:
* Of course, we do! We are committed to universal health coverage and actions on social determinants!
* But without measuring it, how do we know we're making progress? How do we know that the right to health is truly universal?
* We already do. Progress is being made on the Millennium Development Goals.
* Margaret, those goals are only for certain population groups and a few diseases. They leave most people out. No one has defined what it means, in the shared global goal, "highest attainable standard of health" and how many do not reach it and how much loss of human life it entails. I will send you my studies from Berkeley and an article summarizing it. Believe me, Margaret, as an academic and from wherever I am in the European Union, I only want to contribute to a stronger World Health Organization and to the universal right to health.

Back in Berkeley and reflecting on those three forgotten political words for sixty-five years, "highest attainable standard," he concluded that they equated to three others: "sustainable health equity”.

In San Francisco, there was a woman with gray hair and a tender gaze, Paula Braveman, whose articles were the most cited on the concept of equity. Thanda went to give a talk to her team about his studies, and they tuned in on ideas and on the simple concept of equity as "fair distribution of inequality" where "fair" implied conditions that were possible to prevent or eradicate, such as poverty.

Thanda went to the meadows and forests of Tilden Park, atop Berkeley Hills, and looked in awe at the majestic nature of the redwood forests. Using the compass method, Thanda measured the height of a sample of two hundred of these centuries-old trees: the average was eighteen meters, and all were between twelve and twenty-six meters. He drew the graph of their distribution, and it resembled a bell curve like the hat in "The Little Prince" book. That's how, time and time again, distributions of variables in nature were observed. He pondered over each word: Better, Health, and Possible.

He started with the what: Health - physical, psychological, and social well-being, as defined by the World Health Organization for the past sixty-five years as well. Was it something akin to happiness? Truly, measuring such a state was difficult.

The first World Happiness Report had just been released. And who coordinated it? The arrogant Jeffrey Sachs, the creator of everything vertical, from the macroeconomics commission to the millennium development goals and the "just do it" attitude in American cooperation. And which countries had the highest happiness? The Nordic and Latin ones. In Asia, it was much lower. There was clearly a cultural factor influencing how each respondent answered the simple question: "On a scale of 1-10, how satisfied are you with your life?" The Japanese would never say 10.

He started by looking at the most "measurable" component of health: physical health. Using the "cost-utility" method by which the World Bank measured the efficiency of health interventions and funded "vertical" programs while drowning public health budgets, he measured the average "healthy life expectancy" in each country. Like life expectancy at birth, Japan had the longest. In fact, the two classifications hardly differed. He would then measure health through life expectancy, data available in almost every country in the world.

During those days, he received a visit from Aimsa, from the other coast. There was a meeting of Via Campesina, encouraged by a friend of Thanda's, Professor Miguel Altieri, a Chilean as intelligent as he was rough, who defiantly resisted Shell and British Petroleum's co-optation dressed in green despite having dyed the Gulf of Mexico black, from the School of Natural Resources, the name said it all. In the 1980s, Miguel coined the concept of "agroecology," the idea with which peasants committed to community life and nature conservation resisted agribusiness, led by Monsanto, and its "technological solutions" to, in North American messianic terms, "fight world hunger."

Aimsa came to denounce how all this was increasingly clearly linked to genomic editing led by Jennifer Madoud there in Berkeley, already contracted to advance gene therapies with Johnson & Johnson. That company, along with Nestlé, Unilever, Kraft, Kellogg, Coca-Cola, and Procter & Gamble, dominated the global food business. And these industries were based on cloned crops with agrochemicals, biocides (not pests or pests, as we humans said), and genetic manipulation dominated by Monsanto, Bayer, BASF, Dupont, Dow, and Syngenta. Of them, two also controlled drug markets, Bayer and Johnson & Johnson, which along with Roche, Gilead, Abbott, Merck, Pfizer, Bristol, Astra, and Welcome, now GSK, dominated the health business.

It seemed that those giants of agriculture, food, and mass medication were separate worlds, but they shared interests and their main shareholders, with more than half of the capital, were the same billionaires, all with their foundations to whitewash and evade taxes. A win-win business: chemicals and food produced diseases, and their medications treated them, and if anyone doubted their good work in feeding and healing, their foundations glorified them.

That night, Thanda debated with Aimsa his quest for references to "better possible health" to, for the first time, measure health inequity, the price of injustice in human lives. He asked her about the how: the concept of what is "Possible."

* Aimsa, what limits infinity and eternity?
* It was Aimsa's passion since childhood: Buddhism and quantum physics.
* The dimensions of time and space trapped by matter, the Higgs bosons, gravity.
* And applied to full, immortal health, what limits it?
* Immortality is synonymous with lack of life. Every organic molecule is in evolution and adapts to its environment, and for that, it needs genes, which "wear out" with use and lose their ability to replicate proteins and maintain our bodies eternally.
* Are we encoded from birth to die?
* I don't know, Thanda. The truth is that natural selection through genetic recombination implies sexual reproduction. The fact of having children demographically implies the need to die. Otherwise, the increase would be constant, and there would be no resources for everyone.
* Perhaps that's why nature, in all living species, plans death. They say it's through the reduction of telomeres in genes.
* Perhaps, Thanda. That is one limitation of immortality. Our genetic condition.
* But I'm looking for limitations that can be changed.

A few meters away, Jennifer Madoud is editing genes that will "clean up" defects for those who can afford it. And a few kilometers from here, in Silicon Valley, is the "singularity" university where Ray Kurzweil argues that we are approaching the point where human technology combined will be superior in capacity to the human mind. In that place, Ray is obsessed with finding his immortality by applying the most advanced technology in genomics, nanomaterials, and artificial intelligence.

* In any case, Aimsa, I don't think those advances will change our mortal nature, and certainly if they do, it will only be for a few in Huxley's "brave new world.
* That's right. Let's not think of that limitation as preventable, feasible, or even ethical. Dying is part of making room for life, for other lives, for our children. It's solidarity.
* And what other issues limit life then?
* That which influences it and is limited in resources, which is not infinite.
* Well, that's natural resources and their control and conversion into goods and services, economic resources.

That night he thought about the curve of the sequoias and the elephant from The Little Prince. Anything consuming resources above the average of that curve would not be a "possible for all" model because there would not be enough resources for it.

In the following days, he exchanged fascinating data and analysis with Moyes, now fully committed to the 15M movement. He found out the weighted averages of economic resources in the world and how to measure them. Although imperfect, like life expectancy for health, the Gross Domestic Product, the flow of money in society, indicated the availability to buy and sell, often essential resources for good health. He would look for countries with GDP per capita below the world average: "economically feasible-for-all references.

The next day, he arranged to have lunch with Aimsa and Nayra, who reunited after their alliances in Chiapas with the Zapatistas. Thanda saw in those two women a powerful intuition and intelligence, which combined with their courage, led them to speak out for just causes with strength and light. In Nayra, that strength, in Thanda's eyes, was embodied in a beauty to which he couldn't help but surrender.

He told them about the progress of his analysis, the data, and dialogues with Moyes, and the missing piece he needed to fit in: the limits of natural resources. Aimsa had kept in touch with Mans Nilson, from the Stockholm Resilience Centre, and had collaborated in defining "planetary boundaries": the rate at which nature in its atomic components - such as nitrogen, hydrogen, and phosphorus -, molecular - such as water or carbon dioxide - and cellular components like forests and species, recycled, and the limits above which nature was not prepared to recycle back to its equilibrium within the span of a human life. It was estimated that, at the level of exploitation of natural resources of the world population at that time, the most urgent limit, carbon emissions into the atmosphere, could not be more than two tons per person per year.

With this data, Thanda completed his analysis of global health measured not by groups of people or isolated diseases but by the preventable and unjust loss of human life: health inequality: the ignored unfulfilled objective of global health.

He searched for international statistics for the three data points: life expectancy, Gross Domestic Product, and carbon emissions. Of the first two, there were data compiled by the powerful World Bank, from the year Thanda was born: 1961. What a coincidence! Or synchronicity? For the third, carbon emissions, the same World Bank had estimates for each country since 1990. He was thus able to identify the countries that consistently met all three criteria for "better possible health": life expectancy higher than the world average, lower GDP, and CO2 emissions of less than two tons per year. He called them "healthy, feasible, and sustainable models”.

He presented that analysis in several conferences at the University of Berkeley. That list of "model countries" caused astonishment among the academics and students of that global center of knowledge: led by Costa Rica, with eight times less economic capacity per person (Gross Domestic Product: buying and selling) than the United States, it respected the ecological threshold with fifteen times fewer carbon emissions per person and thus had a higher life expectancy: better health. Following closely were Cuba, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam, socialist or communist models despised and two of them assaulted by the empire of capitalism.

He obtained data from the World Health Organization on mortality rates in children and adults since 1990. He was able to demonstrate something like what he estimated on the napkin at the European council a year earlier, which he still kept: almost twenty million excess deaths, one out of every three deaths in the world, almost all in "low-income" countries. He calculated the time lag in which low-income countries, at that rate, would reach "feasible and sustainable" mortality rates: infant mortality would not reach the possible level at that time until fifty-five years later, translating that delay into three hundred fifty million unnecessary deaths in children. In adults, the delay in how feasible and sustainable knowledge and means would prevent unjust deaths was even greater: it would not be reached, at that rate, until year 2,200, causing one billion eight hundred million unjust and preventable deaths in that time of delay.

That finding led him to use a metaphor in his presentations: a coal train with a rigid structure maintaining first, second, and third-class cars. The coal it burned (emissions), to advance rapidly (Gross Domestic Product) and without letting anyone get off (leave the system), maintained rigid differences between those in front and those behind, with only narrow doors between cars (mobility between countries and social classes). The problem was not arriving a few seconds later at the destination or traveling in padded seats or wooden benches. The problem was that those behind arrived late to progress and were losing lives, with a price of twenty million a year, one every two seconds, the time to say: "inequity in health".

Thanda spoke to Nayra about these chilling findings, which often made him feel deep sadness, as Nayra became complicit in all dimensions. They studied together which needs influenced good health. Vital needs for survival - water, food, shelter - were the object of humanitarian aid and caused, mainly due to malnutrition, almost one-sixth of the unjust deaths they had calculated. Security needs to avoid risks, which public health focused on, or treatments provided by health systems, conditioned, mainly by infections and high-risk pregnancies, another quarter of the price in human lives due to inequity. But many deaths were not in childhood, pregnancy, or from infections, and less than half of them were from those arbitrarily selected by Sachs and Fronz in the millennium and global fund objectives. More than half were from chronic diseases that were due to unhealthy lifestyles, and when that happened, often due to lack of access to treatments.

What was a healthy life? Thanda and Nayra debated this in the office at Moses Hall, where they sometimes couldn't hide their spiritual and physical harmony.

* Nayra, I spoke with professors from the paleontology department. I wanted to know what our bodies are designed and prepared for.
* That's the key, Thanda: we live 'against nature.' And our bodies rebel.
* Exactly: with evolutionary and anatomical models, it has been estimated that we are prepared for skeletal and muscular movement of about fifteen kilometers a day during our adult life, or their equivalents in running, swimming, or climbing stairs or hills.
* Very few people then use their bodies for what evolution has designed over two million years since we started walking on two legs and shortly after using fire.
* That's right, Nayra. Without using our body for its purpose, it stiffens. We don't eat with natural and healthy appetite. Nor do we burn calories or replenish proteins at a natural rate. Hence obesity, hypertension, diabetes, and osteoarthritis. I remember Jonay telling me about how he and Fernando identified the 'disease of loneliness and sadness,' which added to all these conditions due to unhealthy lifestyles.
* There's another key, Thanda: since we descended from the tree precisely, the pelvis narrowed, and the premature humans were the ones who survived the most. With the cranial fontanelle not closing in the first two years of life, the frontal lobe develops more than in any other mammal. That's the place of figurative thought that expands our dreams and our fears. We are gregarious because we are the most defenseless mammal at birth and because we construct abstractions and myths that, since agricultural settlements, make us function “*en masse*."
* And is that mass life detrimental to our health? Do we live less in big cities than in small towns?
* Another factor comes into play: in cities, we have developed artificial ways of living: with chemicals in mass-produced food, with carbon emissions from our transportation and heating, or with plastics in almost everything we consume that is not edible. We seemingly have more needs covered, but a problem arises that worries me: the constant struggle and competitiveness.
* Yes, I've read that we have been developing behaviors closer to those of chimpanzees, hierarchical, competitive, and aggressive, rather than those of bonobos, which are more community-oriented, collective, and peaceful. The Congo River divided these two evolutionary paths. We have much to investigate. What makes humans competitive with each other and with the environment, to an extent of immense suffering for many and endangering future generations?

He debated these issues with Nayra, who taught him about acupuncture, which she studied at the Chinese Medicine School in Oakland, where she took him for back pain from so many trips. Thanda thought about the energy flows in the body, their blockages, and diseases. They shared these thoughts with NoLwasi, who understood the imbalance of illness in that way, although she saw the flow of energy from the connection with ancestors and with nature, something Adam was passionately involved in the mountains north of Madrid.

He felt a strong and clear connection between many variables and dynamics that needed to be unmasked. He saw them between the competitive, hierarchical, and empathy-lacking forces that accumulated in a few and created a need in many, and the destruction of nature that darkened the future of future generations. With more and more questions on his diagram covering the entire wall of Room 108 in Moses Hall, he prepared the final book Global Health Is Global Justice with analysis, explanations, tables, and over a hundred graphs through which he tried to measure and describe what the World Health Organization had not measured in sixty-five years: the price of injustice in human lives: how - and why, where, and when - "the best possible health" was not achieved, the goal of all countries in global health.

He teamed up with Miguel Altieri, the Chilean exile from Pinochet and leader of the ideas and proposals of agroecology since the eighties, and the force of global movements like La Vía Campesina, where Lisy continued to fight. Thanda and Miguel shared ideas and guitar evenings. He introduced him to René, who put his hands to Miguel's ideas and designed all kinds of gadgets and prototypes in his backyard for cultivating in permaculture, cooking with minimal firewood and no emissions, charging the phone, studying estates from the air, and promoting forms of natural harmony. With him and his sweet and serene Argentine partner, Lili, Thanda created a deep alliance that resisted the distance.

He also compared health in Europe and the United States: their constitutions, laws, resources, services, and cooperation. The key was that the value system in the United States, based on the founding charter of its early settlers "We the People," only recognized one right: the right to bear arms. Unlike Europe, with all its contradictions, health was not a right, and the government was not supposed to guarantee it. When he compared, as he did with global inequality, the United States with Europe, whose Gross Domestic Product was a third lower, he demonstrated an excess of deaths, again, a loss of human life due to injustice, of eight hundred thousand deaths per year, almost a 9/11 every day.

He presented his analysis to Eva Harris, a brave researcher and passionate salsa dancer, a McArthur hero for her hundreds of publications on the dengue virus, of which she perhaps knew more than anyone in the world. Eva directed the Global Public Health Center and felt that from her laboratory, she was not challenging justice like Thanda. In contrast to her colleague Paolo, a revolutionary from El Salvador who challenged the system's complicit research daily with his raw analysis of American capitalism, which he exposed on a radio program encouraging the almost impossible revolution in the country most chained to capital.

He also shared those ideas in the assemblies of the Occupy movement, the echo of the Spanish 15M. He ran, for the first time, encouraged by Nayra, in an election: the primaries of the new Spanish party linked to Greenpeace, Equo, supposedly oriented towards ecology and equity.

Thanda wrote a proposal with passion and came second, after the founder, a former leader of Greenpeace. Nayra helped him prepare his final conference in Berkeley before returning to work in Brussels. They chose a special place: a small stone house, perhaps one of the oldest in the area, which was occupied, and as the entrance sign read, the Dream Institute.

At the conference, there were academics and students from many corners of the university, organizations related to social activism and nature conservation, and wonderful people he had met during his passionate time in Berkeley who had become his family away from home. Terry and Dorothy were there, Nayra's siblings, whom he still felt like his new brothers despite their secret love. Huitzi came, through whom he met his soulmate, Anaya Luis Javier, the dear friends Nayra gathered in friendship and noble ideas, Rafa, a builder who let his soul flow through flamenco guitar, Txotchil, in tune with the stars, Laura, a courageous mother and architect in the bay jungle, Daniel, so sweet in his empathy, Tania, a brave Chilean expressing her thoughts and feelings, Bárbara, a Salvadoran dance fairy, Valerie, a Peruvian who left everything for opportunities for her daughter, Rachel, eternally searching for noble love, Gary, a Hebrew fascinated by Cuban rumba, and BK, a serene yoga master. Also present were René and Liliana, Altieri, Eva and Paolo, and many people he couldn't identify, but with whom he connected through the sparkle in their eyes as their ideas flowed.

He spoke passionately about all those findings that demonstrated the world's wrong direction and the need to share more through cooperation on a scale twenty times larger, and to stop destroying nature.

He noticed that in a somewhat hidden corner of the room, there was a person wearing the Guy Fawkes mask, a symbol of the Anonymous movement.

He tried to publish his findings at California University Press and other scientific publishers. They told him it was interesting, but they said they would call him back without doing so. Thanda began to wonder why he was being excluded from conferences and publications. At that time, a young scientist and hacker from Kazakhstan, in Central Asia, twenty-three years old, named Alexandra Elbakyan, launched a website called Sci Hub, where she provided free access to almost a hundred million scientific articles that she had pirated from private interest networks and the business of science. Thanda decided to self-publish his equity research book and upload it to the Sci Hub network, ignoring the political and academic circles that scorned, or feared, his equity analyses.

The joy of the gathering and the feeling that his ideas and studies found allies and resonance in so many people there, far from home, was joined by a dizziness that he hadn't felt in a long time. He would leave the next day ten thousand kilometers to the east, to Brussels, where an uncertain job awaited him, an empty home, and a heart that was already beginning to race alone at the imminent distance from Nayra. They continued, out of consideration for her children, not showing their love in public, which hurt Thanda a lot, as he felt it noble and brave, ready for anything. Nothing to hide. Despite this, their love grew, and the farewell was heartbreaking. They wouldn't know when they would see each other again, or if that would ever happen somehow, somewhere. Since his painful divorce from Cristina, Thanda had spent almost ten years in solitude, except for isolated encounters with Sara at Doctors Without Borders meetings five years ago, and without the complicity he felt so fully and beautifully with Nayra.

Thanda flew to Brussels with a heavy heart. Would loneliness and distance from love mark his life as they did with his Amama? He returned to Brussels with, as his father would say, the mission accomplished: an eight-hundred-page book demonstrating the arbitrariness of the Millennium Goals, the negligence of six decades of the World Health Organization and the international community, and the precipice of destruction that the human species was heading towards.

Could he influence the grey Brussels of bureaucrats following vertical codes? He had been involved in the Occupy movement, he had run for the first time in an election defending equity and ecology, he had traveled across the continent giving lectures, and he had written his first novel, *Courage and Tenderness: We Are All the Same Energy*, inspired by the fight against the shadows of selfishness by so many wonderful souls he had encountered along the way.

Back in Brussels, he made a stopover in New York to meet his soulmate: Jonay. He spent the night at the cabin with Jonay, Aimsa, and Nour. He gave them a copy of Courage and Tenderness, in which his strength and love shone brightly. He saw in them life as a family, in nature, in unity, and in full complicity. That was his dream. Would it be possible with Nayra?

# Fire and Life. Garajonay, August 2012

For two years, the eco-island of laurisilva, Eila, lived in social and natural harmony, banishing the market and its harm to nature. From the third of the islanders who did not vote for MIEL, the majority, especially the owners of small plots of land who integrated into the communal lives of the eco-villages, began to identify with the values ​​of the emerging Eila.

John was eighty-five years old, and the arthritis from his seafaring postures had taken its toll. Despite his daily yoga with Umbela, he had limited mobility. The eco-island became a utopian reference for almost fifteen million commoners in more than thirty thousand eco-villages in almost every country in the world. They wanted to interview him at all hours, but out of modesty and not wanting to take away time from his dedication to Umbela, to the eco-village of Ternura, and to Eila, in that order of preference, he preferred to decline and refer them to a space where he collaborated weekly on the radio and internet program recorded by Paxti. The program ended up being called "Reflections on the lives of Patxi and John."

Committed as a "servant of all" to translate Umbela's decalogue into a way of life on the island and to dedicate himself to it "without salary or clock," with "sweat and passion." Due to his age and limitations, he only went once a week on the boat with Tomas, also already a wise and venerable elder, sometimes accompanied by Martin. They arrived at San Sebastián, now called "the heart of Eila." They crossed the square of the "Embrace of Eila," the streets of Freedom, Sweetness, and Gratitude, lush with all kinds of fruit trees and vines of spinach, blackberries, and tomato plants, and arrived at the "Common House of the Eco-Villages" to discuss and "consensus advice." They did so based on proposals brought from each valley in the "forums of feelings, thoughts, and actions." They enjoyed afterward celebrating with different religious communities reciting the "song of life" at the "gratitude union" meetings.

The areas of "harmony in coexistence," "harmony in nature," "harmony in well-being," and "harmony in knowledge" informed him daily of their challenges and proposals. Eila, known for its open arms to anyone, welcomed over three hundred Africans fleeing hunger and violence in their villages, integrating into the eco-villages with their rich traditional knowledge and perseverance in the passion for living.

It also began to welcome people from all over Spain, Europe, Africa, and other regions, offering their voluntary work and commitment to living without property. Health experts and many other knowledgeable individuals came solely out of conviction for communal and ecological living. Around three hundred officials from other areas of Spain exchanged their positions -jobs- with officials from the previous administration of La Gomera, reluctant to give up their salary privileges.

Gradually, it also made most of the land public. Almost all foreign owners of luxurious villas sold their properties and emigrated to other islands or tropical retreats, although many of them donated their properties to Eila and integrated into the eco-villages. The sixteen families who owned three-quarters of the island began to see that their businesses of property sales, apartment rentals, stays in luxury hotels, golf games, or meals in expensive restaurants hardly had any customers since they could not use petroleum or plastics, which proved to be the basis of their previous economy. Fifteen of them sold their properties to the government of Eila, which paid them in installments thanks to the income resulting from the "voluntary salary waiver for use in the common good" of most officials, called "servers of the common good." After four years, John estimated that they would have already paid off these expropriations and would no longer need any salary allocations from the Spanish government to their officials.

One landowner did not leave the island. Juan Antonio, the most powerful proprietor had a heart attack, and was affectionately cared for by Luis, and his wife and son went to see him. At first, he refused to see them and called them "thieving hippies" and shouted at them:

* Now you come for my inheritance, don't you?

With great serenity, his wife Dolores replied:

* We don't want anything from your properties, Juan Antonio. Not a euro or a brick. We have harmony with nature and with the community. We don't need anything else. I'll tell you what we do want from you: your embrace and for you to let us embrace you.

They continued going to the hospital every day with a stew from the garden and a herbal infusion. On the third day, Juan Antonio felt a pain with suffocation in the night and felt that he could die. At that moment, he felt the deep desire for the embrace that Dolores had told him about. The next day, without any expression other than the tears of the long desert that was his life without deep and sincere love, he hugged Dolores and Juan Antonio, who introduced him to Martin, his grandson. They stayed with him without words, without judgments, only with tenderness, massages, and hugs. That night Juan Antonio passed away, leaving his lands to all the inhabitants of Eila.

Don Cayo and Gracian continued with criticisms and defamation campaigns in the media. They lived in Tenerife and attended the sessions of the Canary Islands parliament where they challenged the representatives of Eila. On the contrary, John invited them to sessions of "*learning from each other*" to listen to ideas for the common good on a radio program of Eila.

It was difficult to remove all the plastic, already prohibited on the island. With the help of Joseph, who visited Eila to support natural energy plans and fossil-free vehicles, they set up a "dream factory" in "the heart of Eila." They bought a 3D printer from an "open hardware" network. They began to turn the forty thousand tons of plastic from landfills into coils of thread. With them and the first 3D printer, which they called "mother," they built other 3D printers and thus ended up having one in each valley, then several in each eco-village. In this way, they took advantage of the plastic and, with the help of Joseph and many ingenious engineers from the eco-villages, they built prototypes of computers, mobile phones, windmills, hydraulic rams, parts for solar panels, bicycles, and electric tricycles, and even parts for sailboats.

Tomas, with Martin's help, turned the port of Ternura into a shipyard for sailboats that gradually replaced Olsen's polluting ferries that stopped tarring the bay of "the heart of Eila”.

The twenty-seven eco-villages and six eco-neighborhoods of Eila cultivated about six thousand hectares and cared for about four thousand hectares of pastureland, totaling one hundred square kilometers, less than a third of the island. Most of the rest was the "expanded reserve of Garajonay - soul of Eila," in memory of the Guanche legend of love, which multiplied its previous extension fourfold.

Thus, against all the predictions of economists and politicians, they made the use of money disappear as useless. When they had paid off the last properties, they reached an agreement with the government of Spain to import only forty vital medications that Luis identified in a "health council" with healers of all kinds of knowledge, from all the eco-villages. In exchange, Eila contributed with surplus healthy food and medicinal plants for the healthcare system in other Canary Islands. In the food markets, "festivals of flavors and scents," and in the craft markets, the "creative festivals," food, fabrics, clays, and wickers were exchanged. Thus, banks began to disappear naturally, and the coins that people kept, already useless, in their homes were melted into sculptures of feelings.

Not without many discussions, rifts due to disagreements, and defamatory campaigns, Eila's dreams were progressing. There were already thirty thousand "Eileans" on the island in the thirty-three eco-villages and eco-neighborhoods, about five thousand goats grazed, fifteen hundred cows, about six hundred horses and mares, and over a billion bees collected honey. They had about five thousand mobile phones and two thousand computers. They had a thousand bicycles and electric tricycles, twelve sailboats, and six solar ultralights. They obtained energy from about three hundred biodigesters, about two hundred windmills, and about twenty thousand solar panels. In the orchards, they had about a hundred water pumps and twenty cornmeal mills to make gofio. Most of the components for all of this were made with the 3D printers that, together with the carpentry and welding equipment, brought to life the "factories of dreams." In two years, six hundred children had been born, almost one a day, and two hundred and forty people had passed away, the vast majority at an advanced age. The network of "blue spots" of places on the planet with high longevity selected it as one of them, and its studies pointed to communal empathy as the reason for such good health. But what John felt happiest about was that two-thirds of the island were wild nature, much of it barely touched by man in the form of laurisilvas since the Tertiary period.

It was mid-August. The midday sun was severe, and a deafening orchestra of cicadas invited to a nap. But John felt he needed to look at the horizon from above and reflect on his life. He told Umbela that he needed to meditate in solitude. He walked slowly down the south slope towards Roque del Sombrero. He felt the need to meditate. He thought about the community, he thought about the more than a hundred people who had passed away in the eco-village of Ternura, he remembered each name, each epic story, each hug. They now rested in the forest of the junipers he was crossing, their branches twisted by the trade winds that seemed to speak and tell a mysterious tale. Nourished by the matter and essence of lives, all of them epic, that took care of those magical lands and embraced with love those who coincided in the mysterious time and space of that magical adventure called life.

He reached the rock and looked towards the horizon of the sea. He thought about his parents and the family he left in Wales over half a century ago. He thought about the voyages across the seas aboard Satia, which would never return. He thought about the love of his life, Umbela, his faithful companion and noble effort for the family. And he thought about his son Jonay, whom he did not know when he would see again or, this idea clouded his gaze and bathed in vertigo, if he would see him again in what remained of his life, he suspected not much.

John thought about the dream, now a reality, of seeing an island free from property chains and hierarchies, free, embracing and caring for its mother, nature. And in her, he thought about the immense treasure and responsibility of caring for Garajonay, that wonderful forest of living fossils from the warm and humid jungles that populated the Mediterranean region in the Tertiary, which gave life to an extraordinary number of unique species on the planet in addition to a very high density of centennial and monumental trees. He had promoted thirty years ago that it be declared a World Heritage Site, and that same year, after multiplying its extension threefold and dedicating Eila as its first mission, the care and empathy with that wonderful forest, the entire island had been named a Biosphere Reserve. John used to walk barefoot and in deep veneration for the forests of Garajonay.

At that moment, he could smell smoke. He looked towards Agando and observed a black column from the Las Paredes area. He feared it could set Garajonay on fire. He called the coordinator of harmony with nature on his mobile phone. He asked her to alert all the municipalities and eco-villages. All the Eilians, of all ages, should collaborate in extinguishing the fire that was burning the soul of Eila.

In the fire plan they had prepared, all the Eilians had a role. Each one had a backpack always prepared with a fluorescent cap, a flashlight, a whistle, a bandage, and a ball of gofio with honey. Those under fifteen and over seventy could, according to their strength, carry water from wherever it was to a circle of over three hundred meters from the fire. The rest could approach up to one hundred meters with protection of damp cloths and protective goggles. Among the Eilians, there were a thousand people trained to operate about two hundred portable water pumps throughout the island. Equipped with helmets, protective clothing, boots, and a machete, they were prepared to put out fires from less than thirty meters away. Thirty Eilians knew how to handle the ultralights, which had an emergency motor that ran on used oils and could carry a hundred liters of water.

The entire island mobilized. They began evacuating isolated hamlets and eco-villages in twenty-three areas, including Barranco de Santiago, Alajeró, La Laja, the hamlet of Imada, and Vega and Pala. Sailboats from all over the island mobilized to evacuate villagers from areas at higher risk of fires from their homes by sea, taking elders and children to gather in the plaza of Eila's embrace.

John called the Canary Islands government's environmental counselor and requested assistance from the other islands, which sent three helicopters at dawn. They asked for support from the Spanish government, which sent two seaplanes on the third day. John insisted, despite Umbela's annoyance, on being on the front line.

Three hours later, a second fire broke out in the Manantiales de Vallehermoso area, near the eco-village of Valentía. Shortly after, in the Fortaleza de Chipude. It was clearly a deliberate and cruel attack in three separate locations.

After battling the flames all day, hitting them with palm leaves and throwing buckets of water, and despite the drops and discharges of water bags from the seaplanes, helicopters, and ultralights, the flames kept growing.

They continued to work in shifts and in chain efforts. Luis organized in the rear centers for dealing with heatstroke, poisoning, burns, and anxiety crises. Most of the Eilians did not stop working together against the fire for five days and five nights, eating only two balls of gofio with honey per day.

By the fifth day, the fires in the laurel forests were starting to be extinguished, although there were still fire spots in a dozen ravines for another week, threatening to char beautiful palm groves.

John looked with deep pain at the four thousand hectares scorched. He estimated about three million trees, many of them over a hundred years old, some perhaps five hundred: billions of plants, fungi, and lichens, and hundreds of billions of insects. He felt pain for every expression of life killed by human cruelty. Over three hundred million lives of wisdom had been sacrificed for the destructive madness of humanity, of silent and selfless photosynthesis to squander oxygen and water vapor that fell in majestic waterfalls through the ravines, and with it, life on the island for thousands of years. All burned in a few days.

There was still an area burning and of greater danger due to the rugged terrain. It was the triangle between the Roques de Agando, Apartacaminos, and Chipude, in the south of the island. Vehicles with water could not access it, and helicopter and seaplane flights were dangerous. John asked Martin and Fernando to gather a hundred young people who were strong, brave, and good riders. They should go on horseback, with their protective suits and machetes.

Upon reaching the base of the Roque de Agando, they split into two groups, some heading east and others west. They dismounted and began cutting palm fronds with their machetes. They approached the fire front, about five hundred meters away. They divided into pairs for stretches of about ten meters and began taking turns smothering the flames with palm fronds for three minutes each. After about five hours, the fire began to relent. John had participated like any other, despite his advanced age and limited mobility. At that moment, the wind shifted, and a Canary pine in front of John caught fire. The blaze ignited his clothes, and two large branches fell, covering his body in glowing embers. Those closest, including Fernando, rushed to smother the flames on his back with palm fronds.

John couldn't see, as if a merciful force had wanted to shield him from such a harrowing sight of his beloved island, burned. The smoke choked his breathing and at the same time led him to a drowsy state where he relived his walks venerating those magical forests. He felt embraced by their silence, gently lulled by the call of the Rabiche pigeon, the murmurs of the small springs, and the whisper of the trade winds rustling the leaves of laurels and viñátigos. He recalled with fascination the flights of warblers and the goldcrest, and how the sparrowhawk, the kestrel, and the little owl majestically glided over the ravines oozing with the magical humidity of the forest in cascades of purity. Life. So magical. And to care for it. The best way to have honored his passage through it. He tried with all his soul. Like his soul, he would rise from the ashes.

In the arms of Fernando, who embraced him with the utmost imaginable tenderness of a friend, the movie of his life marched by: his childhood and youth in Wales, his shipwreck, the rescue of Tomas, his heart melting in Umbela's gaze since she healed his wounds, his care of El Cabrito ravine, the wonderful gift of Jonay's life, his walks with his son through so many ravines and peaks, Fernando's arrival, the rescue of Kadiatu and Lisy, Jonay's departure to Africa, his travels around the world with Umbela, the network of eco-villages, the family magically growing with Aimsa and Nour, the fight against drugs, the time of exile, the MIEL movement and the foundation of Eila, the dream towards utopia, so many children he saw born and men and women he saw journey to another dimension, embraced with tenderness... like Fernando's embrace, who sobbing with love on the chest of his brave soulmate, showered him with caresses until he ceased to breathe, to beat... to exist in the material dimension where he had lavished so much love at every step.

# So much Love… so much Pain… White Lake, October 2012

Jonay awakened with a strange premonition. He opened the computer in the cabin at dawn. He had received a message from his mother. He identified it because, following the Findhorn Decalogue, she always wrote everything in lowercase:

dear son,

there are moments when words cannot even begin to express the feeling.

i feel a deep pain in telling you that your father traveled to another dimension yesterday, the dimension of the magic of nature he cared for so much, the dimension of the sunsets that cradled his soul, the dimension of the stars that guided his brave journey towards his dreams.

with him, from our sight and other senses, millions of trees and so many forms of life of Eila disappeared, an intentional fire cut existence in this reality of such beauty short, and with it, the human being who illuminated my existence and led it to a sea of love larger than the ocean that brought him to my arms half a century ago. we were always united and always will be.

the most beautiful thing he brought into my life is you. i want you to know that there was not a day in the physical distance from you that i did not think of you, that i did not picture you on the horizon before to the south and now to the west, where his soul traveled every night to embrace yours in your sunset, to give you strength in your awakenings, to whisper in your ear the immensity of his love for you and his pride in feeling the nobility of your soul.

Eila has been left half burnt and desolate without its guide, but the memory of the beauty of Garajonay and the light of your father call us all, united, to care for her even more in her rebirth. every sprout of every plant will be a symbol of hope.

i love you with all my soul, son. and i feel your father so deeply within me that, i dare say, and speak to you from now on like this, that we love you.

for so much love and always, he lives in you and you in him.

be strong, son, be brave and be tender, in the profound transformation of going in part with him and in evoking, often with the icy pain of not feeling his skin and his voice, the memory of his love towards the eternity in which we are all the same energy,

your mother, united with you.

As he read it, Jonay felt as if a dark force had ripped out a deep, sacred, and essential part of his life. His eyes filled with tears that burned his eyelids. He felt a piercing pain in his forehead. His lips trembled as if they refused to express, powerless, so much pain and so much feeling. A lump in his throat robbed him of air; his chest seemed to scream, as if unable to receive and release, without knowing how, so much pain, and at the same time, so much love. His legs shook. He felt the earth sink beneath him and the skies collapse onto his soul, which saw no sense in continuing to walk without the hand of his lifelong guide. Without the light of everything. He wished to be surrounded by a dark abyss, that "nothing" that "nothing can explain," to pour into it his soul that seemed to break into thousands of senseless pieces, without a reason to follow a script without that focus that had magically brought him on stage in this adventure that this dawn seemed so senseless...

He looked at the bed where Aimsa still slept and went to the stable to check that Nour slept peacefully on Rasta's belly. He walked towards the lake, which was barely beginning to paint the golden strokes of dawn on its rugged face. He took off all his clothes and entered the cold-water lake. His tears of pain and love, more fused than ever in the same feeling, dissolved with the lake's. While he swam, his mind went blank, as if everything around him were alien, unreal. He swam the kilometer diameter of the lake several times, as if wanting to leave all his strength in it. As a tribute to his father's bravery, to his communion with the sea. Exhausted by the effort and numb from the cold waters, he stopped in the middle of the lake and shouted with all his might:

Why? Why was it with pain and destruction that you took my father from my life? So much noble struggle to honor life with love and harmony with nature... tell me, did he not deserve a sweet ending in my mother's arms? Why did you not take me by his side to give him my hand and feel his? How can I go on now? Why? Where to?

He realized that he was reproaching Mkulumkhulu (God, the "grandfather of all grandfathers") like his Ndebele brothers in Ukuzwana did. Like he did with so many patients that AIDS cruelly took from the world, like with Anwele, like he felt last year with the departure of Haka. This time the cry was more heartrending. He felt, in the depths of his soul, where eternity and infinity beat, a deep dark pit from which he did not know how he could emerge. Or if he wanted to.

When he approached the shore, he saw Aimsa and Nour sitting and embracing. They stood up as he emerged, naked and with his tears still diluted in the water that still embraced him. He put on his pants and walked towards them.

* We saw your mother's message, sweetheart.
* I needed to cry my pain. I need it.
* I understand, Jonay. Now cry with us and lean on our strength, receive our warmth, merge your aching soul with ours, also united with John's love and bravery, forever in our hearts.

Jonay hugged them, but felt a desire to be alone flood him, to feel his father in his solitude, to think of nothing else, of no one else, to do nothing that no one, not even his partner and daughter, expected of him. He felt only a thin and fragile thread of light, of strength, of courage to keep breathing, and he reserved it for the union with his father, in deep and painful transformation.

He returned to the house and wrote to his mother:

mom,

as you rightly say, there are no words that can express the feeling... which in me is one of deep emptiness and pain to think that I will no longer have his warm embrace, his deep gaze, his gentle voice... I will have to search for them by evoking memories, in dreams, in the sound of the wind, the salt of the sea, the songs of the birds, and the magical shadows in the night...

in this, mom, my greatest desire is to be by your side, to give you my embrace, and together feel how dad lives within us... he loved you with all his soul from the moment you felt each other through the frosted glass on the night of his shipwreck... I exist because of your love... in your love, I see the light and I try to radiate it around me...

I feel pain and guilt for every day I was away from you, for so many years I did not support you in your noble struggles... each of those days now weighs heavily on my heart...

I will return with the winds sailing to embrace you,

to feel him under the shade of the juniper

where his tired body rests,

to watch with you the sunset horizon

that you felt by his side for so many years,

to gaze at the stars and evoke in each one

a memory of the light he left behind...

there are not enough stars...

Jonay felt as if his father's transition to another dimension had transformed him... as if every atom of his fragile molecular assembly had been displaced and could not find its place...

He could only express tenderness to his mother and seek his father in his memories and dreams, which also rocked him awake because looking at nature, he saw him in every corner.

Several nights, tormented, he felt his father's screams in the fire, more from the pain of seeing his brother trees die than from his own death.

He could not disguise his feelings towards anything other than his father and the support for his mother. He could not express any words of affection towards Aimsa or Nour in a month. He looked at them almost as unreal, like the rest of the reality around him from which his soul wanted to flee due to the absence of his father's light. Reality became a nightmare from which he wished to escape, and he longed for the night, or moments of total solitude and silence to feel his father, and to engrave his footprint of love even more firmly in his soul forever.

In response to his final message, Umbela replied:

son of my soul... your father lies now under a juniper tree overlooking the sea that brought him to me... I feel him within me, and I see him in you... in your nobility and your struggle for the ideas you believe in... you are full of him. You don't have to make any effort to hold onto him... he lives with you forever. Do not feel any guilt for the distance... your father was proud of your dedication to your patients in Africa and your sacrifice of so many things to support your soulmate... just as he did with me. I only ask you one thing, son: the Community of Tenderness and all the eco-villages of Eila, want to pay tribute to his dedication to the dream of Eila. Can you send me a few words in his honor?

Aimsa and Nour felt the double pain of John's physical departure and Jonay's spiritual departure, who took refuge in meditation for a month to feel his father within him. He knew it was selfish to only think about that void in his soul that needed to be repaired, but he had no strength or light for more.

He sent these words to his mother to be read at the tribute to his father:

John Harris was born in a seafaring village in southern Wales. He spent his youth keenly aware of the social struggles of the miners in those valleys and of the nature and horizons of the sea. Barely of legal age, he decided to set sail on his boat "Hope" - hope - southward to explore the world and experience its magic. He was accompanied by his dog Satia, his harmonica, and a very special book in his life: "The Story of My Experiments with Truth" by Mahatma Gandhi. Fate had it that a gust of wind caused the boom to strike his forehead, rendering him unconscious and his boat adrift. He was rescued by Tomas, a fisherman from the El Cabrito ravine, with whom he formed a deep friendship.

Tomas took him to the "relief house" in San Sebastian, where my mother was assisting the local doctor, Don Ezequías. They saw each other blurred through frosted glass: before seeing each other and only in their figures, they saw a light that they knew would be magical for the rest of their lives. That door opened, and John saw in my mother the tenderness and sweetness that had slept in his dreams. My mother saw in John a noble and brave man. I was born from their love, and I owe them my life and all the magic I have discovered in it. John gradually integrated into the island with no small amount of rejection from those who only understood values through sacraments, properties, and attire.

He married Umbela and went to live with Tomas in El Cabrito. Slowly, with little more than their hands, they brought that dry ravine to life. With volcanic stones, they built their humble home and terraces on the slopes, to which they brought water and nutrients, crops and harvests, color, and life. I grew up in that pure nature. There was not a dawn that my father did not offer his effort to life nor a sunset that he did not give thanks to nature.

My adolescence arrived, and so did Fernando from Cuba and Africa. The alliance between them is eternal. We rescued Kadiatu and Lisy from the seas of Africa. People from many places arrived on the island fleeing the Chernobyl disaster and in search of the community in nature that John and Umbela were creating. Over the years, the Community of Tenderness grew, and Fernando encouraged the one in *La Valentía* on the cliffs of Arguamul.

That "Valentía y Ternura" spread throughout the island, and communities of natives with people from many parts of the world began to create islands of love for others and for nature, without codes or chains. It was not always easy. They often received rejection and defamation from those who only understood morality with imposed codes.

John and Umbela went to learn from other eco-villages in the world. In Findhorn, Scotland, Umbela proposed the decalogue of harmony, the house of Chun, spring, renewal. John insisted on always keeping his heart and arms open to those who did not think or live like them, and on giving in taxes just enough to also receive from the benefits of institutions like health services.

I went to Tenerife to study, to Zimbabwe to work as a doctor, and now I live on the other western shore of this sea that separates and unites us. It was only two years ago that my father led the dream of Eila, that of an island where its nature was not owned by anyone, where oil, plastics, chemicals, and excavators did not continue to damage it, with open arms to anyone who wanted to live sharing and not competing. Nearly twenty million people now live in eco-villages in more than a hundred countries.

Eila is a light in the world. It inspires us to leave behind the burden of having what others do not have, pretending to know what others do not know, and desiring in ways that others dictate. The veneration for nature that John always professed and forged in the spirit of Eila must prevail.

He died with the trees he loved, burned, like them, in pain and without understanding who can inflict so much pain, who can destroy so much beauty. John fought, with his body already carved by the winds of life like the branches of the juniper that inspire today, until his last breath. He gave his life for Eila. He was the noble captain of this beautiful ship, and he clung to it.

Perhaps he shipwrecked again because the storms were strong and this time with tongues of fire. Perhaps, just as his shipwreck half a century ago engendered this beautiful dream, today his brave fire shipwreck will illuminate a New Humanity and Eila, which will be reborn like the house of Chun towards a new spring with the love and union of all the Eilanders and friendly souls from around the world, may be even more, the sign of hope that this Humanity, crazed by having and destroying, so urgently needs to transform. John was and is my father.

I cannot imagine a greater honor, a more beautiful privilege, a firmer responsibility than to follow his light while we are alive with your example, and then, to go confidently to his sweet encounter.

Jonay, with tears that barely let him see the keyboard, wrote some verses, and accompanied them with simple chords (G-C-D7-G).

He asked Fernando to sing them with the guitar and for Martin to accompany them with his father's last harmonica in the tribute.

There won’t be enough stars to see in them all the reasons.

Why the seas brought John to this beautiful island.

There won’t be enough stars to see in them this immense magic.

That destiny intertwined so that you would be his brave guide.

There won’t be enough stars to see in them all the memories.

That your soul sowed, that left your mark all over the world.

There won’t be enough stars to see in them the dreams that remain.

To fight bravely, to feel tenderness, to know that you are here.

There won’t be enough stars to see in them that you never left.

We are what we love... and only thus do we understand... that there is no end...

The ceremony in honor of John was broadcasted worldwide. Patxi shared the last story they had prepared together for the next weekly program, which would still be called "Reflections of Patxi and John," listened to worldwide.

More than twenty thousand testimonials from eco-villages around the world flooded Eila. Each Eileño transcribed one with ink on the limestone rocks of the "Embrace of Eila" square. Fernando was proposed by the "forums of feelings, thoughts, and actions" of each valley and chosen as John's successor, "servant of all."

John's body merged into the spirit of a juniper tree in the forest of memories where so many other villagers who gave their lives in Tenderness lay. There was no plaque or religious symbol, no statue or place in his name, Umbela knew he would not have wanted it. It was never known who caused the fires. It was thought that perhaps it was the enemies who had expelled them from Tenderness years ago to build hotels and golf courses, or those who were expropriated from their large estates. It would remain on their consciences.

Tomas carved on a large branch of juniper fallen by the wind, like John by the flames, two words that summarized such a beautiful life, and the feelings of so many people around the world determined to pour out their courage and tenderness for harmony united in nature without limits:

There won’t be enough stars.

# The friend of Plants. St Catalina Hill. January 2013

Adam had been in Spain for a year and a half already, far from his roots in Bulililamangwe, discovering the pulse of a generation that wanted to make its way through the outdated hierarchies of power and escape the traps, like black holes, of globalized consumption, feeling blindly perhaps the greatest suffering and destruction of life ever seen on the planet in its four billion years of existence.

He became close friends with Moyes and María, who were still very active in the 15M movement and debating the foundation of a political party for change in Europe. The example of Eila, rising from its ashes in John's memory, guided many movements and communities. Adam took the six o'clock train to ChaMartin and connected there with another to the university in Cantoblanco. The hours on the train became cherished spaces for conversation with other passengers, for reading, or simply for observing the holm oak groves, ash wooods and green valleys while listening to music.

Adam combined his tasks in the neighborhood's orchards and gardens, where he earned his food and transportation, with his studies of biology at the university. In the first year, he became fascinated with understanding physics. He remembered conversations with Aimsa about the magic of quantum physics that defied Newton's rigid concepts. He immersed himself fascinated in chemistry and the dances of electrons around diverse nuclei where Higgs bosons trapped neutrons and protons in dimensions of time and space in various and infinite combinations. He was dazzled by the geology of the planet and its layers and crust with wonderful shapes and traces of time. He found peace in mathematics to study with numbers the magical variables and distributions of life. He saw in cell biology protein factories as tireless workshops for the restoration of bodies worn down by time. And he delved into zoology and its study of all forms of animal life.

After a summer traveling around Europe on an inter-rail pass with Ángeles, with whom he forged a close friendship, and getting to know a world so different from his origins, he began the second year in which he turned his mathematical knowledge into statistics, cellular biology into microbiology, chemistry into biochemistry, and zoology into the evolution of species, in addition to his favorite, botany. His fascination with nature found a mystical dimension with plants.

Although he had a friendly relationship with everyone, the distance, nearly sixty kilometers from Robledo to the university and Madrid, where most of his classmates lived, his shyness, and above all feeling out of place at noisy parties with alcohol and recorded music, kept him at a cordial distance from most of his classmates. He felt a lot of complicity and affection towards Moyes and María, although they were very busy with citizen movements seeking a necessary peaceful revolution. In any case, Adam preferred to be in the serene world of nature than in the noisy tumult of crowds or parties.

He wandered through all the mountains around the house in the neighbourhood of the train station in Robledo. He observed all plants in awe. He understood the similarities with those he knew in Bulililamangwe. In his field notebook, he drew and noted properties he discovered or sensed in the trees in the area. He became a brother to the cork oaks, maples, alders, hazelnut trees, cornel cherries, ash trees, poplars, oaks, willows, elms, and the evergreen stone pines and junipers. He could see and draw during his long hours on top of the granite rocks in the surrounding mountains how bee-eaters, hoopoes, coal tits, quails, warblers, starlings, sparrows, blue tits, goldfinches, blackbirds, robins, and magpies flew through the skies and filled them with wonderful cacophony. He also observed the majestic flights over the Cofio River valley of eagles, falcons, kites, vultures, and storks. At night, walking with Haka's lantern, he discovered barn owls. He often saw squirrels, wild boars, rabbits, hares, weasels, genets, foxes, and even several wildcats and a lynx. He also identified various types of lizards, frogs, newts, and snakes, and barbels and trouts in the Cofio River. He had felt a special fascination for mushrooms since he was a child and found cardoon mushrooms, champignons, saffron milk caps, and blue-foot mushrooms, all edibles. He quickly identified the fly agaric, "false oronja," and was cautious of its toxic effects.

In the spring of 2013, he began to meet a group of students with whom he felt a kind of "spiritual music" as if their souls were dancing and swaying. Adam revered intellectuals and scientists, analytical minds, but he began to see in those young people and in their inspirations that there was a greater source of magic, connected with life force, empathy, and creation. They were the world of art, music, and cinema.

Over time, he saw a common thread among so many great artists. They all spoke in their own way of a world that was very close, and yet very far away. A world reserved for hearts with pure intentions. A world from which, from what he saw, tsunamis of beauty, novelty, and inspiration emerged. A world that he had always thought would be reserved as a gift or privilege for very few people, from which he would only passively and distantly hear songs, poetry, and movies.

It seemed as if he were dissolving the scientific analytical filters that he had between his perception and the world. He grew up hearing Jonay play the violin and later Buhleve and Nothando, but he never dared. He began to trust in his ability to write poetry for the first time and surrounded it with the music of a quena given to him by an artist friend. He spent Christmas with Thanda's parents, who gave him a skateboard, and he began to move around the streets of the town and the university's walks with his own momentum. He started recording and editing videos with his phone, drawing, studying history through his consciousness and intuition, which were not taught to him at university. He enjoyed listening to Alan Wells' reflections on the internet and Carl Sagan's exploration of the cosmos.

Adam, in a world of great loneliness and introspection, but profound and serene harmony, began to discover, through low and isolated doses of a medicinal plant he found in the Santa Catalina Mountain, the rebula, that escaped the trap of scientism. Moyes obtained an old telescope, and Adam watched fascinated, from the water tank's roof, the stars, and the infinite forms of the universe as points of mystery and energy, and thus stopped chaining them to definitions and formulas. He realized how the scientific view of the world was gradually leading him to a nihilistic and mechanistic concept of the universe. In some way, that rigid and imposed concept allied itself with the moral justification of living life by accumulating material goods and perceiving nature as a resource for its dominion and enjoyment, not as a living being, to live in harmony.

One day, Adam found growing on wild horse dung a species of mushroom that, in the mycology books of the library, he had seen called "psylocybe hispana." It was like the one Adam had tried in Bulililamangwe and with which they accompanied Haka's departure while embracing.

He enrolled in a mycology course one weekend and eagerly read several books to discover more about the magic of those tiny living beings. He started a notebook with drawings solely dedicated to mushrooms and their connections with nature. One day, Moyes asked him:

* Adam, tell me about mushrooms, I see you fascinated by them.
* From prehistoric paintings, it is known that humans have known about the effects they call neurotropic, which I prefer to call "revealing," since the Paleolithic. The most used throughout history have been Amanita muscaria and the Psilocybe family, more abundant and harmless. In ancient Greece, a drink was made with ergot, a fungus that grows on rye. In the Middle Ages, there were epidemics caused by flours contaminated by these fungi, which caused contractions and hallucinations.
* Has it also been used in Africa, Adam?
* The Psilocybe family has also been used, which was in turn brought by slaves to Cuba and North America.
* And are there still traditional uses?
* Not so much. They used to be used in ceremonies to combat diseases or for religious purposes. Since the 1960s, they have become popular, they are easily cultivated at home, there is a lucrative market in the United States, Europe, and Japan, and they are consumed for recreational purposes.
* And what are its hallucinatory or revealing effects due to, Adam?
* Science says that the active compound, psilocybin, acts in the prefrontal cortex, increasing the effect of neurotransmitters such as serotonin and where we develop abstract thought, conscious analysis, perception, and mood. But I believe there is a connection of energy, magic, impossible to understand by our binary mind.
* And tell me, Adam, have you tried them? I'm afraid of losing my mental balance...
* Twice, when my uncle Haka went to another dimension, and last week, alone in the Santa Catalina hill.
* What did you feel?
* I'll tell you with my heart what I felt. With all sincerity, Moyes. Many people might think I'm crazy, but I tell you with the confidence that you'll appreciate the sincerity and depth of my experience.
* Of course, Adam. My appreciation for you is immense.
* Well, after about half an hour, I started to see, with tears in my eyes, the immensity of the world that, I thought, I was on the verge of not knowing. For about five hours, I felt like I learned more about myself, life, existence, my consciousness, my body, my soul, than in twenty years of traveling, studying, teachers, books, concepts, and classifications imposed on my thinking.

Adam looked into Moyes' eyes, to see if what he was saying was reaching his heart and whether he should continue or not. He sensed that Moyes was moved.

* Please, go on, Adam.
* I felt that the mushrooms were pure clarity. I wondered: how could I have lived so blind? Although I told myself it made sense because it was by closing my eyes and asking with feelings and telepathy to the "magical being pulsating in the mushrooms," for scientists a molecule with chemical effects in our brain, that I could intuit the entire history of the universe, past, present, and future.
* How did the universe reveal itself to you, Adam?
* Well, Moyes, I saw how everything fit together, amidst the pain, love, joy, mystery, conflicts, peace. Everything. Everything was as it should be. There was nothing to fear. It wasn't a delirium. In the face of "truth," there was no need to kneel or lower one's gaze. I could look truth in the eyes without filters. There were no tricks. No hidden agendas. It was the essence of purity. I could see it all.
* Was it like expanding your consciousness then?
* Something like that. It's hard to describe. My only limit to where my vision reached was my ability to expand my imagination. The mushroom taught me, spoke to me. It had a shape, a color, a smell, a very familiar energy. I almost felt as if I had existed at a time when that way of being and wisdom was my home, and I deeply recognized that it still was my home and that I would return there. That cosmic creature spoke to me without speaking, and in a wave of love, I understood why all the dances around the fire have been made since prehistoric times, where all the art in the world comes from, where all religions come from, where so much existential searching goes.
* And why is it despised and persecuted, even considered dangerous and toxic?
* Well, at the same time, I understood the incredible, complex yet simple, rational intellectual distraction system, the magician's trick of directing attention in hypnosis and leading us further and further away from that magic to which we all have access. I understood then why society teaches us to fear this substance. Just as the slave owner fears the tool that breaks the chains of imprisoned souls.
* And how do you think this experience can influence your life, Adam?
* I assure you, Moyes, that the next day it was as if I had died and been reborn, within the same life. It was a feeling of immortality because I could see who I was, behind the curtains of this "theater of life."
* How would you describe or summarize, Adam, the experience of connecting with the mushrooms?
* Moyes, it's as if life were a play, and by taking the mushrooms, you go behind the curtains, you take off the mask, and you see the play from the dressing rooms, the preparations to go on stage, you meet the director of the play, you see the cables of the operators, the audience, you see existence without filters, you understand it from a stagehand's perspective, not an actor's.

At that moment, with Moyes as a witness, Adam, with tears of gratitude, promised that that experience, that way of seeing beyond, would be part of the rest of his life.

He felt that the mushroom asked for nothing in return for the experience. It was out of pure love. His first desire was to share that magic present in the world with the people he loved most: his family.

And so, Adam felt that "the dragon" within him had awakened, the limits of imagination had faded away, his belief system was back in his hands, and the fire in his soul was burning like never before. He thought that this was how his mother's magical powers returned to him, seeing that magic was real. He knew that his ally was nature. That his destiny lay beyond that life in that body. With his fear diluted, his vision clearer than ever, he saw the colors of the world, the people, the cosmic intentions of the entities of civilizations and societies deeper than ever before. His already great love for his loved ones increased. And his passion for creating art and learning to flow in communication through light and sound shone brighter. Adam thus magnetized the compass of his destiny.

# Church back to Love? Rome, February 2013

Patxi had been in the Ukuzwa-na mission for thirty-six years, half of his life. He could hardly remember what he was like in his previous time. He had integrated into Ndebele culture, in their way of speaking and sometimes addressing spirits. He had developed a syncretism between his Christian God and the Ndebele Mku-lumkulu. He faced hierarchies that with physical or psychological violence suffocated love, from the armed struggle of ETA to Mugabe's fifth brigade, from the violence of the Ndebele resistance, and, above all, from the Catholic Church and its passive genocide in the face of AIDS.

His excommunication by the bishop and Cardinal Ratzinger was taken as a liberation. He had resisted them all for the love he felt for Jesus, for life, and for the powerful inspirations of light in his life that, like his uncle Patxi, his brother Haka, and his partner in thought John, were no longer in that dimension. He felt a magical complicity with Jonay, Thanda, Buhleve, and now Thandiwe and their families, who had given so much love as doctors on the mission. He watched with emotion as his children sought their paths of light, Joseph, Nothando, Adam, and Unai. And, above all, the light that accompanied him without any cracks or absence in each step: NoLwasi.

Patxi had become independent of the Church hierarchy and its restrictive attitudes towards love, even his own with NoLwasi. As a united family and community, they had fought against AIDS and the immense suffering caused by blindness and fear. He had allied himself with the brave lay congregation of San Egidio in the Trastevere of Rome. He felt great freedom in sowing love in everything that happened on the mission. It was not always easy amidst so much suffering from the droughts of climate change, the AIDS of taboos and pharmaceutical interests, child trafficking networks, and Monsanto's poisons, among other challenges.

Thandiwe lived with Marco in the small hermitage of so many love stories and dedication, and she was pregnant.

Unai was already fifteen years old and continued with his passion for summits and flights. He knew all the birds and talked to them, especially when climbing each summit.

Joseph, since his return from Eila, had promoted in the network of eco-villages in Zimbabwe and other countries in Africa, the production of 3D printers that transformed decades of blind consumption plastic into gadgets for energy, field care, constructions, transportation, and clean communications.

Nothando played the violin with deep sensitivity, and his concerts were broadcasted alongside the "reflections of Patxi and John" program, which still bore the name despite John's physical absence.

The year 2012 was ending, and he received a letter from the San Egidio community in Rome:

Brother Patxi:

We continue with emotion your weekly reflections from Ukuzwana. We greatly appreciate your courageous commitment to love within the church against the celibacy imposed by those who do not understand love, against prevention without prejudices that kill, and against access to AIDS treatments against capitalism and its greed, and against the poisons of agribusiness. We are very inspired by the vision of the network of eco-villages and of Eila. All this encourages us and gives us great strength for our projects in Trastevere with migrants, increasingly numerous, fleeing from wars, hunger, and droughts due to global warming, our struggle against the death penalty, peace processes now so necessary in the Middle East and in our missions around the world.

We know of your pain due to the exclusion that, since you knew him as Cardinal Ratzinger, the now Pope Benedict has imposed on your mission, and on our congregation. Any adaptation of the Church to the new knowledge, and to confront voracious capitalism and blind hierarchies, has been rejected since he replaced an equally strict but more sensitive John Paul II at his death eight years ago.

His ostracism has reached an unsustainable limit. A priest from Switzerland with whom we have been in contact, Hans Kung, who has been questioning the concept of "Papal Infallibility" for many years, has written to us knowing our alliance with you and with Kevin Dowling in South Africa, Raúl Vera in Mexico, and Pere Casaldiga in Brazil, asking for support with arguments that encourage the Pope to humbly acknowledge errors regarding AIDS in Africa and liberation theology in Latin America, and thus reconsider his opposition to ending the concept of infallibility. And if not, to request his resignation.

In addition, Paolo, a butler of the Pope, has revealed a lot of information, called "Vatileaks," about pedophilia scandals that were already known from his previous position at the head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Two years have passed, and in addition to pressure from within and outside the Church, the Pope's health has been weakening.

We have prepared our annual meeting at the end of January, and we want to invite you to share your experience from Ukuzwana and the link with the vision of Eila that you talk about in your program every Sunday.

We believe that new times are approaching for the Church, and we think that your presence will not only inspire us as a community but also perhaps the winds of change in the Vatican,

God bless you always.

Andrea.

NB: Don't worry about the price of the ticket, one of our collaborators is a manager at Alitalia and has provided us with a complimentary ticket. Once in Rome, you have our humble home to stay in.

He remained thoughtful in front of the screen as he read that email message. He felt sadness for the sexual perversion, hidden and cowardly, abusive, and twisted, that was rampant in the Church, for not allowing natural love to be accepted and blessed. He also felt sadness for the absurd hierarchy surrounding the power and luxury of the Pope, opposed to the catechumenal communities that founded the Church and followed the humble and revolutionary Jesus. Over time, the Vatican had drifted so far from what Patxi understood of Jesus' message in the New Testament that it was unsustainable, as Damian had said. In all of this, the "principle of infallibility" pained Patxi as the antithesis of the *greatest virtue, humility*.

He shared the contents of the message with NoLwasi and told her he would reflect on it for a few days. A week later, he discussed it with her:

* Darling, they've insisted that I go to Rome. But I feel old, and the money for that trip would do a lot of good for many people.
* Patxi, you've dedicated thirty-six years to the mission and to my Kalanga and Ndebele people. You've hardly left Ukuzwana in that time, except for four or five brief trips, and the time you went to fight in Rome twenty years ago. I know you can, as Haka did with ETA, influence change and make love triumph over fear, community over hierarchy, and nature over the crazed market.
* But I don't want to leave you alone, NoLwasi. It makes me feel selfish.
* Well, that's taken care of. When I heard about the invitation, I spoke to Adam. He's been saving money from gardening and wants to contribute to my trip and Unai's because he says he misses us all terribly. We could go to Madrid and wait for your return from your battles in Rome to spend a few days with our not-so-little ones at Thanda's house in Robledo and visit your ancestral home where Beatriz and Meimuna live. I've been told that they want to coordinate everything for Moyes and María's wedding celebration there, and Beatriz also wants to contribute to our trips because she wants your blessing on that union.
* You've arranged all of that in a week?
* With a good heart and the desire for your happiness, Patxi. I'm also intrigued to see that world, to know your roots, where our Adam lives now, and for Unai to see it too. It will be a beautiful journey, and after a lifetime, a few emissions won't alter our ethical commitment to our people and nature. We can also give talks in various places, visit eco-villages in Europe, and secure alliances and support for our mission. Thandiwe and Marco will stay in charge, and Joseph and Nothando are coming to support them in everything in our absence.

Unai was thrilled to board a large plane and see the world he had dreamed of from the skies, much higher than what Inyoni-enkulu could reach, and, above all, to reunite with his dear brother Adam.

For NoLwasi and Unai, the entire trip was like an unimaginable adventure. The plane, the high-altitude flight, the arrival in the big city, the metro, and the train. They were in awe, although they felt afraid of not knowing who truly controlled all those contraptions to which human souls submitted their trust, submissively.

They arrived to celebrate Adam's birthday at the end of January in Robledo. There was Adam, Moyes, and María. The emotion was so palpable when they arrived by train and embraced at the station in the village that no one could say a word. Adam and Unai were inseparable. The next day, they were joined by Thanda from Brussels and Beatriz and Meimuna from Navarra. They celebrated around a fire in the countryside with joined hands, giving thanks for life, especially for Adam's, in memory of Anwele, Haka, John, and so many others who had left their light in their souls. They were already in another dimension. They meditated in remembrance of the rest of the family who remained in Ukuzwana and who from Eila, White Lake, and Cuba sent their love.

Patxi, with his inseparable Haka's hat, continued his flight to Rome while NoLwasi and Unai stayed with Adam to discover his world, his mountains, the nature he had been discovering, and the inner world that was revealing itself to him and he wanted to share.

When Patxi arrived in Rome, he was greeted by Andrea Cardiri, founder of the San Egidio community.

* Thank you for coming, Patxi, we are eagerly awaiting you.
* Thank you, Andrea, you have been very generous. I hope my visit can be useful and compensate for all the expense.
* I'm sure it will, Patxi. Besides, after almost forty years, I think you deserve a vacation. We last saw each other twenty years ago, and the discussions with Ratzinger then faced a wall that now seems to be starting to break down, with love.
* They went to the Basilica of Santa Maria where they dined with migrants and homeless people in need, and then they had a discussion with a group of the community, which now had fifty thousand laypeople in sixty countries, all very connected to the network of spiritual eco-villages. They were very interested in their mission without hierarchies, their fight against pharmaceutical companies, human trafficking, and Monsanto, and the idea inspired by Eila.

During the following week, he spoke in more detail about the almost forty years of Ukuzwana and the network of spiritual eco-villages, for which they connected with Umbela in Eila and with Aimsa in White Lake. Patxi gave lectures at more than twenty venues of religious congregations representing over half a million religious individuals worldwide, in addition to appearing on Italian radio and television and speaking with journalists from many media outlets.

A few days later, the Pope announced his resignation in Latin during a meeting of the College of Cardinals while discussing dates for the canonization of beatified individuals and martyrs. For six hundred years, no Pope had resigned from his "throne." They had all died as Popes. Venerated and "infallible." His brief resignation message referred to his advanced age, but Andrea and many others thought it was due to scandals that would be well covered up during his retirement in Castel Gandolfo. He asked for forgiveness for his mistakes and alluded that God was asking him to dedicate himself to prayer and meditation. His resignation took effect at the end of February, thus beginning the age-old oligarchic process of choosing the next Pope of the world's most followed religion, by nearly one and a half billion people.

Patxi learned that one of the candidates was Jorge María, the Jesuit from Buenos Aires with whom Raúl Vera, Kevin Dowling, and he had been discussing Humanity and its essential return to harmony with nature and debating together the teachings of Saint Francis of Assisi. Two weeks later, he was elected Pope. He expressed his desire to be known as 'Francisco' in honor of the saint from Assisi. His election was a revolution for a Church that had been electing European Popes for thirteen hundred years. He was also the first Jesuit Pope, challenging the hierarchy of power with social ideas for centuries, especially in the last fifty years in Latin America.

In line with his message of humility and with the simple apartment where he lived as bishop of Buenos Aires, he decided to reside in a humble room at Casa Santa Marta, where he cooked for himself and took public transportation, and not in the Vatican palace, with its entourage, Swiss Guard, and all kinds of luxuries. His passions for tango and soccer were well known, as well as his love for reading Dostoevsky and Borges. He declared that he wanted "a poor Church and for the poor and that's why he was inspired by Francis of Assisi." He would try to emulate him as a man of poverty, a man of peace, the man who loves and cares for creation. Without protocol or solemnity, Patxi was received by the Pope at Casa Santa Marta:

* Hello, Patxi, I finally get to meet you.
* If you allow me, I'll call you Francisco, without a title. I don't believe in hierarchies.
* You don't know how much peace that gives me. I think I'll spend my time as Pope surrounded by protocols that suffocate me.
* I'm glad. I hope you can reform the Church and strip it of its arrogance, Francisco. May it open to those who love in pairs, like me, open to those who differ from heterosexual identity, understand the need for safe sexual relationships to prevent the immense suffering of AIDS, challenge borders, capitalism, and inequalities, and, above all, as inspired by Saint Francis, may it stand as a defender of Creation, not with nature at its service but the other way around.
* That's why I called you, Patxi. With Kevin, Raúl, Casaldiga, and others, I want you to help me draft an encyclical inspired by Saint Francis and change that concept of anthropocentrism that is leading us to self-destruction and the destruction of God's Creation.
* Agreed, Francisco, we'll think of something that can be useful to you. Strength and light in your mission. There's much to change, much to dream, and much to fight for with hope.
* May God bless you, Patxi.

Patxi returned to Madrid to reunite with his family. Upon arrival in Robledo, he was greeted at the station with affection, and the next day they continued their journey by train to Pamplona.

Patxi was returning, fifty years later, to the family farmhouse. Upon arrival, he recalled the scene on the porch where his uncle Patxi prayed in front of the whole family and received a hug from grandfather Agustín. He explained to NoLwasi, Adam, and Unai his childhood memories as he showed them the hayloft, the stables, the stone trough with the sapaburus, the steep orchards, the path to the spring, and the great oak tree where he asked them to sit in a circle and hold hands to give thanks for so much life lived.

Adam looked at the beech forests with fascination, and Unai sought a route to climb with Adam that same night, with the full moon, to the peak of Irumugarrieta.

Beatriz and Meimuna had started to make some renovations, mainly by removing the partitions that Agustín's children, the late older brother, had built while disputing the inheritance before finally moving to Bilbao. They designed a large stone room on the ground floor with the wood-fired kitchen and stables behind it, and three large rooms upstairs for themselves, for Moyes, and for family and friends. They had already begun convening assemblies of farmhouses to propose the idea of the eco-village, and it seemed to be progressing well except for the deep-rooted attachment to land ownership and its relationship with Basque inheritance tradition. Rooted in the inheritance was a dual sense of "ownership" for human beings, both material and familial, perpetuating conditions of selfishness and inequality.

The next day, Moyes and María celebrated their union. María's family came from Llanes, and they had common friends from London, Brussels, the university in Madrid, and the anti-eviction platform and the 15M movement. They received messages of affection from Jonay, Aimsa, and Nour, from Thanda and her family, from Thandiwe, Joseph, and Nothando from Ukuzwana, from Umbela and the communities in Eila, and from Buhleve with Elias in Cuba. Moyes and María asked Patxi to say a few words.

They were seated at the porch table of the farmhouse, as they had been so many times during Patxi and Beatriz's childhood. Patxi looked, as he always did, at the horizon of the Aralar mountain range, and spoke thus:

No one knows where our slow journey is headed. We only know that we live in everything we love. I left this house fifty years ago and sought to love where I thought it was most needed. I realized that love must flow without hierarchies or codes, that the more fragile life is, the purer that love flows, and that it should not focus on one person, one group, or all of Humanity, but on all forms of life on our Mother Earth. And that love must start with us, towards our soul, often waiting for us to leave behind our material concerns and listen to its magical union with the entire universe. Thus, knowing ourselves as part of all energy, we will love without limits.

Moyes, your life is the brave gamble of your mother for you, the gamble of her and Beatriz to love without fear or prejudice. From them, you have drawn courage.

María, I know of your life of affection and respect for your parents' hard work and cooperation with the neediest.

How beautiful that what brought you together was the fight against the greed of banks and the defense of your parents' honest work and their right to a home. And may you continue to fight for noble causes. In your joined hands and in your magnetized gazes, there beats something beautiful that you must treasure like a treasure: spiritual complicity and also physical and intellectual, to be 'much more than two', to dissipate sorrows and exalt joys, to mitigate the existential anguish that sinks us when we close the borders of our skin, and together radiate love always to family, community, and the world."

For love belongs to no one, nor to any place or time, nor is it tied or chained. Do not feel love as something conquered and securely tied with a wedding: it is an energy that is born anew every day from your hearts and comes from the other to whom it must flow, and from the universe, to which it returns to dissipate. It is every day that it renews itself, floods us, and flows, making you shine.

I wish you, Moyes, María, with your family and friends here as witnesses, the tenderness to feel the love of the universe, of all forms of life, and of each other as soul mates, and the courage to never, ever, stop expressing that love in all its forms, paying no attention to anyone who wants to limit it.

On the train back to Robledo, Unai asked his parents if he could stay and live with Adam. He was fifteen years old and determined to ally himself with the mountains and the skies, climbing and flying like the birds. Knowing other worlds meant opening his mind and heart.

NoLwasi and Patxi felt a piercing pain in their hearts at the vertigo of the empty nest. The youngest, Unai, was flying. Literally, that's what that great soul desired. They couldn't hold him back from his fascination with traversing worlds, valleys, mountains, and seas. Nor from the profound alliance with his brother.

They needed to fly.

And Patxi had to return with his faithful soul companion to Ukuzwana, where part of the family and the community awaited him, now in the *twilight of their lives*.

# Magic crosses paths. Mexico city, may 2013

Thanda had returned in the spring of 2012 from Berkeley to Brussels. He left part of his heart in Berkeley due to the deep bond that had formed between his soul and Nayra's. He also returned to an empty home, with his daughters already becoming independent, and to an institution, the European Commission, which received him with total indifference.

Meanwhile, Nayra had decided to end the house-sharing without intimate love with the father of her children and had moved to a wooden house in the mountains of Berkeley, which she had chosen with Thanda before he returned to Brussels. They communicated every day through systems that were starting to work erratically with mobile phones, like Viper, and through Skype. The nine-hour time difference meant that Thanda's waking up coincided with Nayra's going to bed. Thanda, who enjoyed playing the guitar, often sang "Kathy's Song" to Nayra as she fell asleep: "My thoughts are many miles away, they *lay with you when you’re asleep and kiss you when you start your day*."

His oasis of free thought in Berkeley ended in an unbearable bureaucratic intellectual desert for Thanda's free soul, which cried out to challenge the complicity of supposed cooperation, rather collusion, with an unjust, hypocritical, and destructive global system. His health team had been dismantled, and the much-fought-for European policy on global health remained inert in the archives like so many other policies and words of power without commitment or action. European cooperation in health was still crumbs, mostly under the vertical, arbitrary system tied to interests and alliances with the philanthro-capitalism of global funds. After completing his academic sabbatical, he submitted his report and book on comparative analysis of the right to health, his analysis of global inequality, and proposals to make a qualitative leap to a global system that truly defended the universal right to health, and the only international agreement in this regard, "*the best possible health for all*." As instructed, he sent such a report and a one-page summary to the Secretary-General of the European Commission and to ten Directorates-General related to his study. He never received a single comment on it.

Due to the reorganization that "relocated" more than five hundred officials without any attention to their training, experience, and passion, Thanda had been assigned to a position to manage programs of "democratic governance" in North African countries. While it was a very human challenge, he did not know the region, nor the Arab culture, did not speak French well, and would move away from his life-time experience and passion for health. Susanne, a colleague of Franco-Egyptian origin who had been assigned, without speaking Spanish or knowing anything about the region, to cooperation with Latin America, offered to request a change of positions from the hierarchy. They did so, and it was accepted by a Lithuanian economist, Jolita, who was appointed Director of Cooperation for Latin America and the Caribbean by then. Neither knowing the language or the region. Power over empathy.

Thanda, who had begun to get to know Latin America since his studies in Berkeley, felt interested in discovering its culture and social challenges at the root of health injustice. It was the region from which his soulmate Nayra came, with whom, even from a distance, love grew every day, despite not knowing when they could see each other again. He felt that there was a storyline in his life transitioning from his work in Africa and global health equity to Latin America and economic disparity, in the region of the greatest inequalities and injustices in the world.

He arrived at the regional cooperation unit with Latin America and introduced herself to his boss, a bitter Greek economist who thought more about his retirement on a Mediterranean island than about injustices in Latin America. Thanda did not perceive the slightest hint of sensitivity to pain and injustice and the opportunity to do something worthy in cooperation. As he entered his office, these were his words: "I cannot welcome you. *I did not ask for you* to come here." They assigned him a dark office with hardly any responsibilities except to collaborate with Vittorio, an Italian philosopher dedicated passionately to social justice, although very frustrated by bureaucracy and political favors, more concerned with his impending retirement and playing the piano.

Thanda returned to Berkeley to participate in a colloquium on his book "*Global Health Is Global Justice*." Larry Gostin, from Georgetown University and author of the book "Law and Global Health," participated. Also attending was his good friend David, who, having resigned as Minister of Health in Ecuador, was now teaching in Massachusetts. To remain discreet, Nayra attended the conference in the background, and they barely greeted each other from a distance. They had a code between them: whenever Thanda thought of Nayra or wanted to dedicate a thought to her during his public conferences, he discreetly touched his nose. He did so several times, and Nayra would return a wink and a smile.

After giving the lecture, Thanda stayed at the home of his good Mexican friend, Rene. Past midnight, unable to resist, he walked up the slopes to the house on Chasta Road. He discreetly knocked on the door of that lovely wooden cabin perched on the steep hills, not far from the house on Regal Road where they had sealed their love for the first time.

Nayra opened the door, surprised, and concerned about the "indiscretion." But with great excitement, they embraced, a hug that lasted for several hours and seemed like a long-awaited eternity. Before their children woke up and before the sun rose, Thanda returned to the university and to conferences and meetings to continue advancing the proposal for global equity in health, his great passion.

During the following three endless months of spring in Brussels, Thanda began to feel the courage to bet on love with Nayra because he had never felt such a deep complicity before. He encouraged her to spend a summer together in Europe to meet his family and roots. Nayra would arrive on a flight from San Francisco to London. Thanda, who liked to consider "stoic efforts for noble causes," traveled by buses filled with migrants to France and then to the southern coast of England by ferry, followed by more local buses, to arrive at Heathrow Airport after a day and a night of travel. He arrived about three hours early and paced nervously, waiting for the arrival of the woman of his dreams. He felt restless and unconfessably insecure because Nayra's beauty intimidated him, knowing she was admired by dozens of fans in Berkeley. How could an ordinary man, not very athletic, not handsome, not elegant, clumsy in dancing, and fundamentally shy in speaking, in his gray autumn, attract such a beautiful lady? But their mutual expressions of love and excitement, despite such an uncertain future, grew stronger day by day.

Nayra arrived radiant, and Thanda concealed his trembling legs. Nayra had left her children with their paternal grandmother in Mexico City and was always very attentive to their well-being. Thanda began to feel something that took many years to dissipate he feared that he might sometimes be more of a companion to a dedicated mother whose children were her absolute priority, rather than a partner to unite their lives and provide a home for their children. But he told himself, «Mathematically*, a fraction of infinite love is worth more than a whole finite love*." They strolled through London, which Thanda knew from his visits to Moyes. Visited Gandhi's statue in Tavistock, the house of Quaker friends, the buskers in Covent Garden, and Speakers' Corner.

Then traveled to Brussels, where he showed her his world: the house he now lived in, facing the Sonian Forest; his bike route of kilometers under the chestnut trees to work; his work in the commission; walks around the Grand Place; Jacques Brel's songs; the Jeu de Balle market; and walks to Chateau de La Hulpe. They went to a concert by Paul Simon, whose song "Kathy" Thanda had sung to Nayra countless times from afar. The phrase "*Why don't we get together and call ourselves an institution*?" from the song "Rubber Boots," dedicated to the miners of South Africa, stuck with them. Thanda thought of his Ndebele brothers migrating to Soweto. They then traveled to Spain, crossing France, and sleeping in roadside motels. They had their first argument during a storm in the parking lot of a roadside motel because Nayra felt trapped in a plan when they couldn't stop in Paris and stroll its streets. A hug sealed the disagreement with renewed love.

Thanda told Nayra the story of Courage and Tenderness, and they arrived at the Basque farmhouse of his grandmother, which marked the beginning of that "*puzzle of shattered dreams*." After meeting his proud family of Basque farmers, and stopping in a beautiful village in the Picos de Europa, they continued their journey to Madrid, where Nayra met Thanda's parents. She connected sweetly with his mother and with his father in artistic sensitivity and subtle humor. They had lunch with the whole family, his daughters, sisters, and nephews, in the house in Robledo, also with Adam and Unai, whom Thanda saw as his sons, and who felt a strong connection with Nayra. They returned to Brussels, stopping at the farmhouse where Anna was trying to promote an eco-village among the rugged farmers of the Ebro Delta. They then continued to Paris, where they stopped, to Nayra's delight, at the Louvre and heard La Bohème while walking through Montmartre.

Upon returning to Brussels, and with only five days left before Nayra's return trip, as often happened, they didn't know when it would be, Thanda told Nayra that he had a final surprise for her: a secret trip.

Thanda made flight and hostel reservations, considering all the details, knowing Nayra's sensitivities. They left from the house facing the forest to Charleroi Airport in southern Belgium. Surrounded by modern buildings, he jokingly told her that he had booked a few days at an "all-inclusive" hotel, something he knew Nayra detested. After the joke, he told her to wait outside the airport for ten minutes while he spoke to the ticketing agents so she wouldn't find out where they were going. They went through security and waited in a common area. Multiple flights were being called, and as they approached the boarding line for their flight, he blindfolded her to keep the destination a secret. Once on the plane, he took advantage of a moment when Nayra went to the bathroom to explain the surprise to the traveler sitting in the same row and asked him to ask her upon her return: "*Have you been to Frankfurt*?" They thus arrived at the destination Thanda had prepared with so much excitement and detail.

Upon leaving the airport, the gondolas that would take them through the canals to the beautiful St. Mark's Square were obvious. Nayra was excited to have arrived in Venice by surprise. When they arrived at St. Mark's Square, nearly empty and its medieval cobblestone floor shining brightly from the rain, a small orchestra played "*Com te, partire*." They stayed in a small room in a small hotel, from where Nayra remembered her father seeing the full moon bathe the medieval rooftops in silver light. Then wandered through the streets and canals for two days. Thanda prepared another surprise: he bought a ring with a malachite stone at an old shop and invited her to dinner on a terrace in a secluded square downtown. Earlier, he had arranged with the waiter to place the ring in her glass when serving champagne, and with a couple dining at the next table to record the scene. When Nayra discovered the ring, she was briefly moved but then told Thanda, as sincerely as brutally, that she didn't like it!

The next morning, they went to the old antique shop where Thanda had bought the controversial ring, and Nayra chose another: a ring with a stone with a "magical meaning in Mexico": *onyx*. They returned to St. Mark's Square before heading back to Brussels, and as Thanda ceremoniously put the onyx ring on Nayra's finger while the love theme from Cinema Paradiso played, he proposed to her the phrase from the song of the rubber boots, of the South African miners:

-What if we form an institution?

Nayra replied:

-Onyx institute for equity.

They returned to Brussels and London, where they bid farewell. Thanda went to give a talk at the London School of Economics and then returned to Brussels with a broken heart. He was tormented by the echo of the question of whether his fate would be like that of his grandmother, forever waiting for eternal love.

Upon his return to the office, and despite his work on global health policy being ignored, his studies at Berkeley disregarded, and his passion for the right to health scorned, he began to see how to open an area of health cooperation between the European Union and Latin America. This led him to propose programs and meetings to create systems and maps of health inequity, using the method he had developed at Berkeley. To organize these meetings, the European Commission hired a foundation in Spain, and Thanda suggested to Nayra that she send her resume to contribute to these efforts. Thus, Thanda and Nayra collaborated on analyses and proposals, strengthening their complicity for justice and health, which grew alongside the spiritual depth of their feelings of union.

They met in Lima, La Paz, and Montevideo, hiding their love and with the complicity of "nose touches" and "winks." They met furtively at night in those corners of the world that became witnesses to their great love. Meanwhile, they advanced with the plans for their onyx institution for equity and connected with networks of allies to change the corrupt system of market and accumulation.

Nayra had been conversing with the father of her children the convenience of returning to Mexico, their native country. She asked Thanda if he could work there. Just in that year, the commission had decided to end its cooperation programs with "upper-middle-income countries" like Mexico. They decided to have their very likely last encounter at Christmas. Nayra returned to Brussels, and from there they traveled to another desired destination of Nayra's: Berlin. They went to see the bust of Nefertiti, as Nayra's father used to call her, whose resemblance to her was surprising in her linear but soft features, her dignified and upright neck, and her gaze between tender and firm. Attending a concert in the cathedral and whispering while the musicians tuned their strings, Thanda asked Nayra if her move to Mexico was definitive. Nayra told him it was. Thanda replied, despondently, that then *their life together would be impossible* for a long time. They spent a tender New Year's in Brussels, but Thanda couldn't shake the knot in his throat for *yet another farewell* with an uncertain horizon.

It seemed that there was no way to converge their lives other than in sporadic encounters when Nayra organized a meeting in Oaxaca, Mexico, for the health and migration group of the University of Berkeley. She thought it was an opportunity to see Thanda again and sensed that the magic of life could make them converge in that magical country she loved so much. She sent an invitation to the European Union for a commission representative to participate in the meeting and present the "global health policy and health equity challenges." She knew the invitation would reach Thanda, and it did.

It was February when Thanda arrived in Oaxaca and was fascinated by its colonial palaces, its cobbled streets, and its Zapotec indigenous population. Thanda had a special affection for Mexico since childhood: his mother's younger sister had emigrated there after falling in love with a Mexican man and refusing his mother's Maitetxu's fate. When Thanda received his first salary as a resident doctor, he bought a ticket for his mother, who traveled and reunited with her sister twenty years after her departure.

Nayra arranged a reservation for Thanda to stay at the Quinta Real hotel, the former monastery of Santa Catalina de Siena. Its four centuries of history seemed to make its imposing stone walls whisper thousands of adventures of settlers and indigenous people. Thanda fell in love with Mexico, its color, its kindness, its wealth of cultures, languages, customs, cuisine, craftsmanship, literature, *struggles... many of which were still pending*. Nayra then arrived with a group from Berkeley, and Thanda went to the airport to meet her again, once again concealing their love. They were able to sit together in the taxi that took them to the city, and once again their knees brushed as they had done a year before in Berkeley. They attended to their tasks and conferences, and at night it was Nayra who sneaked away from her group to another place in the city and arrived among the convent walls to blend, like Malinche, with the "Spanish conqueror."

After two days of meetings, Nayra returned to Berkeley. Thanda returned to Mexico City to report to the European Union delegation on the content of the meetings in Oaxaca. He was received by a young colleague named Kurt, who took him to a nice office, with a large table, a red sofa, and a window facing a lush meadow. Thanda talked to Kurt about his work in Brussels, first for health cooperation, then for the concept and metric of equity, and now for regional cooperation on social justice and health policies. Kurt said they needed someone like him in the delegation. The cooperation chief was on sick leave and had been repatriated to Brussels with almost certainty that he would not return to his position. They had a major social cohesion program, and the challenges of inequality and inequity in Mexico were immense. The office they were meeting in could be his. Thanda's heart skipped a beat.

Thanda returned to Brussels and asked the director for the region about that possible vacancy. For two months, he was told that the position had already been filled. He found out from Lluis, a good friend who was then the director of social policies, that it had been assigned to a Portuguese former senior government official under Barroso's presidency. That's how positions worked in Brussels, through friends and contacts. He began to realize this when he looked up the meaning of "lobby" when he passed his opposition. He insisted with the management and with the European ambassador in Mexico, and they agreed to interview him. He read everything he could about Mexico and cooperation, exploring new forms of cooperation with countries with sufficient resources but great inequalities. Apparently, he impressed the ambassador with his ideas and passion. So, he was selected for the position of head of cooperation of the European Union in Mexico. That evening, almost night, after the interview, he called Nayra, excited:

* I got the position in Mexico; you got your way!
* I knew it since I heard about the meeting in Oaxaca. Life is magical and always finds complicity with fearless love.
* Let's then be brave and start a family in a home.

Thanda made one last trip: he invited his daughters, his parents, his sisters, and nephews to a gathering on the island of Lanzarote, where forty years ago he had taken his first family trip with his parents. There, he told his father that his horizon was on the other side of the sea where a love and challenges awaited him to continue fighting for justice. His father, with deep tenderness and appreciation for his son's struggle for his ideas, gave him his daily prayer written knitly in a piece of paper he would forever keep. He said to him: "*follow your dreams son*, and remember every morning in your offering of love, that this is the first day of the rest of your life; and when you go to bed, offer *gratitude to the universe* for another page of adventures in the *book of your life*."

Thus, Thanda and Nayra, by the *whims of fate*, came together in Mexico, a country as troubled by injustices and violence as it is infused with a magic capable of the most sublime beauty. Like the one Thanda felt in the brave soul of his beloved companion, Nayra.

# Life emerges from the embers, as love reshapes itself. Eila, November 2013.

It had been fifteen moons since almost a third of Eila had been scorched by the intentional fire of heartless individuals. It was estimated that a billion insects from five thousand different species had perished in the flames, including two hundred million bees, ten million trees, and fifty million bushes of over nine hundred different species, fifty of them native. Also perished, suffering, were tens of thousands of reptiles and bats, including some unique species on the island like the small lizard and the golden lisa, along with around twenty thousand chickens, a thousand goats, three hundred cows, and two hundred horses. And one man.

John, faithful to his ship like a captain, was the only person to "wreck" in its flames. After his tribute, after laying down stones with messages from all over the world in Eila's embrace square, after resting while gazing through the twisted arms of a juniper tree on the south slope of Ternura valley, Umbela deeply felt his legacy and message, and like the thousands of eco-villagers on the island, they gave their souls to resurrect Eila from such cruel flames.

Umbela felt John's absence so profoundly that she was speechless for almost a year. She could only express herself with the sweetness of her hands and with hugs, often bathed in tears. She watched the sunrise, the sunset, and the stars, but everything seemed dim without the physical presence of her companion.

Fernando took John's place as the "server of all" and always wore his old sailor cap with a phrase: "always with you, friend." The weekly radio program with Patxi in Ukuzwana was renamed "reflections of Patxi and Fernando." Their legacy, inspired by Umbela's decalogue of social and natural harmony, banishing the market and its harm to nature, gave hope despite the immense damage and sense of orphanhood.

In the "common house of the eco-villages," they prepared a plan for "the *return to life*." Maintaining their tasks of "harmony in coexistence," "harmony in nature," "harmony in well-being," and "harmony in knowledge." They linked them all to heal the damage from the great fire.

Fernando designed the plan with his medical vision. As if the island were a patient with third-degree burns on more than a third of its surface, they knew that hydration was the most important and that the water cycle needed to flow more abundantly and, in more places, watering the island, filtering through its entrails, and relieving so much pain with the liquid of life. With Joseph's help and the 3D printers already in each eco-village, twenty wells were drilled, and another twenty windmills were built to circulate more water through grooves and channels across all the burned areas of the island. They then had to treat the burns by cleaning the dead tissue, restoring it with grafts, and stimulating tissue granulation. They used ashes as fertilizer, turned the partially burned trunk remains into active charcoal, and mixed them with seaweed from the sea to revitalize the soil. They redistributed pastures in graft forms and created nurseries in each eco-village with over three hundred thousand trees of the fifty endemic species on the island, according to heights and with special attention to diversity in Garajonay.

In less than six months and with the help of over two thousand volunteers from around the world who came to help "revive Eila's hope," they had planted over ten million native trees, two hundred fifty per Eileño, one per person per day. As they planted, they expressed a feeling that they wrote on a stone next to its sprout. The protected area of Garajonay extended even further, almost three-quarters of the island, perhaps exactly the opposite of what those who set fire to such a beautiful island intended.

They still had to treat the pain and prevent it from happening again. After the tribute to John, tributes were held all over the island for all forms of animal and plant life that returned as carbon to the earth in such a cruel, painful, and swift manner. The deceased animals were buried in different types of memory forests across the island. Stories were told of all the effort and collaboration of the Eileños and so many friendly collaborators who came to their aid. Poems and songs were composed, murals were painted, and the events were recounted in plays and mime performances.

Jonay's verses "There won’t be enough stars..." became an anthem that they often sang in memory of John and in the union of all to protect the treasure of life on that small island in the Atlantic, which was a beacon of hope for the New Humanity.

The best prevention against new attacks on life was to show that they not only did not falter in their dream but emerged strengthened, with more protected areas for Garajonay, more trees planted, more water circulating, more fertilizers, more volunteers, and more shared courage and tenderness.

Life continued to pulse in the eco-village of Ternura. Old Tomas could no longer sail and surrendered to his end. He passed away six months after the fire and requested that his body be delivered to the sea in a boat draped with his nets.

Fernando had gradually become solitary in his intimacy. Saidu accompanied him, with the affection of a son. Kadiatu worked for women's rights at the United Nations in New York, where she had romantically joined a Ghanaian diplomat. Lisy was active in the peasant network and completed her doctorate in agroecology at the University of Antioquia, in Colombia.

Fernando’s friend John no longer played the harmonica with him, and Fernando's guitar was gradually forgotten in a silent corner. He longed for warmth in intimacy that never came into his life. He thought that perhaps a broken heart never mends, and he resigned himself to live with that emptiness.

Yolanda and Juan Antonio intertwined their lives, and Martin finally felt peace with them. Together, they built a sailboat in Old Tomas's small shipyard and sailed together through the islands.

Martin and Saidu then developed a mutual attraction and embarked on another journey together to Freetown, where Saidu assisted in the country's reconciliation.

Umbela was seventy-six years old. The passage of time had turned her hair silver, which she tied in a ponytail and covered with a blue scarf gifted to her by Aimsa. So much life lived had left traces on her face. Her forehead barely had wrinkles, evidence that serenity had bathed most of her existence. With her eyebrows almost gone and her once long eyelashes, her honey eyes narrowed and surrounded by soft lines from so many sunsets. A gentle, flat nose traversed between cheeks flushed from so much fresh air and healthy food. Her light and sweet mouth made efforts to keep her arms toward the sky. That slight inclination only visited her, illuminating her face more than when a memory evoked her beloved John.

She received messages from all over the world about her decalogue, already translated into more than eighty languages, and applied to constitutions and laws like those of Eila, throughout the world. But she felt overwhelmed and uneasy when communicating with strangers, especially if they flattered her. She preferred to entrust Fernando with defending and improving the decalogue and slowly surrendered to the inertia of days and nights with the longing for John's embrace.

Often, she realized that her eyes moistened, and more and more those waves of longing for her partner merged with a deep feeling of gratitude and peace. It was a peace difficult to explain and even more to confess it was the acceptance of the slow transition to another dimension, where she was sure she would embrace John again.

During the first months after John's departure, Umbela hardly ate. Fernando was worried about her. Also, as his role as "server of all" required him to be closer to the "heart of Eila," he asked Umbela if he could stay with her. It was an excuse to be closer to her, ensure she ate well and took care of herself, and evoke together the memory of the companion and friend of those two lonely souls.

One afternoon, as time passed and the second Christmas without his physical presence approached, Umbela asked Fernando to accompany her to John's juniper tree to watch the sunset from there. She went almost every evening, but that evening she needed to go with Fernando.

John's juniper was one of the two hundred in that juniper grove where those who had passed to another dimension rested in their roots. It crowned the summit of the southern slope of Ternura valley. The northern winds that combed the peaks twisted the branches, which seemed to extend in a movement embracing the wind, dancing with the times.

* Fernando, yesterday John asked me about you.

Fernando, who was somewhat skeptical of the dimension of energy, and especially understanding it or communicating with it from the material dimension of living, said:

* How do you know, Umbela?
* I talk to him every day, Fernando. I listen to him without words, even more so when the winds whistle through his branches and leaves. I can almost tell you which leaves weren't there yesterday and how his energy expresses itself; it embraces me and waits for me.
* And what did he tell you, Umbela?
* He told me to thank you for coming with me, and to give me the hugs that he can't give me now with his skin, although his soul is in mine.

Fernando fell into thought. He felt great tenderness for Umbela. There was no one in Eila with such serene generosity. His reverence for her dissolved into seeing her as the faithful companion of his noble friend.

In the taboos of affection ownership, there would be those who, in the culture of fear norms, would consider it disloyal to embrace someone who was "their" partner. He remembered how John, and then Aimsa, spoke of oxytocin and its power of vital harmony, gently guiding cortisol to its circadian cycle between sunrises and sunsets, dancing softly with the days and nights.

Fernando had also suffered too much loneliness and too many, almost all of them, nights without the warm embrace of a soulmate's complicity. He remembered from his time in Sierra Leone how widows would move in with a brother of the deceased, avoiding loneliness like a black hole where the soul withered.

* I am honored by John's request for me to occupy such a beautiful space he left behind. But tell me, Umbela, what do you feel?
* That our embrace in the night will ease our loneliness and bring joy to John, who will always be in my being. Do you feel at peace with trying it, Fernando?
* To be honest, Umbela, it's hard for me to rid my mind of the concept of ownership of love. Even in our eco-villages, full of villagers determined not to live with shame or prejudices about love, mutual and exclusive fulfillment is an instinct that often-conditioned relationships.
* That's right, Fernando. That desire dominates our feelings, and often the fear of losing that "exclusivity" or not having it brings us sadness. Perhaps unrequited love is the greatest cause of suffering in humanity, and because of that fear, we want to secure it, tie it... and thus... we suffocate it...
* Well... let's accept it. We shouldn't blame ourselves for this selfish trait. We are *life seeking to perpetuate itself*. It happens in many mammals, perhaps because it was such a form of relationship in which the father was more responsible for protection and sustenance, the one with the highest survival...
* Whatever our nature, living out the last stage of life having your company, your embrace at night, and our memories with affection, nostalgia, and even humor of John, fills my soul with joy.

She extended her hand.

* And me, Umbela. I'll explain it to Jonay. And I'll speak in my own way with John. There's a space of fulfillment that will only be yours, I'll respect it as sacred. But living with you and giving each other affection brings a new light to my life. You don't know how long it's been since I felt a tender hug.

They walked back hand in hand to the little house, and on the porch, already seeing the stars, Fernando sang Jonay's song in honor of John, " there won’t be enough stars...". They slept embraced, feeling *immense peace*.

# Injustice Kingdom. Washington, may 2014

Nour turned eighteen and decided to embark on a journey along the American Discovery Trail with Rasta: five thousand kilometers spanning fourteen national parks and sixteen national forests. While Nour was flying high in her newfound adulthood, galloping with Rasta across this marvelous yet unjustly chained country, Jonay and Aimsa spent a week at Bob's apartment in Brooklyn, who was away on a trip to Cuba. They reunited with neighborhood friends and with Sam, the elderly dog who only ventured into the garden for a few minutes before retreating to long dreams in the kitchen, where many conversations wove dreams and spun adventures.

Jonay was invited to give lectures at Georgetown University, on the outskirts of Washington DC, organized by Larry Gostin. He spoke about the pain caused by patents on AIDS medications. Impressed by his experience and ethical coherence, he was later invited to debates on "Obamacare," the flagship policy of the Obama administration. The law, passed by the US Congress in March 2010, stated that "all Americans must have health insurance and those who cannot afford it must receive monetary assistance." As the final touch of the meeting, President Obama gave a speech, announcing that the goal had been exceeded, and the program had managed to insure seven million previously uninsured people. When the debate opened, Jonay asked:

* Mr. Obama, my name is Jonay. Thank you for your efforts in healthcare in this country. But I must tell you that the situation worries me: Although the law facilitates access to health insurance for 2% of the population, ten million remain uninsured and another twelve million undocumented migrants lack access.
* Jonay, I understand your frustration, but we must take it step by step. Each of these seven million people can now sleep more peacefully, pursue their dreams without the fear that an illness could take away their home or life because they can't afford treatment.

Jonay pondered the American illusion of "pursuit of happiness," the only right, alongside the right to bear arms, in the American constitution.

* And I applaud your efforts in this regard. We know that in this country, some lack any sensitivity to this anguish and consider that, under the wild law of the market, those who fail to achieve their 'happiness' don't deserve it. But aside from the many millions of people still left stranded, whom I urge you to also consider, including the migrants who work the fields and care for their elders, the privileged who do have access to the insurance system you defend still end up paying parts of the bill, often those who can least afford it, and frequently facing catastrophic expenses for their lives and their families.

The president's advisors murmured something to Larry, who wanted to move on to other questions, but Obama insisted on continuing the conversation with Jonay:

* We have also fought to exclude policies for pre-existing conditions or risk factors. We are, Jonay, controlling the market and the profit motive so that our healthcare, the most advanced in the world, reaches more and more Americans.
* I insist, Mr. Obama, your progress has only covered a quarter of those who need to be insured, and only covers half of their healthcare expenses. Surely the most economically powerful and scientifically advanced country, which sends missions to Mars, can do more for its people and include those who come to this country to work honestly and contribute to it. I believe you are wrong to support a market system of insurance, providers, and pharmaceutical companies, controlled by billionaires, instead of preventing the market's claws from playing with people's health.

At that moment, Obama's tone changed. He felt questioned in his logical argument. His supposed solidarity action was being attacked with "socialist" arguments, the red line for anyone with any power in the country of "freedom" (to enrich oneself). Moreover, those large insurers, providers, and pharmaceutical companies had supported his campaign, and that of the Republicans, which although it had the facade of citizen contributions, hid important and unavoidable servitudes to capital.

* In our country, we believe in freedom, Jonay. Within that freedom is the freedom to educate oneself, invest, innovate, and offer services, and to receive just rewards for it. That's why we have hospitals and doctors with more resources and knowledge to advance human knowledge, from which the rest of humanity eventually benefits.
* I don't want to monopolize the privilege of discussing with you, Mr. Obama, but let me make two final points: that supposed space for the free market that allows progress in the frontiers of human knowledge and well-being is questionable: almost all advances in knowledge have come from laboratories with public money and young researchers with humble scholarships. It is the desire to contribute to the common good that moves humanity, a thousand times more than the desire for individual enrichment.

Obama once again prevented Larry from stopping Jonay's harassment and said to him:

* And what do you propose, Jonay?"
* Don't let the claws of the market play with people's health and lives anymore. It comes at a cost: on average, every American pays ten thousand dollars a year in health insurance and direct payments to providers and pharmaceutical companies, often catastrophic, three thousand of which are through taxes. Such a cost, five times that of the European Union, translates to four fewer years of life expectancy. A friend of mine conducted a study estimating eight hundred thousand excess deaths compared to survival rates in the European Union. This system dominated by the business of insurers, providers, and pharmaceutical companies comes with a price. The excess of unnecessary expenses goes into the pockets of those who negotiate with life. Calculating the excess in relation to Europe, it amounts to eight thousand dollars per person, a business of two and a half trillion. And let's relate it to the unnecessary loss of life I mentioned earlier. The result is chilling, Mr. Obama: for every unnecessary, preventable, and unjust death in this country, someone is earning three million dollars, the budget of the twenty years I worked on the Ukuzwana mission in Zimbabwe, during which we treated two hundred thousand patients. But you know what? In that time, we couldn't prevent the deaths of more than thirty thousand young people from AIDS because the patents of pharmaceutical companies, which also profit in this blood market in the United States and around the world, continued to enrich themselves. I urge you to end this horror, ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and close Guantanamo. You promised it in your campaign; you no longer need anyone for another reelection. Leave that brave mark on history.

Obama looked stern, but at the same time, there was a slight shadow of emotion. He knew Jonay was largely right, but his hands were very tied in the White House, more than what people knew, and even more so than what Julian's WikiLeaks, Aimsa's friend, and the revelations of another brave voice of truth, a "whistleblower" to the powerful, Snowden, could reveal.

* I'll think about it, Jonay.

He whispered something to Larry, who said the president had urgent matters awaiting him at the White House.

Larry told Jonay:

* You almost broke up the meeting and had my school shut down, but Obama was moved; he told me he wants to talk to us soon.

A group of people surrounded Jonay. Among them was a man with a tired yet sharp gaze like an eagle, who said to him in a very soft voice:

* I'm Noam Chomsky. I liked what you said about 'It is the desire to contribute to the common good that moves humanity”.
* That's my conviction. And that anarchy is the most natural way to share in kindness. You have inspired me a lot, Noam.
* What your father did in Eila is wonderful. Are you coming with me now to the meeting Aimsa invited me to?

A few hundred meters from Georgetown, at the home of Grace, a friend of Doctors Without Borders, Aimsa had coordinated with her Australian friend Julian Assange, founder of WikiLeaks, who was sheltered in the Ecuadorian embassy in London, a call to a young man named Edward Snowden, in a secret location in Russia. Both knew well how to ensure that this call could not be heard by anyone. Noam and Jonay arrived and sat with the three around the computer, which with an encrypted program allowed the security of the call.

Aimsa explained to Noam and Jonay her analysis: Edward had been an analyst at a company called Ball Hallton, from which he managed to penetrate the National Security Agency and had thousands of documents that, due to their perversion, he felt ethically obliged to denounce, as Julian had been doing for several years, especially regarding American abuses in the Iraq war.

The Ball Hallton company had become an unprecedented axis of power. The main owner was the Carlyle Group, which also controlled hundreds of health insurers, telecommunications companies, advertising, banks, insurance, cybersecurity, and more and more, arms. It employed nearly seven hundred thousand people in about eighty strategic countries where they had developed a policy of financial circuits where the private and the public were barely distinguishable. In the networks of perversion and pain that Aimsa, with the help of Haka, had been drawing and analyzing for the last twenty years, Carlyle was like magma permeating everything. Speculating on financial and economic crises, Carlyle acquired Pinalvest, a super-asset management platform to buy capital shares in markets at risk and with ongoing social problems, to profit from the misery and tragedy of hundreds of millions. Most American politicians participated in the group's profits.

The director of Carlyle was Darrell Runstein, a billionaire who had hired former secretaries of defense and directors of the National Security Agency and the Central Intelligence Agency, the feared CIA, of the last thirty years, and presidents like the Republican Americans George Bush, Ronald Reagan, and the Englishman John Major. With this, he had been penetrating the Department of Defense, allying with other giants like Lockheed, Northrop, and the California Integrated Analysis Center that Aimsa knew from her time in Berkeley. Among other things, they had been dedicated to training and sending interrogators to Iraq, some of whom Julian had demonstrated were torturing in the Iraqi prison of Abu Ghraib.

Through their network, they had obtained contracts worth more than three billion dollars, including sensitive interception programs for telecommunications across the Internet. Their influence magma was expanding like Orwell's Big Brother.

Julian asked Aimsa:

* Aimsa, can you tell us your impression of how this whole system works? We disclose documents, but the networks of perversion, as you call them, are too complex.
* I cannot know all of it. But analyzing what Edward, you have had the courage to make public, the system largely controlled by Carlyle through Ball Hallton resembles a human brain in evolution, especially in the prefrontal region. There are tens of thousands of centers and connections that respond to a dozen major controllers and dominate consciousness, government, to a point where this and the system that controls it are the same thing. In fact, corporations like Carlyle no longer separate their private budgets from the public ones, except when it comes to profits. Their pyramidal structures and command channels integrate government control, citizen control, institutional control, and administration of the large collective database. It is truly Big Brother.

At that moment, Noam asked:

* Has all this complex network influenced the sale of weapons by the United States and its impact on geopolitics, especially the epicenter of wars and interests in the Gulf?
* During the Obama administration, and his shiny Nobel Peace Prize, his Secretary of State Clinton voted yes to Bush's resolution for the war in Iraq, defended the coup in Honduras, promoted the invasion of Libya, and applauded the killing of Gaddafi. She also increased arms exports to the highest level in U.S. history, which already accounted for three-quarters of all arms sales in the world. A large portion of American weapons were destined for the Gulf, specifically Saudi Arabia, one of the countries with the most human rights abuses, where women are still stoned to death for suspected extramarital relations. The Saudi regime is bombing Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, massacring civilian populations, hospitals, schools, and neighborhoods without scruples, as well as any manifestation or insurgency of the Arab Spring. As a reward for business, the United States promoted Saudi Arabia's presidency in the United Nations Human Rights Council. It's hard to imagine greater hypocrisy.

Noam, very sensitive to these issues after fifty years of analyzing American geopolitics, complemented the analysis:

* Saudi Arabia, its sheikhs and caliphs on the peninsula, continue, as Aimsa rightly pointed out, to follow the most radical interpretations of Islam. They ignore those interpretations that do not serve their capitalist interests. They finance jihadist groups operating in Syria, including ISIS. As one of your cables revealed, Julian, then-candidate Clinton, facing Obama, accepted Saudi Arabia as "the most significant source of funding for Sunni terrorist groups worldwide." But once in power, she justified arms sales by saying it was "good for global security." The Saudi weapons sold by Americans, purchased with oil money that chokes the world in smoke, bombard civilians clamoring for freedom and justice. Furthermore, the United States, under the guise of the "responsibility to protect" principle, invaded Iraq during Bush's tenure, with current Vice President Biden complicit from the Senate, and Libya and Syria under Obama and Clinton. With this Saudi alliance, the United States controls oil prices, maintains the threat to Iran, and protects Israel, sacred land for over a third of Wall Street's capital.

Julian interjected:

* There should be, Aimsa, a map of the major lies: after the lie about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, which cost two hundred thousand civilian lives, Libya was invaded supposedly to protect the population of Benghazi, who, according to the United States, was going to be "massacred" by Gaddafi, something we learned from revealed documents to be false. These are not just lies; they are "factories of false truths" to justify inconfessable interests. The power of manipulation is immense.

Aimsa emphasized:

* And for that matter, large bombings are not necessary, which have rather become a business for the military industry. The end of Gaddafi came from an American drone controlled from Las Vegas combined with two French jets attacking the vehicles, all with information systems facilitated by the Carlyle Group. Drones have also been sent to Yemen and Pakistan. Remote killings by drones have become a normalized practice under Nobel laureate Obama.

Noam, of Jewish origin and deeply ashamed of the constant massacre of the Palestinian people with American weapons, added:

Obama, with Clinton, justified the recent Israeli bombings against Gaza, which have massacred over two thousand five hundred Palestinians with no possible escape from a rain of bombs.

Julian told them, with a sense of anguish:

* Lies and violence rule over truth and peace today. Edward and I, along with many others worldwide, denounce the intrigues and lies of power and are persecuted for it. Networks are being organized to expose the system's major lies, like the group Anonymous, which attacks political and economic institutions of power, revealing their shame. Of course, they have been removed from major social media networks, in service to power and the CIA. Joe Biden, vice president under Obama, extended the death sentence to crimes of "espionage and treason," of which they accuse us.

At that moment, Jonay couldn't bear more sadness, and seeing that Grace had a guitar on a chair, he asked for permission and sang a song he had composed in memory of the recent, yet another, massacre in Gaza:

Thirteen hundred died.

Trapped in the prison of hatred.

Children, mothers, and all

Scream their despair helplessly.

While we watch them fade away

We are silent witnesses.

Simply counting the dead

Who dares to sleep in peace?

And if I sing like this

It's because my soul.

Feels the pain so deeply.

In the Gaza Strip...

A mother wanders.

Among pain, destruction, and cries

She hears her child's cry.

Finds him covered in blood...

She screams desperately for help.

But the bombs silence her cry.

Both embrace in agony.

While we all watch them die...

And if I sing like this

It's because my soul.

Feels the pain so deeply.

In the Gaza Strip...

Everything was carefully planned.

In the dark rooms of power

Excuses, dates, and victims

Now they call it a success.

Why don't we stop the wars?

Unite people, beliefs, and hands.

Abandon greed, live in peace.

I know we can...

Aimsa was moved hearing her soul companion sing and remembered how the hope of Obama's poetic speeches had faded away, and that country continued to be, dominated by a few, the machine of terror and greed that drowned so many corners of the world in pain, with so many allies, and above all, silent accomplices.

# Solidarity Eco-village. Madrid, July 2014

Adam had been living in Madrid for three years already. He lived happily with Moyes and María in Thanda's house in Robledo. They had fixed up the little clown house, and Adam moved in there. With the help of Thanda's firefighter friends, they repaired the old and beautiful Arabic tile roofs marked by shadows and moss over time, knocked down walls to create large communal spaces, and broke through the low plaster ceilings to allow air and light to circulate up to the wooden coffered ceiling and its strong beams.

They maintained there the headquarters of the "Spanish Association of Cooperating Doctors," now expanded to include all cooperators. They received visits and stays from cooperators from many corners of the world who shared their stories and aspirations. They also often shared their frustrations about returning to a society obsessed with consumption. Without time for romantic stories of solidarity and dreams of a world without the fences of properties and countries.

In the garden, they put a small stable where two mares that a neighbor, Rafa, and a herd of sheep from the Caro brothers, had given them slept. They had a chicken and duck pen, a vegetable garden with various vegetables and tubers, fruit trees of apples, peaches, pears, plums, and quince, a greenhouse, and a workshop.

Unai decided, inspired by Nour, to leave his studies and learn from life, travels, and the people he met along the way. In the workshop, he was building an ultralight aircraft modeled after Enyoni. He also got to know Javier. He was a good friend and Thanda's firefighting companion. They rode the two mares through royal trails and paths through the mountains and climbed peaks in the Sierra de Guadarrama, Navacerrada, La Pedriza, and Patones. Often, they rode to the San Juan reservoir, where they dismounted and climbed the rugged limestone walls and bathed in the reservoir with the mares after descending. One night, Javier took him to climb the Pico de la Miel, in the Sierra de La Cabrera, without ropes and under the full moon.

The previous summer, a fire had ravaged almost a thousand hectares of the Santa Catalina Mountain. Adam was preparing pine shoots, junipers, holm oaks, elms, and other endemic trees in the greenhouse. During the spring, he had planted almost five thousand shoots with the help of Unai, Ángeles, Daniela, Moyes, María, and sometimes some university friends and an organization he got along with called Ecologists in Action.

One afternoon, on his long train journeys back from the university, he saw a church tower in ruins that seemed to call out to him in the sunset. He got off at Las Zorreras station and walked to those ruins. They belonged to an abandoned village called Navalquejigo.

To the right, there was an asphalt road leading to a residential development of large houses. To the left, there was a path almost consumed by brambles. About three hundred meters away, he found a pillory next to what could have been the platform of a gallows, and he felt a shiver. He imagined cruel times when people were executed for not submitting to the king or the church and their heads were displayed on that column. He was somewhat relieved to see next to it a stone fountain and basin where surely water had been collected for many generations. About three hundred meters further south was the ruined Romanesque church. He climbed up to the bell tower and saw the Valmayor reservoir. He could recognize in the surroundings of the square the remains of a dairy farm, a stable, a blacksmith's forge, and a bullring, originally a council corral, ruined houses of medieval origin, some with a well, oven, stables, hayloft, and vegetable garden, and a larger house with a sign that read "The Castle". Nearby, he could hear a stream and saw a stone bridge crossing it. He was amazed among the ruins, dreaming of an eco-village where they would welcome cooperators and share their experiences with groups of schoolchildren, to hear stories different from those of progress, consumption, and competition that dominated everything.

When he returned home, he told Moyes, María, and Unai about what he had discovered, and they wrote a message to Thanda, who now lived with Nayra in Mexico.

Thanda put them in contact with her good friend Fernando Cardenal, an eighty-year-old doctor with immense enthusiasm, who, after a lifetime working in Africa, had gotten involved in the cooperators' association with great wisdom and humility. He lived in a village near Navalquejigo and looked into the archives of the El Escorial town hall, which was then presided over by a brave and libertarian mayor named Lorenzo. With Joan and Anna, they took the Cooperators' Association project to the Senate, where they only received good words.

Ceramic remains from the Roman era and a paved road that connected with the *Cañada[[1]](#footnote-1) Real Segoviana* were found in the area. In the XXIIIth century, the church was built with dorian columns and pointed arches. It was a place for farmers and then a hunting lodge, a refuge for corrupt politicians, a stopover for King Philip II on his travels to the Monastery of El Escorial, and even witnessed battles during Napoleon's invasion.

Fifty years earlier, the wealthy Arroyo brothers bought it to speculate with holiday homes for the Madrid bourgeoisie. As Lorenzo in the Town Hall managed to have the village declared a Site of Cultural Interest, demanding a restoration in its original form, not profitable for real estate speculation, it was left to its fate, with only one neighbor remaining until the end of the century. Since he died fifteen years earlier, the village had been abandoned.

They were the four of them along with Fernando, and they drew up a plan: it consisted of nine hectares that stretched to the north shore of the Valmayor reservoir. All the buildings were in ruins, with collapsed roofs and some with barely one wall standing. They counted fourteen small houses ranging from eighty to one hundred square meters in floor area, the "castle" with three hundred square meters, the Church, and the town hall with two hundred square meters each, and the bullring with a diameter of forty meters. Almost all the land was covered with brambles, rockroses, and broom, with an area of holm oak and ash forest.

Adam devised a project: a "solidarity eco-village". They could rebuild the temple and turn it into a place of spirituality without "commandments." The town hall could be a large meeting room where *cooperants* (international volunteers) shared their experiences with groups of schoolchildren. They imagined the bullring as an agora for debating ideas, performing theater, and sharing music. They thought of the castle as a residence with a library and common dining room for cooperants in transit when leaving or returning from their missions. The fourteen houses could be given to migrants and homeless people. Pascual thought they would have their living space on the upper floor and their work of kitchens and crafts from different corners of the world, on the ground floors. Through Umbela and Fernando, they were establishing a beautiful complicity and communication with Martin in Eila and designing an eco-village just half an hour from Madrid. They needed to study water supply and fertilizers for the fields, and energy and communication for the houses. Hence, they would need to build a dam, install a hydraulic ram that pumped water to some cisterns to irrigate the fields, and reach deep waters with a windmill for drinking water. They studied the land, very dry, alkaline, and chalky. It needed nutrients and especially microorganisms. They devised a dairy and horse stables to graze in meadows that would rotate with crops. They also planned a system of biodigesters, biogas, and fertilizers for four hectares of vegetables, tubers, fruit trees, and legumes.

It was his fourth year of biology at the university, so he submitted a thesis proposal for a self-sovereign ecosystem. In addition to being self-sufficient for ten families in food and energy, they would invite guests and schools. They would preserve fauna and flora. They would regenerate soils, waters, and biodiversity. They would prohibit, as in Eila, the passage of vehicles, the entry of plastics, cruelty against animals, and the use of money. Visitors could contribute with volunteer work or by sharing their stories and skills. Adam sent it to Anna, in Barcelona, who was then president of the association of cooperants in Spain, presented it, and it was approved by the Board to finance the purchase of the land from the speculator and the initial materials for the ram, solar panels, submerged pump, windmill, and stones and tiles. They estimated that buying the materials would cost half a million euros, the price of a small apartment in Madrid at the time.

Anna went with Adam to present the "village of cooperants" project to a senate committee in Madrid, to the cooperation agency, to the El Escorial town hall, and to various foundations and NGOs. All showed their interest and told them they would study it and respond, but they never received any response or support.

It was the summer of 2014. Along with Adam and Unai, Moyes and María, Fernando and Pascual, Thanda and Nayra arrived at the Robledo house from Mexico, and Anna and Cristina from Barcelona, Sergio from Ibiza. They connected with Jonay and Aimsa in White Lake, with Thandiwe, Joseph, and Nothando in Ukyzwana, and with Fernando in Eila. Adam laid out the situation:

* On one hand, we are challenged by the lack of facilities to start a project that we see as coherent with our ideas, with the network of eco-villages, the care for nature, and a new dimension of villages in empathy, through the cooperants.

Thanda replied.

* That's right, Adam, but without buying the property, we cannot start the project. John always insisted on maintaining the balance between sovereignty and respect and compliance with the norms, of property, taxes, and others, of the society around us.

Adam continued:

* Yes. And that will always be our intention. We could go on paying in installments with contributions from schools and visitors.

Unai, more rebellious, spoke up:

* But we have a dilemma: inspired by Eila, the village of cooperants would have no owners, no deeds, and would escape the logic of selling and buying land, water, and life.

In that approach, Moyes, fighting against evictions, proposed:

* And what if we are brave and move in without ownership permissions? Wouldn't we be more consistent with the ideas we believe in?

The younger ones were suggesting becoming "squatters," a growing urban movement across Europe. Groups of people without another available home would settle in houses owned by others and claim their right to remain in those homes, redundant to their owners. Many of the empty houses belonged to wealthy individuals with multiple properties or even speculative banks that had evicted those who couldn't pay their mortgages, as Moyes and María well knew.

At that moment, Fernando intervened:

* I am already eighty years old, Adam. Even with the ideas of sharing everything and taking care of the land and life, there are many people who work hard for it from their childhood. Studying, collaborating in social movements, looking for a job serving others, and even proposing social, scientific, artistic, and political ideas. Many of these people sweat their effort and receive a modest living in return. They pay their taxes to society. They might have disagreements, but they think they should contribute for what it gives them in well-being, in security, to them, and to others. It's supportive and fair.
* I understand you, Fernando, but if society becomes so perverse that it destroys nature and distributes its resources in a way that accumulates in a few, as is currently the case: is it legitimate to break with the system and ignore its unjust laws and its corrupt rulers?

Thanda then intervened.

* Yes, Adam, although it would be difficult since most of the land is privately owned, subject to the market. If you take over private lands, the 'law enforcement' will have you evicted or taken to court, and there will be those who say that such lands were obtained with the sweat of generations of work.

Unai said anxiously.

* So, what do you propose we do? Do we abandon the dream? Where is our courage?

At that moment, Nayra intervened:

* I believe that community ethics consists of working for the common good, of the community and of the surrounding society. If so, then there are traditions with strong ethical arguments that the land should be cared for but owned by no one: this is the case with the ejidos in Mexico, since the times of the revolution. I propose that we talk to the mayor of El Escorial so that, since Navalquejigo has been declared a site of cultural interest, it can be expropriated from its current speculative owners and being communal lands, be granted to a project like the village of cooperants.

At that moment, María intervened:

* We have already tried in El Escorial with several evictions, even that of a shelter for abused women. But the city council doesn't have savings but rather debts, with the same banks.

Thanda intervened:

* In addition to your beautiful plan, Adam, I'm going to prepare you a project in the style of the European Union, with all the 'jargon' and 'game' of format, logical framework, organigram, timeline, and budget. I will help you to present the idea in a 'politically correct' manner in terms of environment, gender, minorities, rights approach, and even innovation. We will send it to all the NGOs in Spain and Europe, and perhaps we will convince the mayor that the schools and visitors can contribute funds to gradually amortize the expropriation in a few years.

And so, they did.

The following month, they managed to get Ecologists in Action to present it to the European Union's "development awareness" call, where it was selected and funded. The city council expropriated it for public use and granted it to the project. It was coordinated by Adam and Unai and began its activities in July 2014.

It was equivalent to a small neighborhood of an eco-village, which at least needed four hundred of its members to be self-sustainable. It was surrounded by luxury developments that soon began to protest the intrusion among their lush mansions of "hippies." They saw as a "denial of progress" the fact that they ate what they grew and not what they "*civilizedly should buy in supermarkets*”.

But everyone, especially Thanda, Jonay, and Fernando, felt that the challenge was beautiful. They saw in it the image of reverberating the pollinating effect of cooperation in the society of origin. They saw how demystifying the "templars" of modern cooperation and hearing from their humble testimonies, the consumer society could learn from the marginalized countries of the power circles. In addition, the eco-village would be about a half-hour train ride from a major European city.

Cities, crowned by the vision of "development and modernity," were, for Thanda, black holes of consumption, self-complacency, and the breakdown of ecological balances. Moreover, she felt that in cities, mutual empathy between nature and humans was atrophying. They thought that the eco-village of cooperants could also be an example to courageously propose to the wealthy vacationers, many of them belonging to the elites of economic and political power.

So began that beautiful dream. First, they selected who would be part of the community. Moyes and María would continue taking care of Casa Garay in Robledo, where they already had a network of about twenty houses to start animating an eco neighborhood, while the forest of Santa Catalina grew anew.

Adam and Unai, inseparable, would go to the eco-village of cooperants. Pascual volunteered and encouraged three homeless people from Santa María de la Paz, one Moroccan, one Ecuadorian, and one Romanian. Two university colleagues with their partners joined the project, and two families with children, one from Bolivia and one from Mali, also asked to be part of the project, in addition to a former Augustinian religious from San Lorenzo de El Escorial. In total, there would be about twenty people to start the project that would welcome the cooperants. Thanda estimated, based on her experience in Robledo, that around eighty cooperants would spend time there during the year, sharing their experiences and landing or taking off towards new "missions".

They began by building a warehouse for materials and supplies, where they stored Arab tiles, ashlar stones, cement, lime, plaster, wood, and Talavera tiles. They then built some stables where they brought six cows and two oxen, and another with four mares and two horses, which they trained in the bullring. The next step was a biodigester to obtain energy for the kitchens. This allowed them not only to fertilize the fields and obtain biogas but also to start the routine at dawn of milking the cows, collecting the manure, and appreciating the cycle of everything in nature.

They then built a dam at the northern end of the Valmayor reservoir and obtained the plans for an electric ram through open source, which Unai gradually assembled. It became the "heart" of the dream: with no other energy than the pressure of the water's gradient, the ram pumped water to the cisterns with a similar cadence and mechanism to how the ventricles pump blood in the human body. With the tanks full of water and animal manure, they began preparing three hectares with the oxen pulling the plow, where they planted potatoes and sweet potatoes, corn and beans, pumpkins, sesame, many types of vegetables and fruit trees, as well as caves with mushrooms and other types of fungi. The next step was to rebuild the town hall, with a large hall and fireplace where they gathered for assembly meetings and made decisions.

They rehabilitated "the castle" and its six rooms and living room with fireplace and kitchen for the cooperants who began to stay there and share their memories, ideas, and proposals for a world without borders.

# The humblest giving. From Cuba to Sierra Leone, November 2014

Buhleve, Elias and Haka-Sibindi, who was called "Hasi," had been living in the popular council of Escambray, in the city of Santa Clara, for four years.

Elias had returned to his position as an internist at the Celestino Hernández clinical surgical hospital. He was born three years after the triumph of the revolution, 45 years ago in the town of Santa Clara, in the center of Cuba. That year, with the revolutionary fervor that led to the literacy campaign and the victory against the United States mercenaries at Playa Girón, the communist party was created as a "mediator between the people and the State" and an expression of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" proposed by Marx. In its first congress, "the vanguard" was selected, "mass" organizations were created, the "Granma" news outlet was established, the "central committee" was constituted, and it was given the utmost power in the country. Meanwhile, armed groups under CIA direction and trained in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, committed violent acts throughout the country. Elias's parents, from humble families, were involved in the revolutionary movements. They participated together, with Elias's mother pregnant with him, in the literacy campaign teaching humble adults in the east. They advanced in their studies of mathematics and history in research centers and various institutes. Elias grew up in the education of pioneers towards the "new man" that Che Guevara dreamed of over whom no forms of domination would weigh nor be an instrument of other men, in a horizontal relationship of solidarity and no longer in the vertical one of dependency.

Eulalio, Elias's father, was a comrade of Che in the liberation of Santa Clara. He soon felt disenchanted by the authoritarian attitudes of the party and its vanguard over what Fidel called "the masses." He felt that the economic power hierarchy of Batista and the mafias of the United States was being replaced by another hierarchy. Although it was noble in ideas of distributing wealth and solidarity with the peoples of the world, it was a hierarchy after all, with leaders, vanguard, and "mass" that had to follow the slogans and direction of the "enlightened." However, although he did not share those forms, this did not cloud the background of ethical ideas in a world where the capital of large companies dominated the lives of most of the world's people. Eulalio wanted to contribute, through his studies of mathematics, to the process of emancipation proposed by Che. This path would lead man to achieve his full human condition when he could meet his needs with a lesser portion of his effort and thus avoid selling himself as a commodity. Elias began to walk, symbolically, in the year that Che went to Africa. Two years later, Che went to Bolivia where he would be assassinated, and with him, Eulalio thought, the dream of the utopia of kindness without hierarchies.

Elias studied in the children's circle and then in the Marcelo Salado primary school, where he integrated, like all his classmates, into the José Martí pioneers organization with the motto "pioneers for communism, we will be like Che." As part of the ritual, he climbed Pico Turquino upon finishing his primary studies. He continued his studies at the basic secondary school Capitán Roberto Rodríguez, in honor of the peasant guerrilla, a comrade of his father and Che, who was prepared to attack the then police headquarters, later the school that bore his name, the day before the revolution triumphed when he was fatally wounded. There, he met Nélida, whom he soon fell in love with.

Elias was imbued with the ideas of the revolution and felt the pride and warrior ardor of facing, from a small island, the American empire. The dignity of expropriating lands and factories from multinational companies was paid with the embargo of the country on which the economy had depended a few years earlier. These ideas were well seasoned with the welfare that the powerful Soviet Union allowed to maintain its communist bastion on the shores of Uncle Sam. Cubans alleviated the tropical heat with Órbita fans, washed clothes with Aurika washing machines, saw the world through TVC 388 televisions, and preserved food in Soviet refrigerators. The vanguard and the distinguished internationalists were rewarded with a Lada car, often personally delivered by Fidel.

Elias was able to study medicine at the Faculty of Medicine in Santa Clara and specialize in Internal Medicine. He strongly felt the noble ideas of social equality from the revolution and was a leader of the University Student Federation in Santa Clara. Soon, the Special Period arrived with Gorbachev's Perestroika (Transparency) and shortly after, the collapse of the Soviet Union. Cuba, almost the only country that clung to the socialist system, rejected any temptation to fall into the clutches of the market.

The dependency on the socialist bloc was revealed as oil, machinery, food, and even many essential medicines ran out. The nights in Santa Clara were almost completely dark, fresh water was scarce, and transportation was on heavy Chinese bikes called "Forever." But amid so much hardship, humor and celebrations of any reunion, melody, and whatever was available to feed on prevailed.

Elias told Buhle how dignity, as well as imagination and humor, kept most Cubans committed to the egalitarian ideas of the revolution, even in conditions of scarcity. The homes of Cubans turned into workshops for thousands of types of inventions. With sodium bicarbonate, still produced in Cuba with the over one hundred-year-old Belgian Solvay method, Cubans made toothpaste with salt and deodorants with alcohol, still emanating from the surviving sugar mills. With old Aurika washing machine motors, they made homemade fans. They built "riquimbilis," bicycles to which they attached lawnmower engines. They made water heaters with cans, wood, and wires; artisanal oil lamps with a toothpaste tube in the center of a glass jar, a wick, and oil, and even television antennas with two metal trays, tied to a wooden T.

Despite such need, universal and free education and health care heroically continued, and doctors, nurses, and teachers were still sent all over the world. At the end of the Special Period, the Latin American School of Medicine was founded to finance any young person with a passion for being doctors for the poor from any corner of the world, including the United States.

Then came the brotherhood between Fidel and Chavez, and the "rescue" of the Cuban economy, as theoretically dignified as it was dependent, by Maracaibo oil. To try to suffocate the Cuban communist economy, the United States and later the European Union, pushed by Aznar in the shadow of Bush against any threat to market hegemony, tightened the blockade, and the island was also left without credits. Even with Democrat Clinton, between the terms of Bush father and Bush son, the embargo became law. After Cuba mercilessly shot down the Miami Brothers to the Rescue planes invading its airspace and dropping slogans along the Havana Malecón, the blockade conditions were tightened.

It was in those times that Elias joined the brigade of internationalists for Zimbabwe and there met the love of his life, Buhleve. When they returned as a family, it coincided with the handover from a weakened Fidel to his brother Raúl and the timid opening to the private sector, almost exclusively oriented towards tourism. Elias felt pain seeing the contrast of tourism with the humble conditions of the dollar-less Cuban, which were sometimes obscene. A half-hour ride in the luxurious taxis from the American dream of the 1950s cost more than a month's salary of any doctor.

While Elias was returning to his position, Buhleve became interested in getting to know the Latin American School of Medicine. Symbolically, the city of humble youths from over a hundred countries around the world who were studying to become doctors out of solidarity, not for status or privilege, replaced the Naval Academy. Doctors instead of soldiers, life instead of death. An old colleague of Elias was a professor at the Latin American School of Medicine and invited Buhleve to visit. Buhleve was amazed by the melting pot of cultures and languages, all intertwined around the noble goal of alleviating suffering without asking for anything in return. She met with a group of thirty Ndebele and Shona youths from Zimbabwe who were studying there. The rector welcomed her and mentioned that her book "Where There Is No Specialist" was known among the students of the Latin American School of Medicine and the Cuban medical brigades in many countries around the world. Buhleve expressed her enthusiasm to collaborate with the Latin American School of Medicine by training young people from all over the world on how, often with limited resources, to give the best of their knowledge and especially their heart to people and communities in the most remote and forgotten situations from the centers controlling global knowledge and resources.

A few months later, she received a formal appointment from the ministry of public health as a professor at the Latin American School of Medicine and prepared the content for two subjects. The first, which she would teach in the first year, was called "the health diagnosis of the community," based on the method that Jonay, NoLwasi, and Anwele had used twenty years earlier in Bulililamangwe. Then, she prepared another subject for the final year, called "dignified medicine with limited resources," based on her book "Where There Is No Specialist." In addition, she would help the young Ndebele students learn Spanish in the preparatory course.

Meanwhile, Hasi attended the childcare center "May the Sun Always Shine." With the onset of the revolution in Cuba and the adult literacy campaign in which Hasi's Cuban grandparents participated, childcare centers were established where housewives, workers, and peasant girls coming to study at the university volunteered their time to impart love and knowledge to children in language, mathematics, physical education, music, and visual arts. There was something in the daily routine unrelated to money that left a space Buhleve felt as light and freedom. Solidarity, volunteer work, and contributing to noble causes without expecting anything in return were seen at every corner. Buhleve felt a deep resonance with the ideas of her beloved Ukuzwana.

To teach her subject "*dignified medicine with limited resources*," she had to travel across all provinces of Cuba since students from the Latin American School of Medicine were integrated from the third year into the health system throughout the country. She discovered the marvelous tropical landscape stretching over a thousand kilometers from east to west and especially the jovial and affectionate character of its people, although often men confused affection with intimacy, and Buhleve maintained an unwavering fidelity in her love for Elias.

By then, she received news from Lisy, with whom she had collaborated years earlier and from a distance in the fight against Monsanto in Zimbabwe and South Africa, the last from her longed-for father Haka. Lisy lived with a water rights activist in Oaxaca, Mexico, and was invited to a congress of the National Association of Small Farmers, ANAP, in Cuba. The meeting was heartfelt as they had known of each other through two brave men and references in their lives as chosen fathers, Haka for Buhleve and Fernando for Lisy. Both had allied in various fights against the trafficking of arms, diamonds, and children in Africa. After the congress, Buhleve invited Lisy to tour several provinces while she gave classes in the hospitals.

They then learned of the call made by the Cuban Ministry of Public Health to recruit volunteers in the fight against the Ebola epidemic in Liberia, Guinea Conakry, and Sierra Leone, Lisy's native country, from which she had left more than forty years ago. They discussed it with Elias and decided to volunteer, Buhleve as a surgeon and Lisy as a translator, since she still remembered the Krio of Freetown and the native Fula and Temne languages from her childhood.

They interviewed with Dr. Jorge Delgado, who told them that, despite the danger and harsh conditions during the mission, almost twelve thousand Cuban professional volunteers had presented themselves in just three days. About four hundred were selected, and Buhleve went as the only surgeon to attend to patients and relatives infected by the virus and in need of urgent surgeries in the field hospitals that would be established. Lisy was selected as a translator for the native languages in Sierra Leone, which she still remembered.

They followed courses at the Central Unit of Medical Cooperation, where Lisy began by teaching English to the selected internationalists. Buhleve also attended meetings at the Pedro Kouri Institute of Tropical Medicine to learn about the epidemiology, clinic, and diagnostic and treatment techniques of that fearsome virus, the most lethal in the history of humanity. Then practiced with the rigorous personal protective equipment through which more than a liter of sweat per hour was perspired.

A month later, they flew on an old Cubana de Aviación plane to Freetown, where they were assigned to the coordinating unit of the Ebola control program. Lisy was able to contact her brothers Alajie and Tanu, whom she hadn't seen since she fled with her sister Kadiatu from the tradition of genital mutilation and an arranged marriage, forty years ago. During the emotional reunion, they told her that their father had died and that their mother was in Magburaka, their hometown. She had been widowed for more than ten years and, according to tradition, had been married off to the younger brother of her late husband, Lisy's father. Lisy asked Jorge, the brigade coordinator, for two days off to reunite with her mother. Buhleve offered to accompany her.

Upon arriving at their mother's house in Magburaka, Lisy hugged her with heartfelt emotion. Lisy was forty years old and her mother seventy. It had been thirty-six years, half of her mother's life, since they had last seen each other and had barely known about one another. She lived with the brother of her late husband, who had married her, and two other previous wives and their children. She had been suffering from river blindness, a parasitic disease transmitted by a small fly in the fast-flowing rivers that run towards the Munmuna falls. She fermented ginger beer that she cooled in a kerosene refrigerator that Lisy and Kadiatu had bought for her. She sold it to workers from the sugar cane plantations near the house. Emotionally, Lisy hugged her mother and asked:

* Mother, "Sheke," "Yarama" (greetings in Temne and Fula), my heart trembles with emotion at seeing you.
* Daughter, since you left I have prayed every day to Allah for your return. Your father went to paradise without being able to see you again. He waits there trusting in your just lives.

Lisy felt in those words the pain of waiting and some reproach for fleeing from customs and for being absent when her father died. Her mother's reference to being "just," clearly related to the Muslim moral codes her mother blindly followed, left her thoughtful.

She couldn't help but also express her pain.

* Mother, we left to seek freedom for our souls. We couldn't be ourselves with painful rites and forced marriages. Kadiatu and I have traveled the world, we have sought our paths and have vibrated with the beauty of life without codes of morality or justice, being brave to feel it from our souls. Your eldest daughter fights for women's rights in the world, and I for respect for nature.

Her mother looked at her, at first with confusion, as if not understanding, and then with a full and deep smile they rejoiced in the reunion with hugs, songs, stories, and dreams.

As the evening fell, Buhleve went for a walk, and Lisy joined her mother's prayers towards Mecca, thinking to herself about the energy of love and its many ways of expressing itself, including religion. She didn't share it, but she wouldn't let it drown the deep love and gratitude towards her mother.

When Buhleve returned, it had already dusked, and after silently watching the stars crown the dome of their lives, they slept together in the humble house with a dirt floor and a palm roof.

The next morning, they began their return to Freetown with a two-day stopover requested by Jorge, the brigade leader. It was at the St. John of God Hospital in Mabessaneh, near Lunsar. It was named the St. Joseph Hospital, in honor of the father of Brother Ricardo, its founder, and shared a name with the mission in Zimbabwe where Buhleve had lived half her life since being freed by Haka.

In Lunsar, several cases of Ebola had been diagnosed. As it was a reference center for surgery in the northern half and the Temne region of the country, Jorge suggested to Buhleve that she explore the possibility of staying there for two weeks to support the surgical tasks while also helping to prepare part of the hospital for the isolation, diagnosis, and care of patients suspected of having Ebola.

That hospital was mythical for both. Buhleve had heard from her father Haka the stories of the fight against the cruel war and the trafficking of arms and diamonds in which her father had helped Fernando, the mentor of her mentor, Jonay. Lisy had escaped from a life constrained by religion and customs the day she and her sister were treated by Fernando, who then worked at the St. Joseph Hospital, for a severe tropical ulcer. Besides saving her leg, he also helped her on her journey to freedom in the world, away from the chains of traditions and religions. This was followed by their escape on Thanda's ship, the rescue in the Canary seas, their life in Eila, and their sailings with Jonay's parents. Her life, for the past twenty years, had been devoted to the peasant communities fighting across Latin America, where she found the epic adventures that bathed her soul.

Upon arriving at night, they were welcomed by Brother Manuel Viejo, who had replaced Fernando in the last thirty years. He inherited the coordination of that hospital, which navigated, almost absent from the rest of the world, among forests, savannas, and rice fields, and among the poorest and highest mortality towns in the world, upon the death of Brother Ricardo. Despite so much suffering, Lisy and Buhleve felt the purest and cleanest smiles of its people. They slept in a barracks of rooms occupied by volunteer cooperants. In the same room that Fernando had occupied thirty years earlier.

Manuel was a missionary known throughout the country for his strong will to help the needy. He was almost seventy years old and had joined the Order of St. John of God half a century ago. He barely remembered his life before becoming a friar, as a young man who grew up in Folgoso de la Ribera, in the Spanish province of León, where he returned every three years to take care of his parents. It was by entering the religious order, and perhaps partly for this reason he entered, that he was able to train in his great passion, to be a doctor for the neediest. And so, he had spent forty years dedicated to alleviating pain from illness on missions in Africa. Before arriving in Sierra Leone, he had worked in a remote hospital in Ghana called Asafo.

The next day, Lisy visited relatives in the area. Buhleve accompanied Manuel on his hospital rounds. It reminded him of his life in another San José, surrounded by dry savannas and kopjes and overwhelmed by AIDS, fifteen thousand kilometers to the south. They visited the nearly two hundred sick in the one hundred and fifty beds, many of which were adapted to accommodate patients on blankets under the beds. Buhleve thought many of them had symptoms suspicious of Ebola, although they had been diagnosed as malaria. They continued with the consultation of about a hundred patients, many of whom had walked from remote villages, and where Buhleve applied the Ebola diagnostic protocol and trained the laboratory technicians. That afternoon, among three operations in which Buhleve assisted Manuel in treating patients with a strangulated hernia, a uterine rupture, and an amputation due to gangrene from a black mamba bite, they were setting up a part of the hospital for isolation and care with protective equipment that they coordinated to arrive from the Doctors Without Borders headquarters in Freetown. They started courses for six nurses and a dozen nursing assistants and admitted several patients in whom Buhleve suspected Ebola infection.

At night, under the stars, they had a deep conversation. Buhleve asked him:

* Manuel, you've spent forty years on missions far from your town and your family, don't you miss them?
* A lot, of course. But I've learned to feel my "family" in all the people around me, and for a long time, they have been my patients and the humble people of Africa, whom I love so much.

Lisy intervened at that moment:

* We have spent almost the same time away from our roots, me around the world and you close to mine. I confess to you, Manuel, I fled from a culture that would suffocate my soul with genital mutilation and forced marriages. However, I have seen far from here a world supposedly free of chains with traditions but surrendered to the chains of money and consumption. I miss the simple life of my home, in which I reconnected these days with my mother.
* Yes, Lisy, there is no place where our soul finds complete harmony. Our choices are seeking sufficient harmony, with serenity of complicities and challenges of what we do not understand or do not accept. Sometimes what we do not understand we comprehend over time, and what we do not accept we tolerate over time through empathy. But it's better not to think too much about it. I have let myself be led by the heart, and here I am.

Buhleve sensed in Manuel's words and the way he expressed them, a serene sincerity full of light, and wanted to delve into the light of his heart something that intrigued him about religious people, especially since Patxi, his uncle and the soul of the "Ukuzwana of the South," decided to be free in love.

Manuel, tell me if it doesn't bother you: in letting yourself be led by the heart, have you never felt the desire to live as a couple with a woman, to change the vow of chastity for the commitment in love full of body and soul?

* Well, I'll tell you, Buhleve. I do not hide it. About thirty years ago, at the end of my period at the Asafo hospital in Ghana, I met a volunteer doctor named Anna. She came to direct a primary health program in a district with hardly any vaccination, family planning, hygiene, or mosquito nets. It was called "Nsoroma," stars in the local language, Twi. She introduced very bravely education, prevention, and treatment systems that combined traditional medicine with herbs and allopathic with medications that changed the communities for pineapple crops with a Dutch organization. She lived with a small chimpanzee and spread joy and kindness throughout the hospital. Although we installed her in the old chapel of the hospital, perhaps intending to imbue her with some faith, she refused to pray the lauds and vespers with the community of brothers, and she didn't even come to Mass on Sundays. I saw in her kindness, generosity, and beauty. And I began to wonder if the rigid keys of faith and the commandments of Catholicism left out other free forms of beauty and goodness that I constantly saw in Anna. We used to play pelota against a wall outside the hospital every afternoon. We spent a lot of time making affectionate jokes.

Manuel paused. They noticed he was getting emotional. He continued:

* One night after our workdays, I went for a walk with Anna through the forest surrounding the hospital. We could hear the screams of the gorillas, in front of which Lucy, Anna's chimpanzee, cowered in fear, clutching Anna's back. I confessed to Anna my fascination with her kindness and generosity without the codes of religion, free and authentic, without even needing an exclusive and excluding paradise. She confessed to me her inspiration in my silent dedication and my abnegation to the religious vows. We looked at each other, and I felt the impulse to kiss her. I hadn't felt the warmth of a woman's skin since my shy kisses with a girl from the village before becoming a religious. Anna moved her lips away and offered me her cheek. Her gesture told me everything. It was the last time I felt hopeful about joining a woman. Perhaps the only time. Many times, I have wondered what would have become of my life if Anna had not dodged that kiss."
* The next morning, while having breakfast in the brothers' dining room, Manuel told them he felt a strange dizziness. Buhleve accompanied him to his consultation, where this time he was the patient. Instinctively, he put on a mask and gloves. He saw that he had a temperature of 39º, a diffuse rash, high pulse, and very low blood pressure. He noticed the painful liver. He took blood samples in which he saw a low number of leukocytes and platelets and urine in which blood could be seen with the naked eye. The reagents for the laboratory tests that could confirm the disease had not yet arrived, but Buhleve suspected it.

While Buhleve was setting up the Ebola treatment center inside the hospital and the protective equipment for health workers and the tests for the laboratory arrived, Manuel's condition worsened. He developed intense weakness, severe muscle, head, and throat pains, and began to vomit, which a few days later turned into blood. Buhleve tried to maintain his tension, hydration, and breathing with IV fluids and oxygen, but he worsened day by day. Every day half a dozen patients died, half of those diagnosed. They set up an incinerator to avoid contagion at funerals, something that sparked many discussions against those who wanted to maintain the sacred custom of waking and embracing the deceased. Even with only a thread of strength left, Manuel, attached to an IV, gave talks to families and communities about the care they should take to avoid infection.

A few days later, the superior brother told Manuel that they could evacuate him to a hospital in Spain. Manuel initially refused because he did not want any privileges over his patients. Buhleve insisted:

* Manuel, I understand you well, and I would say the same. But your life is very valuable to thousands of people and patients that you will surely continue to treat when you get better. While you are away, I will continue to be in charge of the hospital, and we will wait for you to recover well to continue your noble mission.

It was Buhleve's advice and the "vow of obedience" that led Manuel to accept being evacuated on a medically equipped plane sent by the Spanish government. He did so with one condition that his superiors accepted: to return to care for the sick in Lunsar as soon as he improved. If it was God's will.

Two weeks later, Manuel passed away at the Carlos III Hospital in Madrid. Some in the Spanish press accused the government of evacuating a religious person with public money. They did not know that this man had treated nearly a million poor patients for forty years, had performed over twenty thousand operations, and had done it all out of love. He left behind only a few possessions: his doctor's coat, a pair of sandals, barely any clothes that fit in a small bag, a dozen books - including Gandhi's "Experiments with Truth," the "Manual of the Cooperant," and "Where There Is No Doctor" - a pelota racket, a small radio, an old Zeiss-Ikon camera, a Seiko watch, a razor, a "black stone," a stethoscope, and a box of handwritten notes.

While Lisy returned to Freetown to support the Cuban brigade as an interpreter, Buhleve stayed a month working at the hospital in Lunsar, as promised to Manuel. Then Anna came to replace her, crying for her great friend Manuel, who might have been the most faithful companion. She wondered if there were multiverses and if she could return, through a "wormhole" that she would have opened if their lips had met, just a few millimeters from how it was, with Manuel's shy and trembling ones.

When Buhleve and Lisy finished their mission, they were preparing to return to Cuba with a stopover in Madrid. The superior of the Lunsar mission, Brother José María, asked them to take Manuel's belongings to deliver them from Madrid to his family, who would come from Folgoso de la Ribera.

Before leaving, Lisy received a visit at the Cuban brigade's coordinating center. It was a Temne man around forty years old with an amputated leg and crutches.

* Lisy Jalloh? My name is Saidu Duarte.

Lisy noticed that he emphasized the surname Duarte, as if with some pride or to signify that his Bantu appearance also had a distant connection.

* Saidu! Fernando's son! When he rescued us at sea, he asked me if I wanted to be his younger sister or his elder daughter. I told him his sister, which makes me... your aunt or your sister!
* Yes, I know your story well. Fernando talks a lot about you and your sister Kadiatu. I met her when I arrived from Sierra Leone to Eila, but you were already in America.
* Yes. It's been twenty years since I've been back to Eila. I would love to, especially to see how it has become the money-free island and to honor John. How sad his death was!"
* That's right. John burned with his millennia-old trees, defending the island in life, and with his memory, the island is recovering even stronger.
* And is it true that you live there without money, without property, and without hierarchies?"
* We try, Lisy. It's not easy because from the outside there is a group of former owners of extensive lands that were expropriated and that constantly tries to discredit and block the MIEL movement that strives to preserve life without chains. But we remain very united. Fernando is now John's successor. He wears his sailor's cap, and there is not a single day he doesn't dedicate a song to him at sunset.
* What great men! The bravery of Fernando and Haka, the tenderness of John and Patxi. And so many others...
* Yes, and they were great because they had wonderful women behind them. Helen, Umbela, NoLwasi. Hopefully, our generation will firmly take up their relay.
* You didn't mention any woman supporting Fernando?
* No, Lisy. Sometimes he has company, but since his union with your sister was interrupted, he has not found a soul mate.
* There was a silence. Lisy pondered. After all of Fernando's dedication, she never quite understood her sister's rejection, now a senior official at the United Nations and already married to a Ghanaian diplomat. She didn't want to tell Saidu because she suspected that Fernando still silently awaited her. She preferred to change the subject:
* And tell me about yourself, Saidu. What became of your life since you arrived in Eila?
* Well, I returned with Fernando and learned to live in the community of Valentia. Even with my single leg, I learned to go down to Arguamul Beach, to climb logs washed up by the sea, to build porches in the community, to cultivate, and to take care of the goats. Fernando taught me many things about medicine and encouraged me to study medicine. But I had a deep pain inside me, Lisy. You must have heard of the horrors of the war in this country. I was at the epicenter of cruelty. I suffered it in my own flesh, and also, blinded by drugs and fear, I caused a lot of harm.

At that moment, he rolled up his shirt sleeve, revealing a snake-shaped tattoo:

* This sign reminds many people here of my past as a guerrilla and the darkest depths of pain. When Fernando rescued me from death and I became aware of all the pain I had caused, I wanted to end my life. It was only because of Fernando's affection and support that I carried on. But I had to return. I couldn't run away from my past. I had to contribute to the peace of my country. I heard from the brothers at the Lunsar hospital, of a Jesuit missionary named Chema who ran a program for the rehabilitation of child soldiers. I couldn't live in Eila's paradise and turn my back on so many children and young people who had no one to rescue them from pain, social rejection, and worst of all, their own rejection of their existence. I have been collaborating in the center for three years now. Showing them how I was able to emerge from the darkness helps them, gives them hope.

They met Buhleve at Half Moon Beach at sunset. Saidu told Buhleve how Haka helped stop the war, although few people knew it. That's how true heroes were: anonymous.

The Cuban Ebola fighting mission was about to conclude. Out of the nearly two hundred Cuban brigade members, one had contracted the disease. He was evacuated to a hospital in England and was recovering in Cuba, where he had already requested to be part of the Cuban medical brigade in Mozambique. Buhleve and Lisy felt like part of a group of brave and supportive men and women who didn't think or measure life in terms of money but in service and in honor of defending values that the world of globalized commerce was trying to bury.

On the return flight, Buhleve carried Manuel's bag by hand, which he was supposed to deliver to a family member of Manuel's at the Madrid airport. He couldn't resist reading some of Manuel's handwritten reflections. He had only known him for a few days and had felt a deep tenderness for him, his humility, his dedication, and his subtle and gentle, almost shy sense of humor. Among them was one that caught his attention for how it began.

Asafo Mission, Ghana, May 12, 1996.

Dear Anna,

Perhaps you will never read this letter because maybe I will never have the courage to send it to you. But I feel that if I don't take this profound feeling out of my soul and onto paper, I will be suffocating something beautiful in a cruel cell with the guards of modesty, shame, and fear. Once out, I don't know if these thoughts and feelings will fly to you because I wouldn't want them to overwhelm or hurt you by not being able to reciprocate.

As you know, I studied in the seminary from a young age, and I saw in the congregation of San Juan de Dios the way to dedicate myself as a doctor to those who suffer the most. I had not felt attracted to any woman, and I felt a fullness in my soul when I thought about the life of Jesus and tried to follow in his footsteps by alleviating the pain of others in remote and forgotten corners of the world, like here where we met, in the Ashanti jungle.

My life followed a routine of vespers, communal breakfast, visits to wards, consultations, lunch again in the community, operating room, a walk through the jungle, vespers, and retiring to my room to meditate in gratitude and sleep. The days repeated themselves in seamless serenity, in unquestioning dedication, in faith without doubts.

And then you came. With your insolent joy, your irreverent rebellion, your dedication to the poorest not from compassion and sacrifice for the Faith, but from deep empathy and the happiness of receiving their pure smiles.

Every day, I hoped that as the sun set, I would leave the operating room and you would return, covered in the reddish dust of the road, from visiting the villages of the Nsoroma project. We often played fronton for a while, and I felt in your humor and your jokes a bath of pure and free water for my soul. Then I would always ask you: Anna, do you feel like taking a walk? And you would always reply: Manuel, I'll think about it. And five minutes later, you would come out of your room showered and ready to walk. I looked at you discreetly, without you noticing, and I saw in you a beauty free from codes and securities, a joy of giving oneself to the poorest without a paradise as a reward, only to feel in the same dedication the reward.

I was fascinated to hear your stories of childhood in your Barcelona neighborhood, your student adventures, your passion for dance, your loyalty to your friends, your veneration of your mother, your happiness to be in Africa, as you said, caressed by its humidity, intoxicated by its deep smells, enchanted by its songs, bewitched by its tales, fascinated by its magic...

And you know what? I realized that I wanted to be the humidity that embraced you, the smells that intoxicated you, the songs that enchanted you, the tales that bewitched you, and the magic that fascinated you. I would return from our walks. Perhaps you noticed that I took my meals to my room with the excuse of studying when it was for fear of not being able to hide my fascination for you from my brothers during dinner. Night came, and I was troubled to know that you were just a few meters away in your room and that life passed every day and every night without embracing you as water slips through the open hand of a thirsty person. And I thought to myself: is it lawful to profess the religion of love and reject the fullest love for another being, the fusion of body and soul, the surrender of every atom through the last pore? God! How I desired you!

I fantasized about uniting in love and working together in remote hospitals around the world, always together, having our children to whom we could offer a life of love and dedication.

That's why this evening, on our return from the walk, crossing the river, I helped you jump the last rock, and your face was just inches from mine. When I tried to steal a kiss from your lips, you turned your cheek. There was a silence that I preferred not to hear. My heart felt that you couldn't be "mine" because you belonged to the world, and I, perhaps, couldn't be yours because I belonged to my God. I didn't want to think anymore about these two different worlds that overlapped every day in a magical walk of tales and songs, complicit ideas, and friendship that doesn't hide secrets. Or hardly any.

For this secret will remain on this paper; I will learn to forget that dream, I will continue my celibate path of dedication to others, drinking from the Faith and inspiration of Jesus' life, although I cannot promise that some nights, I won't imagine that you are my pillow, and I will embrace you and surrender being my soul furtive from my skin.

With my unconfessable love, I wish you all the happiness so that your passion for life infects all those shaded by your being.

Yours always in my silence,

Manuel.

# Humanity heroes. Comalapa, Chiapas, March 2015

Thanda had been living in Mexico for almost two years. He first settled in an apartment in Polanco from where he would rush up Chapultepec Avenue to work. He bought an old "bocho," as they called the Volkswagen Beetle in Mexico, in sky blue color, with a sunroof, and began to explore the city. Three months later, Nayra arrived, and they chose a beautiful house in Naucalpan. Their belongings arrived from Brussels, mostly books and manuscripts that Thanda had kept since his adolescence.

Once settled, they traveled to Spain to reunite with their parents and visit Granada, where Thanda was appointed as a professor at the Andalusian School of Public Health. Seeing the Alhambra from a room in the teachers' residence in the Albaicín neighborhood, of which Clinton had recently said was the most beautiful sunset view in the world, they felt they were beginning a long-awaited phase of their lives. In harmony, in a love they had never felt before.

When surrounded by so much beauty, they received a call from Mexico informing them that their new home had been flooded. Upon arriving in Naucalpan, they sadly discovered that, despite the efforts of a vigilant neighbor to put all the books in the sun, most had been destroyed by a burst pipe that turned the basement into a pool where more than a thousand books and manuscripts from a lifetime of reading and studying by Thanda drowned. The pain lasted briefly. Thanda felt clearer than ever that the loss of material possessions was a relief, lightening the load and lifting the soul.

They moved to another house in the Chapultepec neighborhood, near the European Union Delegation where Thanda would work for the next four years. Thanda and Nayra began a life together, almost two years after sealing their love in the mountains of Berkeley. Nayra devoted herself to studying art history at a nearby academy and taking care of their children, Enkidu and Jerónimo, who were returning to their Mexican roots.

Thanda passionately threw himself into his work, gradually immersing himself in reality and proposing cooperation projects in that magical universe from the deserts of the north to the jungles of the south, from the Tarahumara tribes to the Maya villages, the great colonial cities, and the small rural towns, all with their plazas, churches, street taquerias, street vendors selling tamales, mariachis, corridos, and rancheras, danzones, and boleros, their markets filled with thousands of crops of all colors and smells, of flowers, of Mayan textiles, the carved alebrijes of Oaxaca or the painted bark of the north, and the second-hand markets, as extensive as entire cities.

Mexico was a universe of colors, smells, flavors, and sounds. But above all, Thanda felt fascinated by the sweet kindness of its people. It intoxicated the senses and at the same time left in the air a halo of mystery, as if each Mexican harbored, within their soul, a secret and impregnable space, as heirs of millennia of pain and passion, of hope and resignation. Because amidst so much beauty and kindness, another Mexico of pain beat, due to the most extreme and unjust inequalities, and the violence that permeated everything. In Mexico that year, more people died from violence than in the protracted wars of Afghanistan, Iraq, and Sudan combined. Almost every day, around a hundred people died violently, many due to settling scores between rival narco-trafficking clans, but many others due to crimes, mostly unpunished and even in collusion with corrupt police. And almost as many disappeared. Forty-three students disappeared in Ayotzinapa and became the symbol of unpunished injustice. But in total, more and more people joined every day to an entire absent nation of more than sixty thousand disappeared and a great city of a million direct relatives wandering in life, waiting for the return of their abducted loved ones, engulfed by a magma of violence in unconfessed collusion with power.

In the bustling streets and squares, wealthy Mexicans in expensive suits mingled with workers earning meager wages to eat tacos and tamales at street stalls. Vendor carts mixed with huge North American suburban cars with windows as dark as their owners' business dealings. Women wrapped in makeup, expensive clothes, high heels, escorted by bodyguards, drivers, and maids carrying shopping bags and walking their dogs, children living by selling anything at traffic lights, elderly indigenous people begging with lost looks, migrants with broken backs from backpacks and feet worn out by long and stony paths, aimless people devoted to pulque, and workers crowded into buses and metro cars during endless journeys through Mexico City traffic. It was difficult to understand how in that city, the most populous in the world, with the longest working and commuting hours, the most polluted and the noisiest, one of the most violent and unequal, joy and art shone in the bustle, the musical speech, and the "*cantinfleando*" verb, and more than three thousand people arrived at its shores every day to stay, as if it were an immense black hole in the mysterious human universe.

Thanda began his day by waking up around five-thirty, without an alarm clock, quietly leaving the house so as not to wake Nayra or her children in the next room and driving in his Beetle to swim at the navy club, the nearest pool he could find. He decided to change his cycling routes in Brussels and his running circuits up the slopes of Chapultepec from his early months in Mexico, as many days the pollution was such that outdoor exercise was not advisable. Although he was not in favor of enjoying any privileges, especially without being able to share them, his membership in that club, which Groucho Marx would have opposed, allowed him to swim every day between six and seven in the morning. This way, he released his energy and thought underwater about how to better face the challenges of work. He also listened to the Mexican conversations in the locker room, expressions of "compadres," a mix of kindness, political criticisms, business matters, virile bragging, and sometimes, intimate confidences.

So Thanda learned about Mexican speech, their friendly greetings, their way of seeing life, their devotion to family and mothers, the subtle racism of the upper classes, the fascination with all things American, the affectionate resentment toward "gachupines" (Spaniards), the passionate faith in the Virgin of Guadalupe, their culture of eating and drinking, the devotion to loved ones and the heartbreak of falling out of love, and a passion for living so intense that even death was celebrated, and the deceased were remembered with joy.

He continued his day in his office and often crossed the bustling city to attend meetings at government institutions, the United Nations, and international representations, social organizations, and human rights defense organizations, universities, and research centers. He traveled through the central states of colonial Bajío, the indigenous south, the nearly untouched Yucatán, the mythical Veracruz, Nayra's birthplace, and the desert-like northern border. Thanda focused on studying inequalities in one of the most unjust countries on Earth. It was a gift to live with such a beautiful and brave woman as Nayra and to discover such a magical universe hand in hand with him. He could also discover his Mexican family, the result of his aunt's emigration. He set out to contribute ideas, dialogues, and projects to confront injustice, the obscene wealth of a few, and the cruel poverty of many.

He began by relaunching a "social cohesion" program, selecting a team of experts to encourage activities with governments, propose legal reforms, promote projects with communities, launch platforms for financial transparency in public finances, and propose systems of fiscal and territorial equity to limit extreme inequalities.

After a few months, he traveled to Ciudad Juárez, the most violent city in the world during the last decade. There he could learn about the projects he coordinated from Mexico City with human rights organizations. He was able to speak with Mexican migrants and others from Central America who crossed Mexico on the "Beast" and suffered all kinds of misfortunes to reach the American wall.

Obama, in whom so many hopes had been placed because of his fiery and poetic speeches, had maintained the nationalist, imperialist, and destructive course of the United States. The end of his term was approaching, and he had kept the flames of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq burning, fanning those in Libya and Syria. After executing Osama Bin Laden by video, he had assassinated more than a hundred people with drone strikes directed from computers at the Pentagon. He never ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child or withdrew troops and the prison at Guantánamo. But, in addition, during his term adorned with emotional speeches, he deported more migrants than any president before him.

Thanda interviewed an organization that worked underground because it was threatened by drug cartels and their hitmen. Through three anonymous contacts, he was guided on foot through the border neighborhoods to offices where he met a woman in her seventies, whose wide smile couldn't conceal a cloud of sadness in her gaze, from which emanated a determination to honor her name in the face of the murderers who executed anyone who dared to denounce abuses, kidnappings, femicides, and all kinds of crimes. Lucha Castro fearlessly and tirelessly denounced, day after day, how crimes were committed against women, indigenous people, migrants, and anyone who raised their voice, in collusion with the police and the army.

With a heart constricted by so much pain, he went to reunite, almost thirty years later, with his aunt, his mother's only living sister. It was an emotional moment in which he met his extensive Mexican family.

Sixty years earlier, Aurora had fallen in love on a morning at Sardinero Beach in her hometown of Santander, with a young Mexican who was studying olive crops for their possible adaptation to the arid lands of Chihuahua State. The young Carlos courteously courted her through Gran Vía in Madrid until he had to return to Mexico at the end of his studies. The then tense relations between Franco and the government of Mexico, which under President Cárdenas welcomed more than twenty thousand Republican refugees fleeing the dictatorship, and the cost of tickets made another one-way trip by Carlos to Spain and back together to Mexico impossible. With no alternative but a one-way trip for Aurora to the world of her beloved, and not knowing when she would return, her older sister's husband, Rafael, married Aurora by proxy. Rafa proudly joked in his office with two photos of separate weddings with the two sisters. And so, Aurora bid farewell to her mother and her sisters, taking a one-way flight from Madrid to Mexico without knowing when or if she would see them again. There, she was welcomed by Carlos's family, of English origin settled for many generations in Chihuahua, the Barneys. She had four children, eight grandchildren, and already a great-granddaughter, and was pampered, indulged, and much loved by the large family, although Aurora lived with a certain melancholy for being surrounded by so much violence and longing for her native Santander.

Thanda, what joy to see you! The last time I saw you, you were just about to enter university. I've been hearing from your mother about your times in Africa, Brussels, and California. It's so good to have you here for a few years now!

What joy to see you again, aunt. I bring you all the love from my mother and the family.

Aurora's joy dimmed for a few seconds, and Thanda guessed it was the memory of her mother's death, whom she hadn't seen in her last twenty years. Such was the price of living far away, often being far from the most beloved ones even in the most significant moments of life and its end.

He traveled afterward across the desert to the city of Chihuahua, reflecting on the troubled history of those lands. After the Spanish conquest, the extensive Viceroyalty of New Spain was established. A century later, the province of Nueva Vizcaya was founded by the Basque colonizer Ibarra, and in its center, the city of Durango was founded, named after the Basque city near Thanda's grandmother's hometown of Garai. Around some rich mines, the Real de Minas was originally founded, later becoming Villa de Chihuahua, which attracted settlers and their creole descendants endowed with native slave encomiendas. Visitors from the King of Spain arrived in the village to investigate morality, read proclamations in its streets, and collect taxes. Missionaries also arrived to venture into the Tarahumara Sierra, still untouched by Catholic evangelization. It was in Chihuahua where the heroes of independence were executed, only to become the cradle of the Mexican revolution a century later.

Thanda felt that everything in Mexico was magical and mysterious, including its history: an independence movement initiated by criollos in favor of the King of Spain, which did not truly become such until the leadership of the indigenous Benito Juárez, and a revolution of leaders who were at odds with each other and betrayed the true collective and ejidal spirit of Zapata, to gradually establish the Institutional Revolutionary Party, a party that began by nationalizing oil with Lázaro Cárdenas to later become an oligopolistic power, linked to great fortunes and the clergy, and that remained in power for seventy years. The "perfect dictatorship."

With those thoughts, Thanda arrived in Chihuahua, where he visited a project supporting education and treatment for blind children led by a woman who left a profound impression on him.

Carla Herrera was Thanda's age. She was also born into a family with affection, care, and opportunities, but when she entered adolescence, an illness gradually left her blind, without any remedy. She did not let herself be depressed by the closure of her visual windows to the world. She opened all the other windows and even some she hadn't imagined having before. She progressed in her studies and moved to Monterrey to study law. She wanted to defend the rights of children with visual disabilities, and the first step was to prove to herself that she could pursue all her dreams by opening other windows to her passionate soul. She wrote her thesis with scholarships in the United States and accompanied her studies with her passion for sports, running marathons and skydiving with guide friends. She always looked at the world and life with overflowing optimism, one might say disconcerting.

She reminded Thanda of Javi, a good friend and colleague from her time as a resident doctor, who, having been affected by thalidomide during his mother's pregnancy, was born with one short arm and the other and both legs stumps, but he completed his medical studies, drove an adapted car, and filled the hospital with joy and hope every day. Another colleague during her stay in Brussels, Timo, grew up with infantile paralysis, and his entire body, including his neck and facial muscles, suffered from spasticity and very low mobility, but he overcame pain and limitations, completed his studies, passed his civil service exams, moved around on a tricycle that he pedaled with a device adapted to the strained movement of his right arm, and always worked with a smile and a word of support for others. He even participated in popular races where he arrived last in time but first in valor and admiration from everyone. The world was full of examples of overcoming and passion for living.

Carla also overcame another challenge beyond the intellectual and physical ones. When she discovered her sexuality, she felt the union with a woman as the most peaceful and deep bath of tenderness for their spirits, connected without the filter of reason or prejudices, with their souls. She fell in love with Sonia, the woman who began by helping her with her tasks, one word led to a hug, the hug to a caress, the caress to feeling their lips unite, and that to merging their bodies in ecstasy that touched the eternal in the deepest corners of their souls. Thus, they decided to start a family. They sought ways to fertilize Carla's eggs with semen from an anonymous donor bank. They were able to conceive a life in Sonia's womb because of the most persevering love in the face of all obstacles. After another pregnancy, two twin boys were born. They were a complete family in love. But they encountered the prejudices of the Catholic and classist elites of Chihuahua. Since childhood, Carla had been a member, with her parents, of the city's country club, where she liked to go running through its fields and cool off from the desert heat in its pool. When she went with Sonia and their three daughters, they were denied membership as a family because they lacked the ecclesiastical marriage certificate. Carla protested at all levels, claiming their rights as a family, as women, those of her children, and those of the freely chosen sexual identity, and sharing love within and outside the family. Centuries of Spanish King's visitors monitoring the morality of the colonies had taken their toll. In other times, they would have been burned alive by the Holy Inquisition. She filed complaints in local courts against the moralistic country club and its board of wealthy families, who owned much of the city's wealth. Dismissed by judges aligned with that niche of power, she took her complaints to the courts in Mexico City and the country's Supreme Court. In all of them, she encountered the Catholic moralism intertwined with the sacred right of admission of any private club.

But Carla knew what it was like to fight against all obstacles and open other windows when the doors of power closed. She went to the International Commission on Women's Rights at the United Nations. She used her skills as a lawyer in Mexico and a doctor in the United States to present rigorously, logically, and with ethical arguments the defense of her right as a person to live her sexuality freely, to form a family based on love, and for her children to enjoy the same rights as any other child from any other type of family. In New York, she met Aimsa and Marta, who helped her with ethical arguments and the link with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In the eyes of the dull high society of Chihuahua, she was no longer the "good blind girl" but the "dirty lesbian." For the wealthy and "well-bred" class of that city, Carla stained the sacred and centuries-old Catholic customs of the settlers and creoles. Untouchable customs that spoke of religion, supposedly of love, and demonized sexuality; which spoke of the humility of Jesus and lived surrounded by luxuries; which boasted of acts of charity and kept their indigenous servants in dark rooms in the basements of their mansions. She was helped in all her struggle by a rebellious priest who had just been banished from his fight for the Zapatista Mayans in Chiapas to Saltillo, in the northern deserts, Bishop Raúl Vera, whom Nayra had told her about.

He returned to Mexico City and there he met her Mexican uncle's sister, Margarita, a woman in her eighties with an extraordinary determination to promote harmony with the environment. She had founded an NGO, GRUPEDSAC, which promoted ways of living in natural harmony in communities, schools, universities, businesses, government institutions, and social groups. She founded two centers, one in the State of Mexico and one in the State of Oaxaca, where people lived disconnected from water, sewage, electricity, energy, and food networks. Everything was obtained from the few hectares of land, and everything returned to the earth. Thanda put her in touch with Aimsa and the network of spiritual eco-villages to have those centers as a reference for training in harmonious self-sufficiency. Margarita's husband, Rodolfo, was also an admirable man. He had devoted himself to commercial law and seeking fair trade agreements for Mexico. At almost ninety years old, he traveled throughout the Americas negotiating the Pacific agreement and renegotiating NAFTA with the wealthy neighbors to the north. He had founded the law school of Chihuahua and was a deeply respected man in Mexico, both for his intelligence and tenacity, and for his kindness and subtle sense of humor. Margarita and Rodolfo also lived in Chapultepec, and Thanda and Nayra spent very pleasant meals and gatherings talking about the history, politics, economy, and future of Mexico and humanity. The final question was whether Margarita's commitment to preserving nature, and with it the future of her children and grandchildren, was compatible with an economic system dependent on a global trade of mass production and scale that was concentrating capital power in few hands while destroying the environment. Rodolfo ended with a wry grin but a shadow in his gaze that couldn't hide the fear of perhaps having spent his life studying and striving to increase global trade when now economies should shrink, trade retract, and consumption decrease until it becomes essential, local, and ecological. They were different times for which he felt he was already late and with little strength. Thanda felt for her Mexican uncles the most heartfelt admiration.

A few weeks later, Nayra organized an evening at her house in the hills of Chapultepec so that Thanda could meet more people committed to justice in her magical Mexico. So much beauty could not remain drowned by the corruption of a hierarchy anchored in its supposed divine right to dominate and abuse people so gentle that they neither questioned their misery nor knew or dared to do so. At the dinner, Lucha and Carla attended, who were visiting Mexico City for work; José Luis, a Jesuit father and Thanda's study companion who defended the rights of migrants on the southern border; the poet Javier Sicilia, who led the "*hasta la madre*" (fed-up) movement against violence in collusion with power and about whom Nayra was making a documentary; Bishop Raúl Vera, who was attending an episcopal conference in Mexico City those days and was escaping from the bishops' meetings; an ecological economist named Manuel, a disciple of Ivan Illich and leader of the degrowth movement; Carmen Santiago, a Zapotec leader who fought against the abuses of Canadian mining companies in Oaxaca; Ricardo Fuentes, the director of Oxfam, a young Mexican who had spent the last years writing reports on inequality from Oxford that embarrassed the powerful who met every year in the Swiss village of Davos; Ivonne, a Veracruz doctor who fought for equity in the right to health, as fragmented as society was between power fences, and led in that state the nascent MORENA movement of Lopez Obrador and her uncles, Margarita and her quest for self-sufficiency, and Rodolfo, for fair trade. A friend of Nayra's attended the dinner, known to all for his black balaclava and pipe. They also connected via Skype Jonay, Aimsa, and Nour from White Lake, and Adam and Unai from Navalquejigo, and Fernando and Umbela from Eila. Patxi and NoLwasi from the Ukuzwana mission, Buhleve and Elias from Santa Clara, didn't have enough connection, but they sent messages with ideas, appreciation, and affection. Nayra prepared an exquisite Oaxacan mole negro and corn tortillas, and Thanda offered hibiscus flower drink and artisanal mezcal from Oaxaca. Enkidu and Jerónimo, Nayra's children, discreetly and absorbedly listened.

They sat around the fire as the chill of February in Mexico City was still felt. Carmen, for the ancestors, and Raúl, for the history of Jesus, prayed for the blessing of the meeting and its good efforts. Each spoke of their concerns and struggles. Lucha for the women victims of violence, Carla for the right to be different, José Luis for the rights of migrant children fleeing violence in the neighboring countries, Javier for the truth of the disappeared, Raúl for the movement toward a new constitution, Manuel for resistance against the plan for the immense new airport, Carmen against the mines that poisoned and dried up the waters and lives in Oaxaca, Ricardo against the extreme inequalities of the country for a fair tax system, Ivonne for the transparency of parties, public salaries, and for universal health, and Marcos ended by speaking of the dream of a people who no longer believed in nations and borders, in laws and rulers, in the plastic progress dreams and the absurd and alienating speed of the engines that filled everything with smoke.

Thanda spoke to them all in this way:

* Thank you for being here. I will tell you, like my Ndebele brothers in the Kalahari of Zimbabwe, that you are all my 'mkulus,' elders in wisdom. And it is the wisdom of NoLwasi, as they call it, that flows clean and brave from the depth of the soul, without imposed codes, without submission to what has already been said, without veneration for whoever spoke the loudest or wields the sword, without the arrogance of those foolishly believing they possess the truth. You are all good people, as everyone is, but you also express your heartbeat of love courageously in the face of fences that break souls and the union of energies, spirits, Carmen would say, among all of us and all forms of life. If we strip ourselves of codes and labels, we will reach the essence of our souls without fear, allowing them to flow and love each other in harmony naturally. I feel that this wonderful country, now bordered by blood with the imperialist north and with the Maya brothers to the south, is full of fences that suffocate its soul. The fences between white criollos, neighbors in this neighborhood of privileges, who continue to act like the colonizers of five centuries ago, now without encomiendas, but with maids and employees, with submissive mestizos and indigenous people 'at your service'; the fences of macho men and submissive women; the fences of politicians who fraternize their businesses and sleep with privileges of power and abuse as a divine right to govern others. And so, there is a Mexico that survives by selling tacos in the streets of traffic and smoke, and another where the powerful flaunt luxuries and power in their mansions and palaces of power. I will tell you that since I like numbers, I calculated what happens with the disease that burns the lives of Mexicans the most: diabetes. It has the highest incidence here in the world, in large part because their bodies are intoxicated with the Coca Cola of the empire that has replaced the clean water from the springs. That disease will soon affect a third of Mexicans. By mid-life, diabetes begins to close the arteries and capillaries of the kidney, among other organs, and extinguishes their filtering and cleaning function. As if the body no longer knew how to clean up so much dirt from drinking and eating. Half of Mexicans live without formal employment and receive, as charity, crumbs from their health system, the popular insurance, which will not even be able to offer them dialysis. Their bodies will age, their hearts exhaust, and their lungs suffocate. Life expectancy will be barely five years. A whole life of work in the streets and fields, in maquilas and construction; they will not reach a deserved rest, which in any case would be of misery, without a dignified pension or hope for the future of their children, under the darkness of violence, seduced by the luxury of drug lords or by drinking to forget broken dreams, now without the strength to mend them. The other half, if they have formal employment, can aspire to some kind of partial treatment, and if their income does not come from a salary but is inflated by business, that elegant word that describes the speculation of intermediaries, then their private insurance can afford any treatment and prolong their artificially intoxicated lives. It's about tearing down fences and sharing everything without material possessions, without spiritual moralities, without hierarchies that elevate some and subjugate others. But, is utopia still possible? I want Umbela to talk to you about the decalogue of the spiritual eco-village network, Aimsa about how it has spread throughout the world, and Fernando about how it has taken on a beautiful form, rising from the ashes, in Eila.

After the remote narratives of Umbela, Aimsa, and Fernando, the evening continued with inspiring stories, feelings, courageous thoughts, and proposals to be united and fight for the utopia that would regain in those magical lands the illusion of harmony from Mayas to Tarahumaras with Pachamama, from the humble love message of Jesus to the communal ejidos of Zapata. Raúl told them that he would share with his friend Francisco, now Pope in the Vatican, what was discussed that lovely night, as they were drafting an encyclical, 'Laudato Si.' Inspired by Francis of Assisi, it sought to redeem the Church from its history of alliance with power and property, from its rigid hierarchies and monopolies of truth, and from its complicity with empires and borders. But above all, it recognized the tremendous damage from its proud anthropocentrism to all other forms of existence on the planet, Pachamama. Francis also acknowledged the offense to so many people by their moralistic prejudices, absurd fences to love. Carla, moved, shed a tear from her eyes that could not see things but felt the light of love, and Raúl melted into a hug with her.

During their conversations about the global political and economic situation, Thanda thought about giving herself passionately to a citizen movement for human and natural harmony. Moyes and María kept him informed of the 15M movement and encouraged her to collaborate on political proposals for Spain and Europe. After his attempt in the primaries of EQUO for the national elections of 2011, the little interest in the proposals he made for equity, and the internal struggles of the party; Thanda had become discouraged from continuing to collaborate in politics. But Marcos was right: worrying about the state of the world without nobly fighting in politics had a dimension of cynicism, which was an epidemic in society, especially among officials of the European Union. He saw that the three main parties proposing proposals for a new, more democratic, fair, and ecological society, disconnected from dominant economic powers, were Podemos, Equo, and the X party. He had tried to share ideas and proposals with the Podemos cell in Mexico City and through a brief correspondence with its co-founder Carlos Monedero but found no echo of her ideas.

He sent a proposal to the three parties to join forces in a single force of equity ethics for transparency and fiscal justice from Party X, the rights, and universal services of Podemos, and the ecology of Equo. He also did not receive a response.

In his short time in Mexico, he learned about the tax evasion and exemptions of the wealthy class while half of the country lived in poverty; he became aware, through Moyes, of the great financial speculation dominating the world, and through Aimsa and Jonay, of the networks of political secrets and their relationship with the plot of speculation and destruction that Edward, Julian, and others were trying to unveil, and for which they were persecuted. Transparency was key to increasing social awareness, encouraging the ethics of equity, curbing the obscene accumulation of a few, and beginning to transform a corrupt system. He then learned the story of Hervé Falciani, from Party X.

Hervé was an Italo-French systems engineer who worked as a computer scientist at the Swiss subsidiary of HSBC bank between 2001 and 2008, reorganizing its database. He was able to identify more than a hundred thousand tax evaders worldwide. He proposed a system to the bank to prevent tax fraud by its clients but was rejected. He pondered on how such evasion was stealing resources from poor people, especially from the poorest countries. He considered it an ethical obligation to inform the Swiss judicial authorities. The bank sued him for alleged sale of confidential customer data. He was arrested in 2008. After proving his innocence and being released, Falciani fled to France and tried to get the French government to launch an investigation against the fraudsters. Switzerland issued an international arrest warrant against him, and Falciani fled to Barcelona in 2012 to surrender to Spanish justice given the absence of financial secrecy in Spain as a legal figure. He was then imprisoned in Valdemoro and collaborated with Spanish and French justice to identify fraudsters from those countries, thus avoiding extradition. He was released under surveillance, unable to leave his apartment in Barcelona. In the following years, he shared the list of HSBC fraudsters with the United States, France, and Spain, which fined the bank and pursued some of the fraudsters including drug trafficking networks and money laundering, as well as bankers, politicians, royalty, entrepreneurs, and famous artists and athletes. Hervé developed a computer tool to monitor bank transactions at the European level and thus be able to draw up a map of financial flows to detect tax fraud. He founded Party X with the aim of legally imposing the control system on all banks and financial entities.

Thanda saw courage in Falciani's story. Capitalism, already in its speculative generation, was rotten. And profound changes arose from collective consciousness. He thought he should collaborate in awakening that awareness of the injustice of the powerful and contribute to Falciani through her equity studies. He decided to join Party X and enter the lists of the European elections the following May. He prepared a system of 'ethical territorial and fiscal redistribution' based on a moneyless society. A just society would only have local barter in vital matters and digital transactions nationally and globally, with automatic tax equity to direct redistribution to the ethical zone of equity. Falciani's transparency system, expanded to all financial volume and movements, could ensure the limits of equity that Thanda investigated passionately.

His first Christmas in Mexico arrived, and while Nayra and her children flew to Berkeley, Thanda traveled to Madrid to meet his parents and daughters. After a few days of heartfelt reunion and celebrating the new year at Robledo's house with her parents, daughters, Adam, Unai, Moses, and María, she flew back to Mexico City.

He wondered about the contradiction of her sensitivity and political struggle against climate change and at the same time her multiple flights to reconcile work and family, scattered around the world. Thanda thought of John's example in Eila, and the firm commitment to walk towards that ethical horizon of natural harmony was forged within her. Without it, everything else was inconsistent with the ethics of doing good, not only to the rest of humanity but to all forms of life on the planet.

In a corner of the T4 terminal at Madrid airport, he connected her computer to the airport's wifi and participated via Skype in the debate of the primary elections of Party X, presenting his ideas and proposal.

Half an hour after takeoff, the pilot asked over the intercom if there was a doctor on board. Thanda, nostalgic for her clinical days, volunteered. Two other passengers also responded to the call, one was a dentist and the other a plastic surgeon. His internal medicine skills, although rusty from his time in the European Union, led him to assist the patient. It was one of the flight attendants, who was lying in pain at the rear of the plane. Thanda examined her. He noticed that the Murphy sign, pain upon pressing under the right ribs after deep inspiration, was positive and suspected cholecystitis. Thanda asked for the flight medical kit and found cannulas, IVs, saline, and Dolantin. With the help of a crew member, he started an IV and injected the analgesic after checking the patient's blood pressure, heart rate, and perfusion. He asked the crew member, named Juan, if he could take her somewhere where she could lie down, and he could monitor her blood pressure and heart rate. They took her to a room at the front of the plane, just behind the cockpit. There, one of the two co-pilots usually slept. Juan asked him:

* Thank you, Thanda. Tell me, is it urgent to land so she can receive hospital care?
* No, Juan, I think we can maintain her vital signs stable during the flight. I'll keep an eye on her.
* Do you want to come to the cockpit next to me?

Juan was the flight captain. Thanda was surprised by his simplicity. No cap, no epaulets, no formal address, or class distance. They shared stories of their lives in the small cabin of barely three-square meters and over eight hundred buttons and control lights while Juan piloted the Airbus 340 with nearly four hundred passengers on board. The conversation flowed with beautiful complicity in ideas and worldviews.

What touched Thanda's heart the most was hearing a story of profound sensitivity and human generosity that Juan told him. He used to spend time with his partner Cristina in a house they bought in Pollensa Bay, on the island of Mallorca. There was an old and dilapidated hotel nearby that intrigued Juan. He learned that in 1929 it was founded by Adan Diehl in front of the pine tree that had inspired the poet and priest Costa i Llobera, who had died a few years earlier while delivering his sermon in church.

"Arise, O strong soul!

Disdain the filthy mud,

and on the austere heights,

take root with your zeal.

You will see the waves of this world,

crash at your feet,

and free as kingfishers above the deep sea,

your songs will soar."

That pine tree became a symbol of hope to look higher and purer than the filthy mud that was drowning humanity due to its addiction to oil and its struggles for power. Adan Diehl was a poet born in Argentina. He fell in love with that bay, which could only be accessed by sea at the time, and wanted the hotel to pursue the utopia of a place that would gather creators, artists, and thinkers, so that in such nature and beautiful horizons, they could find the best of themselves and propose visions of harmony for the 20th century. The crash of the New York Stock Exchange that same year and its effect in every corner of the world, the declining clientele not contributing to expenses, and the banks foreclosing on Alan's dream. He could barely return to his native Buenos Aires and died in ruin, overshadowed by feeling his utopia drowned in oblivion and longing for the air, the sea, and the pines of that bay where he sowed his dreams. A few years later, lightning struck the pine tree of the famous poem.

Moved by that story, Juan returned to Pollensa, put sea water, beach sand, and pine and cedar needles in a glass jar. On his next flight to Buenos Aires, he searched the immense cemetery of Chacarita for Alan Diehl's grave. After a whole day of searching, in emotional complicity with some caretakers of that city of marble and souls, he found it and placed the jar of Alan's utopian essences at the foot of the grave.

Such gestures were, for Thanda, the most beautiful and authentic ones people could make. Simple, subtle, profound, quiet, anonymous.

The magic of that friendship didn't end there. A few months later, they discovered they were second cousins. Life, Thanda thought, is magical when you walk with your heart wide open to adventure.

The thousands of jacarandas in Mexico City were beginning to bloom, and Thanda took a week off from work to spend time with José Luis, his former study partner, now a Jesuit priest on a mission on the harsh southern border of Comalapa. He traveled to Tapachula on an Aeromexico flight and met Diego, a Basque settled in Chiapas, passionate about Maya spirituality and goodness, and about the courage and dignity of Zapatismo. Diego led the NGO Fray Matías de Córdoba, named after the Dominican monk who defended Chiapas' independence, later annexed by Mexico. He also inherited from Fray Bartolomé de las Casas the struggle for the freedom and dignity of indigenous peoples against the abuses of the Spanish conquest. Diego had married a Guatemalan indigenous woman and was well acquainted with the reasons and routes of migrants, the tragedies, and longings that, from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, tormented by the violence of drug cartels and gangs, made them flee northward seeking peace, work, and something to send back to their families. He knew how the migrants already longed for their land and their people from the first step of their three-thousand-kilometer journey towards the American dream.

Diego worked tirelessly to ensure that the thousands of undocumented migrants arriving daily in Tapachula were not victims of discrimination and rights violations. Of the almost half a million who crossed the border, more than half were detained and deported, often passing through the feared immigration detention centers where they were crowded in. Diego visited them frequently to limit the violations of their rights. He helped them with asylum requests, sought medical attention for them, and provided psychological support when it was often needed. For Diego, the essential thing was to make them feel a friendly hand willing to listen, to help, to fight for their dignity and their future. Diego estimated that over sixty thousand unaccompanied minors crossed the border each year. Minors were easier prey for the immigration police, who pursued them like frightened rabbits and treated them like criminals, sending them back across the border. There, they decided whether to return ashamed to their homes, where their families had given them their savings to pay the "coyotes" for passage across the border on their saving adventure. Upon their return, they faced the gangs and drug cartels that threatened them with revenge and savagery. That's why they almost always tried again and again to cross with the same smugglers they had paid, who helped them try to cross the Suchiate River three times. Those who finally escaped immigration and police controls, paid for by the United States, followed the long route through Mexico. They were often victims of violence, kidnappings, and murders along the way. Sometimes they were forced to join the drug cartels. Children roamed the streets of Tapachula, Comalapa, San Cristóbal, or Tuxtla as shoe polishers or selling candy for a few pesos to barely afford a taco each day. Girls worked as servants, treated almost like slaves, in the homes of the Chiapas creole bourgeoisie. Many were forced into prostitution in the Danube alley. Many others ended up inhaling glue to forget their sad existence, delinquency, and being sent to reformatories. Often, they sank into the world of drugs, crime, and prisons, unable to remember the color of hope. The minority who managed to reach the United States were often deported or joined gangs wandering in vain search of relatives they almost never found.

Thanda spent two days with Diego, sharing his work, legal consultations, visits to detention centers and shelters for minors, and social activities with migrants seeking asylum under his legal support. He then continued her journey on the border buses filled with border traders, bewildered migrants, unscrupulous smugglers, disguised drug traffickers, weathered farmers, dignified Zapatistas, and lost adventurers, heading to the border town of Comalapa, where her friend and former tropical medicine study partner, José Luis, was stationed at the Jesuit mission.

Upon arriving at the mission, José Luis was not there. Thanda sat waiting on the step of the humble and still-under-construction house where José Luis lived with two Mexican novices. He watched groups of migrants pass by with their backpacks and frightened faces, feeling the pain of a humanity shattered by absurd fences that no one remembered why they existed. When José Luis arrived, they embraced warmly. They barely had time to share confidences before joining a group in Chapultepec. José Luis told Thanda how, after completing the course they shared in Tropical Medicine in Barcelona, ​​he volunteered for a Jesuit missionary project in Honduras. He felt the meaning of the Jesuit motto "to love and serve" in his dedication to poor communities in the violent city of El Progreso and decided to become a Jesuit. Thanda still felt strangeness and intrigue when he encountered the deep Christian faith of good people. He remembered her childhood question: "Is it possible for a God of love to exist alongside a truth known only to a few?" At the same time, he felt profound admiration for José Luis's dedication, discreet, humble, and steadfast, without the logo of an NGO or a project's "logical framework," without a salary or anything of his own.

During the following days, Thanda accompanied José Luis and helped him in his tasks of supporting migrants in various shelters. The story of a Honduran boy with whom Thanda formed a bond left a strong impression on him.

Rambo was a slender, sinewy boy with a shaven head, sad eyes, a straight, thin nose, a crooked smile, and a restless attitude, as if constantly on alert. He was born at the turn of the century in Yoro, Honduras. Pursued by the Mara Salvatrucha, he first fled to San Pedro Sula, and then, being pursued by violent individuals, left his country with his younger sister to join a migrant caravan. The previous week, he and his fourteen-year-old sister had jumped the twenty meters of the bridge between Guatemala and Mexico and swam to Ciudad Hidalgo, and then, fleeing from immigration authorities, made their way to Comalapa, where they found José Luis, lost, hungry, and with his sister feverish.

-How did you start your journey, Rambo?

Thanda asked.

* A caravan of about five hundred migrants, organized through Facebook, passed by our house. I didn't think twice: I packed my few belongings in my backpack and encouraged my sister to come with me. We informed my mother when we passed through Ocotepeque, about five hours from our home. It took us eight days until I borrowed a mobile phone in Ciudad Hidalgo to let a family friend know that we were okay. They told us that the beast didn't reach there anymore, and we crossed the border, fleeing from customs officers, during the last month, begging for food every day. Here we found Father José Luis, who gave us refuge. May God bless him.
* But tell me, Rambo, is it so dangerous to stay in your town or neighborhood that you risk so many dangers as a migrant?
* Look, Thanda, when I was 11 years old, the Mara Salvatrucha murdered my brother, who was nineteen at the time, for not joining them. At 14, the gang began to 'bother me.' They insisted that I become a gang member. But I never wanted to. They threatened me. I continued to avoid them. I spent three years selling lychees and cleaning neighbors' yards. The Mara wanted to marry my sister off to a gang member. Shortly after, I had to go identify the body of my fifteen-year-old cousin because he kept the money from an extortion at her job selling bread. The body was face down, hanging from a fence, with a disfigured face. I recognized her by a tattoo. Two months ago, unable to find work to eat, I agreed to carry some weapons from one house to another within their neighborhood, the Reyes Caballero colony, in San Pedro. The Mara paid me and pressured me to join and get a tattoo. When they had already shaved my head, I escaped. I couldn't take it anymore. I told my mother, who, from so much pain, no longer speaks, she just looks at me sadly.
* And where do you want to go now?
* I want to keep going to the United States, Thanda. As soon as my sister's fever goes down, we'll walk to Arriaga and hop on the beast. I know God will protect us. It can't be that he allows so much sadness and calamity in just one family. When I get to the United States, I'll wash cars, and with what I save, I'll sell hot dogs on the street, then buy a motorcycle to make deliveries, and I'll manage to pay for my sister's medical studies and bring my mother with us. My “diosecito” (Little/dear God) will protect us.

Thanda was shaken by so much pain. How was it possible that a God, if he existed, of love, allowed so much suffering for some and so many privileges for others, generation after generation? He thought of her Ndebele friends who would say,

:

* Wake up, Mkhulumkhulu! Can't you see we are suffering? Can't you do anything with all your power?

Like Rambo's, he learned many other stories of migrants and heard about others who had been murdered or disappeared. What could he do from her privileged life and influential job? He gave Rambo and his sister what she could withdraw from an ATM and told them that when they reached Tijuana, they should contact a Mexican friend from her time in Berkeley, Ana Lucía, who worked tirelessly to help migrants apply for residency and nurture hope. Before returning, he joined a Zapatista indigenous demonstration protesting the corruption and violence of the state. On his way back to Mexico City, he thought about a proposal he would make to the European Union and the Mexican government. He couldn't forget the faces of Rambo and his sister and so many other children. Thanda thought that, truly, alongside the AIDS orphans in Africa, they were the clearest examples of what he liked to call "heroes of their own story." If there was a just God, they should be the *heirs of a New Humanity* and guide it toward horizons of light and peace.

He spoke with the ambassador, Andrew, a Londoner who had been working in English and European diplomacy for forty years across Asia, the Middle East, and America. Andrew had a big heart, but like almost all his colleagues in the European Union, he had accumulated a weight of skepticism about what he could do from his job for a fairer world. Among officials, skepticism often evolved into cynicism, something that saddened Thanda to see. In the case of Andrew and many other good-hearted colleagues, a deep sense of frustration had settled in their souls for not being able to change the rules of a cruel and unjust game in which they had to play on the winning side. Thanda had toured Chiapas with Andrew, going from project to project, feted by the clan of Governor Velasco, a young man from a wealthy family who, like so many, used his power to enrich himself without scruples.

* Andrew, I have been getting to know the southern border better in my free time. When we go on official visits, everything is painted pink, and we aren't allowed to see reality.
* Be careful, Thanda, you're a diplomat, you can't take risks or positions that haven't been approved for us from Brussels.
* Andrew, you know that what I study, listen to, and try to propose is in defense of human rights. The European Union hasn't signed the convention on the rights of migrant workers and their families, but it does defend the convention on the rights of the child. I know this well because I coordinated the drafting of its foreign policy on children's rights.
* Tell me, Thanda, I know you do everything with a good heart. What have you seen and what do you propose?
* I have seen migrant children fleeing the most terrible violence in Central America and being pursued like criminals by customs officers to return them to their origins, where certain death awaits them. We cannot turn a blind eye to this, Andrew.
* Thanda, look at Europe too, how migrants drown in the Mediterranean. Europe doesn't support a world without borders but 'regulated migration flows.
* But Andrew, what regulation can there be for a Syrian family fleeing bombs made in France or the United States, or a young person from Mali fleeing hunger and drought caused by climate change, or a Palestinian woman bombed by Israel? Sixty thousand children desperately flee Central America every year. Most are deported, kidnapped by drug traffickers, or roam the streets begging... my heart breaks...
* And tell me, Thanda, what do you propose? We're already helping several NGOs. By the way, I've been called by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs saying they've seen you at Zapatista demonstrations with those NGOs we support. I didn't know how to respond.
* Tell them that we're officials, but we have brains to think and hearts to feel, Andrew. It was a peaceful demonstration calling for dialogue and peace.
* Well, tell me what else we can propose, Thanda. You know I appreciate your ideas, but I think this isn't your place... here we must keep quiet too much.
* I propose that we study how a free movement area between Mexico and Central America would be. They are Mayan sibling peoples. Between Guatemala and Chiapas, they speak the same languages and believe in the same gods. They have much more in common with each other than the people of Chiapas do with those from the north of Chihuahua, where the vast majority will never go, and if they did, they wouldn't understand how they live. The union of Central American and Mexican peoples in a common space makes much more sense than the Pacific Alliance we support only for commercial interests. In a world that should trade less, not more. We are already drowning in smoke and destruction of nature, Andrew... Tell me: what sense does it make to support Mexico's dialogue with Chile, ten thousand kilometers away, for a free customs area for goods and people and not want to do it between Chiapas and Guatemala? Let's propose a Schengen-like area in Mesoamerica, Andrew. Schengen in Europe, with Erasmus and the free movement of people between countries, has brought prosperity, harmony, empathy, and a sense of solidarity. You always defend it in your speeches. Promoting it would save many lives.
* Well then, write me a project to explore everything that would entail, learning from how we did it in the European Union.

Andrew knew that such an idea was a red line drawn by Washington to Mexico. Obama in the White House dictated, and Peña Nieto in Los Pinos obeyed.

Thanda studied all the legal, regulatory, customs, statistical, economic, and coordination framework of social services, health, transportation, taxes, and other cross-border issues that allowed the Schengen area to exist in Europe. He prepared a proposal in several phases, starting with Mexico and Guatemala to continue with the other countries of Mesoamerica and then moving on to South America, where he had contacts with people close to Lula and Mujica who could help heis study and plan the dream of a continent without borders.

He sent her proposal to Andrew, who asked him to send it to the cooperation and external diplomatic service department in Brussels. There was no response.

A few weeks later, he received an anonymous email to her private address:

* Thanda, don't push the Mesoamerican Schengen anymore. Your humanitarian arguments clash with geopolitics and Brussels' concessions to Washington. They can terminate your contract and not give you another position. Keep fighting for the communities, but don't mess with the borders of power, says a friend.

That day he returned home sad. Nayra was there, as always, playing, doing her schoolwork, and talking to the father of her children on Skype. Thanda understood it, and at the same time, he missed h daughters a lot, now teenagers and flying in their own lives. He went up to the roof with her guitar. The day was clear, and the Popocatepetl volcano could be seen. The sun was setting. He sang "*A desalambrar*" with tears in her eyes. Nayra came up. She was so beautiful...

* What's wrong, Thanda?

I don't know if I'm where I should be, Nayra.

# Humanity towards the abyss. from New York to Paris, Autumm 2015

Thanda had received a letter from his friend Paula. She was leading Doctors Without Borders when he was on the board. Now, she worked on the Aquarius ship, rescuing migrants from drowning in the Mediterranean as they fled from hunger and wars in Africa and the Middle East, intertwined with Western interests to which Europe sold weapons. Thanda increasingly saw a Security Council with power over the rest, monopolizing nuclear power and selling most of the weapons to stoke wars around the world. That year, the Aquarius had rescued more than three thousand shipwrecked people. Thanda told her that he wanted to go at Christmas to sail on rescues while his colleagues on board could go spend the holiday season with their families. Paula sent him the photo of a child that represented the reality of many thousands.

The body of little Aylan Kurdi, three years old, had been found dead on the Turkish beach of Bodrum. Thanda researched his story with a lump in his throat and fists clenched in pain and rage. That boy never knew what peace was in his short life. Neither did his brother Galip, who died at the age of five, nor hundreds of thousands of children for whom the sun was fire and the rain was bombs. Aylan and Galip came from the Kurdish city of Kobane, a Syrian town bordering Turkey that suffered violent fights between the Islamic State and the Kurdish guerrillas, both armed to the teeth by the United States. Aylan's family decided to flee to Turkey, like another three hundred thousand people that year. Once in Turkey, they were housed in a camp where they shared a UNHCR tent with three other families. They received a card from the government with which they could withdraw up to the equivalent of ten dollars a day from bank ATMs, as aid for their refugee status. The card had a logo with the flag of the European Union. Thanda learned from his friends at ECHO, the European humanitarian aid agency, that it donated one billion euros a year to the authoritarian government of Turkey to keep refugees from Asia and the Middle East from approaching European shores. There in Turkey, Aylan's father, Abdullah, applied for asylum in Canada, where his sister lived. But his application was denied. Desperate for a life of misery and no future and harassed as Kurdish pariahs and traitors by the government of Turkey, they decided to try their luck crossing the sea. The family set sail in a boat with seventeen other people on the beach of Bodrum to reach the Greek island of Kos, just six kilometers away. They started to row, and just five hundred meters from the coast, the boat began to take on water. Fear led to panic. Some stood up, and the boat capsized. Abdullah tried to hold onto his two sons by their hands, but they slipped away, and he saw them sink. It was already night, and he jumped to search for them desperately in the dark depths. The boat sank. He also lost sight of his wife. He kept looking for them desperately and without the strength to cry or shout. On one hand, he felt the desire to join them in that mysterious and cruel darkness. But at the same time, he resolved to be strong and survive because he had to shout to the world the pain of his family and fight for justice in memory and honor of his family. Only Abdullah survived. He managed to swim to the shore still hoping to find his wife and children. They had agreed to meet at a rendezvous point if anything happened to separate them. But he found no trace of them there. Nor on the nearby coast nor in the hospitals he searched desperately. Two days later, Aylan's body appeared on the sand of the Bodrum beach.

Thanda constantly remembered the story of Aylan and his family. The image of Abdullah trying to grasp the hands of his sons being swept away by the sea resembled his dream of the boat in the sea with his daughters drifting away. He felt a deep longing for his daughters. Nayra had a deep connection with her children, maintaining complicity and harmony with their father, something Thanda could not, or perhaps did not want to, penetrate. But at the same time, he felt selfish, living privileged and safe, feeling from his parents and his daughters the affection from a distance, the tenderness and passion of his partner Nayra with whom he shared ideas and struggles, hundreds of friends, and memories in so many places around the world, and challenges to fight for. There was something in the innocent tenderness of children's love for their parents that he deeply missed, perhaps because it was cut short by his divorce, perhaps because he saw it in his home between Nayra and her children, perhaps because his soul needed that beautiful caress in such a cruel world.

Aylan's story made it even clearer to him than ever that he had to fight against borders. Absurd, artificial, and cruel. Incompatible with universal human rights. He said so in several speeches to the government, the United Nations, and civil society in Mexico. He proposed refounding a Europe based on love, open arms, sharing the land and food, and harmonious knowledge with nature. Aylan inspired what should never happen again. And Eila the way forward.

Aylan, Eila, Europe... "Eylania": he sent a proposal to thousands of comrades in the European Union, launched a petition on the Avaaz network, and talked about it passionately with Andrew. He knew Andrew understood and felt the same at the bottom of his heart, but the hands of diplomats are tied with golden ribbons and their words dictated by power and softened by non-truths. Barely a dozen friends supported him. Not even his proposal to dissolve the southern border of Mexico with the spirit of Schengen among Maya brothers from Chiapas and Guatemala was heard. Another example that what they valued for Europeans, they did not propose for others. A world of wire fences. Mental and physical, mirrors of each other.

That night he sang on the rooftop of the house in Chapultepec the verses dedicated to the Argentine poet Alfonsina Storni, who, tormented by the pain of cancer, surrendered to the sea: "On the soft sand that the sea licks, her small footprint does not return anymore..."

It was already the autumn of 2015, the date by which the Millennium Agenda was supposed to have been fulfilled. Leaders from around the world were summoned to the United Nations General Assembly to agree on a new agenda until 2030, the Sustainable Development Agenda. The network of spiritual eco-villages already had nearly ten million members in over twenty thousand eco-villages in a hundred countries and had acquired "associate organization" status with a voice, but no vote, in the General Assembly. Aimsa had spent the past year discussing with many working groups formed by representatives from countries and UN agencies the report on what had been achieved with the 2015 goals as well as the proposals for the 2030 agenda. She felt a vital fatigue attending hours of lengthy discussions and speeches so empty and hypocritical that she felt dirty being part of that circus. But she had to persevere, to try to change things from within and also to strongly represent the voice and vision of the network of spiritual eco-villages in which she firmly believed as the only hope for humanity.

In the United Nations sessions, there was no country that did not boast about its efforts or results or attribute the lack of progress in its Millennium goals to lack of cooperation. Neither did the UN agencies and the more than a hundred associated organizations show any shred of self-criticism or humility. It was a pathetic circus of vanities in front of a world collapsing in pain and destruction.

The World Bank had defined in 1990 the threshold of "absolute poverty": most countries defined their "poverty thresholds" by the minimum costs for nutrition, clothing, and housing, arising from 1945 with Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on "adequate living standards." World Bank officials met at a luxurious hotel in Manhattan and reviewed the poverty lines of the lowest-income countries. They averaged it and rounded the figure to "one dollar per person per day." Above that line, people "were no longer poor." Upon concluding their historic report, they packed their bags and paid their hotel bills, charged to the World Bank, of over a thousand dollars each in three days. The experts who agreed on that level that defined what poverty was and what it was not charged one dollar for every two minutes, little more than the time it took to repeat "our organization is committed to fighting poverty." In that same year, the poverty threshold in the United States was twenty dollars each day. Life had a different price depending on where one was born. Thanda related these thunderously unequal and shamelessly unjust concepts to the price of life estimated when, three years after setting the poverty line, the same World Bank in 1993 set a price for a year of life in "poor" countries for their "efficient vertical interventions": 50 dollars. Meanwhile, rich countries did set other costs for their public health and private insurance, which amounted to twenty thousand dollars per year of healthy life. That was the value of human life depending on the place of birth. Everything was related: power, differences, wealth dressed in charity perpetuating poverty paternalistically. The saddest thing was to see poor countries and communities praising in gratitude the crumbs of power and health philanthro-capitalism. The one for the capital and bank policies, a smaller one called "world," and the other, with Gates, Slim, and the foundations of pharmaceutical corporations at the forefront, dominating the World Health Organization.

Ten years later, just before Aimsa arrived with Jonay and Nour in New York from Ukuzwana, about ten thousand officials and diplomats from two hundred countries around the world were staying in luxurious apartments and hotels in one of the most expensive cities in the world. There, from the altar of abundance, they decided that the goal of all countries should be to "reduce poverty" - from less than one dollar per person per day - by half, and thus the proportion of poor people, from 1990 to 2015. Once again, it was decided by people who earned about a thousand times more each day. And there was a clever trick behind it: the inflation rate and its consequence on the value of money meant that over the twenty-five-year period, the proportion of poor people would decrease, although relative poverty - the difference between rich and poor - would not change or even increase. Sure success.

Other indicators seemed to have improved. The proportion of children underweight for their age had decreased, but it was seen that overweight was increasing due to junk food promoted by the agro-industry. Primary education coverage had also increased, but what were the children of the world studying? Competing in the jungle of the free market? Aimsa thought of Nour's rebellion against imposed education. Access to clean water, latrines, and energy had also increased, although the world was depleting natural resources, including freshwater sources, and access to energy came at the cost of deforestation and increasing carbon emissions towards climate disaster. Additionally, if China's data were excluded, one-sixth of the world's population and where the economic growth of its centralized capitalism had lifted hundreds of millions out of extreme poverty into rampant consumption, the world's picture was not so rosy. As for health indicators, selective for certain ages and diseases and which Thanda questioned in his entry into the European Union, the average world mortality rate for infants had decreased, although by half and not two-thirds as agreed upon. Maternal mortality had also decreased, although still far from the three-quarters reduction plan. It was difficult to know if the epidemics of malaria, tuberculosis, and AIDS had been "reversed," as the goal stated, even though, as Thanda told her, two-thirds of international cooperation was allocated to those diseases, the cause of barely one in every six preventable deaths, almost forgetting the rest.

 Humanity at the turn of the millennium, also arbitrarily defined according to the birth of Jesus - and even with errors in calculations - continued to suffer from enormous inequalities. More than half of the people were lacking the vital necessities to live in a dignified manner. Aimsa and Thanda had prepared, with the data collected by Thanda during his time in Berkeley, an analysis that demonstrated that "there was no reason for complacency." It was ignored. Thanda was reprimanded, once again, in Brussels for expressing opinions that should only come from the highest hierarchy. He preferred to maintain a "low profile" and send Aimsa data and analysis to influence a different type of agenda for 2030, less arbitrary and where Thanda with his equity analysis and Aimsa with the vision of the eco-villages could influence goals of greater human and natural harmony.

Although he was very reluctant to attend, Aimsa insisted that Fernando participate in the United Nations General Assembly, representing Eila as the most advanced symbol of the eco-village network. He was almost seventy years old. Lisy, after her mission in Sierra Leone, decided to return with Saidu to Eila to reunite with Fernando. At that time, Aimsa's message arrived for Fernando, attaching a formal invitation to speak at the General Assembly and then at an event called "From New York to Paris: for life on the planet." Lisy encouraged him. Umbela did too. Finally, Fernando felt honored and responsible wearing John's sailor cap, which he always wore, and accepted. They prepared John's stranded boat, Satia, with the help of Martin, who wanted to join the journey.

Fernando felt an affectionate bond with Lisy, perhaps more sensitive after her experience in Sierra Leone, when he thought about the courage, she had to rescue them. He felt the need to have a father to share his hopes and fears with.

* Fernando, do you remember what you asked me when you rescued us at sea, over thirty years ago?
* Yes, Lisy. I asked you if you wanted to be my daughter or my younger sister. You didn't say anything. And the discord with your mother distanced our paths, but I still feel immense affection for you.
* Fernando, I want to be your daughter.

They hugged each other excitedly.

* Fernando, Martin, and Lisy sailed during the month of August and arrived in New York. Martin left with Jonay and Nour to White Lake. They were creating a sanctuary for wild horses in the Bethel Forest. Lisy left with her sister Kadiatu, who lived with the Ambassador of Ghana before the United Nations.

Thanda shared his Berkeley analyses and reports at that time, which no one in Brussels had shown interest in reading. In them, she demonstrated that equity between countries and within them was the key to understanding and measuring unjust inequalities. He questioned the lines of extreme and constant misery proposed by the World Bank. He sensed that this institution was more concerned with paving the way for the business of the large corporations of its most influential member countries and especially the United States, with the privilege of always appointing its director, than truly alleviating the suffering caused by the unjust marginalization of the vast majority. The cause of injustice was nothing other than the obscene wealth of a few countries that concentrated much of the capital and that dominated both Wall Street and the policies of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

He sent reports to Aimsa and Fernando, which demonstrated that the threshold for a dignified life, based on minimum incomes to enjoy a dignified life expectancy that was feasible for all and sustainable for future generations, was at least ten times the poverty line of the World Bank. He also shared evidence that, between the poverty line and the threshold of dignity, almost half of humanity lived without the possibility of a dignified and healthy life expectancy, resulting in sixteen million excess deaths each year, unnecessary and unjust, ignored by international agendas and agencies from their ivory towers. He thought that symbolically, it was almost the number of eco-villagers demanding a fairer world and in harmony with nature. He also sent them the data from her report on "the burden of inequality" in the number and proportion of unjust deaths due to unjust inequalities. These data called for a new index: the proportion of the population in the world and in each country living "below the equity curve." Of course, this pointed both to reducing the population deficit of decent living standards, ten times above the World Bank's misery level, and that of those living above the excess and hoarding level, something anathema in the capitalism of "the more, the better." This ethically demanded multiplying by forty times the "official development cooperation," mere crumbs of barely 0.3% of the obscene wealth of the so-called "developed" countries, the ones that had colonized, enslaved, exploited natural resources, and filled the skies with smoke.

When Aimsa presented in New York this logic based on the ethics of the common and achievable goal of better health for all, no diplomat, nor the supposed experts from the United Nations agencies, seemed to understand it. And those who did understand it rejected it. Some despised it as a utopia, others saw it as oppressive communism over individual freedom, of being "equal." Aimsa realized that almost all of those discussing these indicators and goals under the magnanimous motto of "leaving no one behind" lived in abundance above the hoarding limit, the most direct cause of poverty: "the wolf guarding the chickens," she thought.

The only thing they achieved with hundreds of debates was that the World Bank increased the poverty line to "1.9" dollars and introduced a goal to reduce inequality with a quantifiable target. After lengthy meetings, an agreement was only reached to specify that goal: that the poorest forty percent would have a greater income growth than the average. Something so absurd, so trivial, so hypocritical from the dominant world of wealth that Aimsa felt defeated. Even if that minimal objective were met, the richest 1% could still dominate and plunge the poorest 20% into greater misery. That paltry indicator of "more growth" could easily be masked - perhaps a 0.00001% increase? - for the bottom half compared to the average. Was that the extent of the world's ambition to end so much suffering? Would the extremes of wealth, increasingly hoarding, continue to be tolerated, as evidenced by Ricardo's reports with Oxfam every year? Would most of humanity continue to be mired in misery, losing years of life and suffering millions of unnecessary deaths? Would politicians continue to deliver savior-like and poetic speeches, and their statistics show false and hypocritical "progress"? Thanda and Nayra spoke via Skype about these dilemmas and frustrations with Aimsa, Jonay, Fernando, and David, and among them, they felt a profound disappointment that often-brought tears of helplessness in a world dominated by such crude and foolish power.

One night, sharing James's apartment in Brooklyn, who was traveling in Virginia, Fernando confessed a concern to Aimsa.

* Aimsa, it is an honor to be here with you and try to influence government commitments towards a fairer world.
* No, Fernando. You in Eila are the hands and the light, I am just the words, and sometimes I feel exhausted by the emptiness they leave in my soul. As you have seen, there is a lot of rhetoric, arrogance, interests, intrigues, secrets... and in the end, if an agreement is reached, it is often only used in their grandiose speeches. Nothing changes.
* I understand you, Aimsa. It must be frustrating, draining of vital energy, and lonely to fight for our ideas in this asphalt jungle, cars, rush, and dollars. That's what I want to talk to you about, Aimsa. About the dollars. About the discussions of the World Bank's poverty line, Thanda's equity curve, and international cooperation. Everything is measured in dollars. Isn't that where the origin of evil, of injustice, lies?
* I think I understand you, Fernando, but most of the world, Eila is an exception, lives by exchanging their work for money and that money for food and other necessities to survive.
* Yes, but that money is part of a great perverse game. You say it yourself. It accumulates in a few hands that play with it in the financial speculation market... Doesn't it seem to you that the most revolutionary act today is to live without money?
* True, Fernando. And that's why I want you to be here. To show the world that it is possible to live without ownership of natural resources and sharing non-polluting manufactured goods for well-being. That life is much more beautiful without luxuries or whims, without hierarchies, money, or banks. But in the meantime, and it may take a long time, we must put an end to that perverse game that accumulates money and power in a few hands, the same hands that play with governments, with the United Nations, with supposed cooperation, so that everything remains the same. At least you reveal the hypocrisy of the rich giving charity to the poor, who vote for them and applaud them to increase their glory and perpetuate themselves in power.
* At that moment it was already late at night. They were in the kitchen drinking a fermented kombucha. Fernando observed Aimsa's beauty. She had taken off her sari and was wearing a simple cotton t-shirt and Chiapaneco pants. He saw how her black hair fell over her forehead and to one side, how the candlelight under which they spoke, to avoid using electricity, created magical shadow plays on her smooth, harmonious face. Aimsa felt unsettled by the gaze that Fernando couldn't hide. Fernando had a white beard and hair, a tender and sad look at the same time, an aquiline nose that revealed his Basque roots, and strong, weather-beaten hands, intertwined on the table. Aimsa felt inFernando a profound loneliness.
* Fernando, you are like a father to Jonay, which makes you my father. With that affection and gratitude, let me ask you a question: how long has it been since you lived with the full love of a woman?
* Thirty-two years, Aimsa. But after John's death, I went to live in the Colony of Tenderness. Umbela and I felt and feel a deep bond because of so many memories of a life, especially that of her life partner and my soul friend, John. We decided not to spend the rest of our lives alone. We live together with deep mutual tenderness and spend the nights embraced in profound union. There is no sexual relationship, as she always reserved that for John and, in a way, still does. It has been many years since I felt the chemical attraction that triggers our hormones and dilutes reason in absolute fullness. But our embrace, tenderness, and union are pure; they give us peace and light.
* Disturbed by that confession, Fernando excused himself to take a walk in the park.

Meanwhile, Aimsa made a call to Jonay:

* How are you, sweetheart?
* Fine, here living in lovely camaraderie with Lisy and Martin. And you? How are the discussions at the United Nations?
* You know, word games and intrigues of interests far from empathy and reality.
* I can imagine. Resist and speak bravely as always, dear. And Fernando?
* That's what I wanted to talk to you about. He feels sad in his heart because of the intimate loneliness of so many years.
* Yes, I know. I think deep down he came to New York in case he could meet Kadiatu. He never stopped thinking about her after thirty years.
* Yes, but I'm worried that seeing her will cause him more pain. She joined an ambassador, and they live in a very different world.
* He must face it.
* Jonay spoke with Fernando that night. He held him in deep reverence. He was his inspiration in medicine and in going far, where it was most needed. Now he was united in pure harmony with his mother, respecting the intimate space left by John. He was like a father to him. And he felt sadness for his sadness. He felt that Fernando had to have the courage to reunite with Kadiatu and remove that thorn from his soul. He sensed that there were feelings of resentment, longing, and even unspoken hope in him.
* Fernando did just that. The next night, he arranged to meet Kadiatu in Central Park. Kadiatu thought about inviting him to her house, but then feared he would feel uncomfortable. She invited him to dinner at a restaurant in Manhattan, but Fernando said he didn't want to use money.
* Quite difficult in the heart of world capitalism, Fernando. Can't you be flexible for one night in such a special reunion?
* I prefer to walk under the trees of Central Park.

So, they met in front of the Dakota building. Seeing her, he felt she was no longer the same. More than thirty years had passed since he met her in Sierra Leone and more than twenty since he last saw her. She wore a leather coat that revealed an elegant velvet dress, he noticed golden earrings, and she had done her makeup and plucked her eyebrows. She had gained weight, and her expression had become tougher, although in her gaze, a light of innocence and wonder could still be seen.

* You look very beautiful, Kadiatu.
* Thank you, Fernando. And you are very handsome and strong.
* Both sensed in that greeting a certain code of mutual liking without the attraction of other times, which had faded earlier in Kadiatu but had persisted in Fernando's imagination.

They talked about each other's lives. Kadiatu told him about her efforts to defend women's rights and the fight against circumcision, which affected and mutilated the lives of so many African women. Fernando told her about how they fought for Eila to shake off money, property, and all the physical and mental fences with which modern society passively lived.

* And tell me, Kadiatu, how is your heart? I heard you live with a man from Ghana?
* His name is Kofi, he's a good man, Fernando. He divorced his wife and lived alone here in New York. He helped me a lot to gain support from all countries and the African Union in proposals to eradicate circumcision. He takes care of me and appreciates what I do very much.

Fernando felt that he did not take care of her or appreciate her as Kofi now said he did. Perhaps he had always been too convinced of his ideas, of living simply and in nature, and he did not know how to give her the space that Kadiatu took shortly after arriving at La Gomera, on her own. She flew away and never returned.

- And you, Fernando?

He didn't know whether to tell her the truth: that he never forgot her nor met anyone with whom to live in fullness. At that moment, he felt that Kadiatu belonged to another world, to another vibration, and so it should be. He resisted accepting it for many years, but now he understood that it would have been forcing two different vibrations, which separated shone and together grew dim. He felt a great treasure in having the tender, discreet, even timid complicity with Umbela's kindness and feeling how together they could watch a sunset in silence, knowing they were united. After so many years, he felt liberated from the torment of unrequited love, of unreturned dedication, of sterile waiting, of frustrated desire, of shattered dreams, and felt profound happiness for the happiness of that beautiful and brave being he met in the jungles of Sierra Leone and now flew freely in her flight, far, very far from him.

* I am happy in the company of Umbela and passionate about the vision and light of Eila, Kadiatu." As he said it, he felt immense strength and a magical privilege to live in coherence with his ideas. With Courage and Tenderness.

At the end of September, Aimsa and Fernando attended the United Nations General Assembly. The new global agenda was called "sustainable development," something contradictory because development, understood as evolution, like all life at every moment and place, cannot be "sustainable" in its static dimension. On the other hand, making the current level and pace of humanity sustainable, based on constant growth in trade and consumption, was incompatible with the damage to nature and its capacity for regeneration.

Fernando proposed the concept of "harmonious development" to transition from Western anthropocentrism to holistic harmony with all forms of life. They dismissed it, and he even saw many representatives in suits and from their lives of luxury and arrogance laughing among themselves at "utopian proposals" without basis. One of them sneered at Aimsa in the hallways, saying, "What do you want, Mrs. Harris, for us to go back to living in caves?"

At least they managed, through the network of eco-villages and in alliance with many Southern countries suffering from the pollution of two centuries of the North, to include objectives on carbon emissions, biodiversity on land and in the sea, clean water, and clean energy, in "sustainable" cities and communities. They had to accept the name. It was even accepted that the key goal of the "fight against climate change," a euphemism for a catastrophe, thought Aimsa, would be to reduce carbon emissions to a level that would prevent an increase of two degrees.

Fernando had worked with Aimsa on drafts for the conference on climate change that would take place two months later in Paris. The reports from the international panel of experts on the evolution of climate change were devastating. They participated in the calculations and multivariable analysis of the consequences and interrelationships with the other planetary boundaries with his friend Mans, from the Stockholm Resilience Institute. Aimsa presented with Mans and other allies the data indicating that this figure was one and a half tons per year per person. No country agreed to include that goal: it was too distant and impossible for the rich countries, and considered an unfair barrier for poor countries that increased their desires for cheap production and alienated consumption. Some out of selfishness and others out of ambition, humanity seemed incapable of stopping its self-destruction. They left it without a figure, without a limit, to be defined.

In a meeting with delegates from all countries, Fernando asked who knew their personal carbon footprint for that year, and even their footprint for having traveled and spent two weeks in New York. No one raised their hand. They all looked at him with some contempt, that old man poorly dressed in a weathered face and rough hands from working the land.

Therefore, and consulting with the "regional beacons" of the eco-village network, they proposed an objective that would be key to achieving all those related to the environment, half of the agenda: it was about raising awareness of responsible production and consumption. One of the goals within that objective aspired for "all people in the world to have relevant information and sensitivity so that their lifestyles were in harmony with nature." It was the only one of the nearly two hundred goals in that extensive agenda that spoke of "awareness" and "harmony."

For Fernando, that was the key: without individual awareness of what foods, energy, and manufactured goods one consumes, most people were captive to "alienated consumerism." Consumption only looked at convenience and price, without knowing how each one affected others, future generations, and other forms of life. Thanda, Jonay, and Aimsa had calculated with Mans what the limit of carbon tons would be to avoid reaching two degrees of increase above pre-industrial levels. According to Mans and the other experts on the international panel, those two degrees would lead to negative impacts on other planetary boundaries, which would then lead to reduced carbon absorption. Above that threshold, the planet would enter a negative spiral towards temperatures with catastrophic and unprecedented impacts in the history of humanity.

The 2030 agenda was approved. It was dispersed into almost two hundred goals, almost none of which were quantified, and those that were quantified were far from the level necessary to stop collective suicide and human hemorrhage due to injustice. Everyone applauded and left, proudly returning to their countries, leaving their ambassadors and representatives attending thousands of meetings in New York. The theater of vanities remained intact, where almost everything was rhetorical to continue justifying their privileges to their countries and everyone to a world without governance, without consciousness.

Aimsa convinced Fernando, for whom she felt immense affection, to speak out at the Climate Summit in Paris. Jonay was immersed in new struggles for the right to health against the millionaire interests of the medical and pharmaceutical industry, protected by Obama and his poetic speeches. Martin decided to travel through the United States promoting eco-villages and seeking to alleviate his heartbreak over Saidu, which awakened a confused sexual identity within him. Nour set the wild horse sanctuary in the forests of Bothun in motion and decided to join Aimsa and Fernando on another journey across the Atlantic. He had a deep desire to reunite with Adam and Unai, his soul brothers.

Lisy would return to Cuba to reunite with Buhleve, with Elias, and continue her studies at the Latin American School of Medicine. In her emotional farewell to Fernando, she said:

* Fernando, Aita, you must come to Cuba to inspire the revolution towards Eila's harmony.

Fernando was moved. He didn't say anything. He felt an enormous desire to return to his island after more than forty years.

They arrived in Normandy three weeks later and left John's old sailboat, Satia, in a port of a coastal eco-village of sailors, who welcomed them with great affection. They met with representatives of the three hundred eco-villages already existing in France. Aimsa and Fernando explained the discussions, agreements, and frustrations in New York and the importance of encouraging strong and legally binding commitments in Paris. Nour spoke about animal rights and then embarked on a route with a mare that the community lent her, heading south, through rural roads and forests, from eco-village to eco-village.

Aimsa and Fernando went to Paris with a group of cyclists from eco-villages in Normandy. They refused to travel on the train powered by nuclear energy that left radioactive waste for thousands of years. They arrived at the vast halls of Paris-Le Bourget where the United Nations Conference on Climate Change 2015 would be held for twelve days, where humanity would play its destiny. If agreements were not reached to reduce emissions, it would lead to an ecological disaster in less than twenty years, possibly marking the beginning of its extinction. It was a symbol of the pathetic and arrogant anthropocentrism that the immense ships housing more than forty-five thousand participants from one hundred ninety-five countries represented a cost of about two hundred million dollars, subsidized by the electric-nuclear companies EdF and GDF-Suez, and caused emissions of one hundred thousand tons of carbon.

For the conference, Thanda had conducted a study and published an article for Fernando and Aimsa to disseminate. He titled it: "Climate Change: A War Without Weapons." From studies of weather stations with climate data and mortality by age, he inferred that the temperature increase projection at the rate of emissions growth over the last ten years would cause an excess of more than two hundred million deaths. This immense silent or silenced tragedy would target innocents: those over sixty years old from the year 2050 onwards, mainly the generation born after 1990; and, with double cruel injustice, especially in lightly polluting tropical countries.

During the endless discussions and debates of each part of the agreement, each country recounted its efforts and haggled over its commitments. Thanda also sent them studies from Mexico in which he calculated that, of the seven hundred billion tons of carbon accumulated in the atmosphere, the main greenhouse gas responsible for over 90% of global warming, two-thirds belonged to the United States and the European Union, which accounted for only ten percent of the world's population. Emissions continued to rise year after year, mainly due to the increasing emissions from China, India, and Russia. The United States, with nearly twenty tons per person per year, opposed any kind of commitment. The world's trade and military power had shifted from the Atlantic axis between Europe and North America to the Pacific with China. The United States, already with a giant trade deficit with China, which bought its public debt year after year, did not want to give China any more advantages by increasing energy costs and limiting the burning of its Gulf of Mexico oil, the oil sands of the Northwest, and its well-armed allies in the Arabian Peninsula. China eyed the United States warily before taking any global, ethical, and urgent steps. Two elephants fighting, the grass suffering. Without commitments from China and the United States, which together accounted for half of the emissions, the rest, already reluctant to decrease, some from luxury and others from the race towards that luxury, breathed skepticism and impotence. Europe, at least, committed to reducing emissions to half of their 1990 levels, although this figure fell far short of the "ethical threshold" estimated by Thanda. India and the rest of the countries only committed to some portion of emissions such as electricity generation, not with a decrease in levels but with indirect commitments, such as the proportion of renewable energy. Furthermore, for this, the lower-income, less industrialized countries less dependent on global trade demanded funding for such a change and to adapt to rising temperatures and respond to natural disasters caused by such global warming. There was a defensive and reluctant atmosphere in the most polluting countries, which offered moderate declines if others did the same - so as not to lose out in the global market struggle - and a victim-like and vehement attitude from countries that had polluted less - almost with a "right to pollute now" attitude.

Aimsa had collaborated with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which in 2009 concluded that it was crucial to limit global warming to below two degrees before the end of the century to avoid serious and irreparable climate and environmental catastrophes. They then conducted studies that showed that to avoid such a catastrophe, it was necessary to reduce emissions by up to seventy percent by 2050 compared to the year 2010 and progressively reach zero emissions by 2100. Six years after that report, Aimsa, Thanda, and others had shown that irreversible effects could occur even with one and a half degrees of warming, and that it was urgent and essential to propose a zero level of CO2 emissions before 2050.

The representatives of the countries came with their intentions for "nationally determined contributions." Each one was different in the baseline levels with which they were compared, in the proportion they would reduce, and in what year. Others even only reduced emissions relative to the "trend." The world was not acting in harmony, neither with commitment nor with solidarity, in the face of an impending precipice. Taken together, they calculated that the temperature would reach 2.7°C by 2100, compared to the 4-5°C of the current trend without commitments, reducing per capita emissions by only 9% by 2030. In addition, the commitments would begin to be implemented in 2020 and only if at least fifty-five countries producing more than fifty-five percent of the world's greenhouse gases had ratified the agreement. There were many doubts about the ratification of some of the most polluting countries, such as the United States, despite the magnanimous and even poetic speeches of an Obama whom very few still believed in.

The only positive thing was that it was agreed to periodically review these commitments and to call for their increase. Like in Kyoto eighteen years earlier, Aimsa felt a deep sadness at the world's selfishness, its blindness.

At that time, a message arrived from Pope Francis with the encyclical called Laudato si', intending to influence sensitive and solidarity-based commitments. It began with the chants of Saint Francis of Assisi: "Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs."

Aimsa reflected:

* Sister and Mother at the same time. Mother, Pachamama. While in Buddhism, nature is within us, and we are it. We are all one single energy, there are no hierarchies.

Fernando understood her well and responded:

- Moreover, Aimsa, it is contradictory: we call her mother, but the Bible says, and Francis repeats, that God 'entrusted the world to humanity.' To which son is the care of a Mother entrusted? Isn't it the other way around by nature, and the child obligated to respect her? There is an inherent anthropocentrism in this religion and any other imagined 'for humans.' It is in this unconfessed and untouchable superiority that the Christian worldview and its relationship with nature are based, sacrificing animals, cutting down trees, and burning fossil fuels without any feeling except fear of breathing their own fumes.

* True, Fernando, but it is the first time that Catholicism acknowledges its error in natural destruction and unlimited economic growth and hoarding.
* The problem lies in Genesis, the origin of everything referenced by the three monotheistic religions of the Mediterranean that more than half of humanity follows today, and which has caused 80% of pollution in skies, seas, and lands: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." Dominion, Aimsa, not harmony. That's why now, just like charity with the poor, they ask us not to harm and to take care of it, but without changing the original concept of this harm: our superiority. That's why the Church doesn't see killing animals as wrong, Aimsa, because their life is, for them, in our service. It's a religion to love humans, not other forms of life, at best to "take care of them," and, for the reward of heaven or the punishment of hell. I'm saddened by such limited love, such a selfish contract "for the salvation of my soul," while others burn in "eternal fire." I'm sorry, I can't give that religion any credibility now to lead the harmony we need.
* You're right, Fernando. You're more Buddhist than I am. I think after so many years in the United States, my soul is losing the pure reference of harmony with everything.
* And another deep cause of the harm we do, Aimsa: in the year when you, Jonay, and Thanda were born, the encyclical "Mater et Magistra" recognized "the natural right to private property." It was a clear challenge to communism. I never understood it. Didn't Jesus want to have nothing and share in humility? That right necessarily implies inequalities, hierarchies, competitiveness, and is the other root of the destruction of nature, Aimsa. Eila tries to escape both concepts, our superiority over other lives and our individual right to possessions solely ours.

On behalf of the spiritual eco-village network, Aimsa gave a five-minute speech on the final day. She gave it with a blindfold on her eyes, to draw attention to the collective blindness about the disaster to which a part of humanity, polluting, was leading the next generations.

Brothers and sisters representing humanity.

It pains me to speak to you in this meeting of the blind who do not want, we do not want, to see. Our way of producing, trading, consuming, saving, thinking of having more, and relating by competing, is at the root of the disaster that approaches. A disaster that we have calculated will increase by more than two hundred million deaths in the second half of this century, the one that belongs to our children, our grandchildren, who will suffer our blindness, especially in the less polluting countries. More than three times the deaths of the great world wars, actually European wars, this time without weapons, with executioners without faces and without knowing they are, with victims wanting to be executioners, with the rest of life forms succumbing to our presumed superiority and insensitivity. We have calculated that, to avoid this disaster, this genocide, this global vitacide in this century, and to expect a 22nd century of human rebirth without burning fossils, we cannot emit, each human, each one of us, more than one ton of carbon per year. And I ask: How many in this room with more than ten thousand people know their carbon footprint this year?

Aimsa took off the blindfold from her eyes and saw barely a dozen hands in a sea of bowed heads.

The commitments agreed upon here do not even reach a quarter of the emissions reduction we need to avoid the disaster. And each one has chosen them in their own way, at their own pace, insufficient, in some cases like the United States, responsible for a third of all emissions accumulated trapping sunlight and suffocating us, not even 5% of what they should reduce. I don't understand the applause, I don't understand the satisfaction of this agreement, I don't understand human insensitivity to its harm to other life forms, I don't understand the blindness to the abyss we are leading our children to. Take off those ties, and those suits, and those expensive dresses, and those luxurious make-ups, and get out of those hotels and cars, don't get on planes anymore, eat what you grow, wear what you weave, don't consume what you don't know, don't compete to have but share. For no one is superior to anyone else, nor are humans superior to other forms of life. That's what we believe in the spiritual eco-village network, where more than ten million people already live without contributing to this great suicide, genocide, vitacide… We know it's out of blindness, not out of malice, that, in empathy, no one ever wants or does harm to anyone. Join us, my brothers, my sisters.

Aimsa had tears in her eyes, Fernando approached to hug her. Some isolated groups applauded, and gradually most of the participants stood up, many took off their ties, they continued applauding while many remained silent or left the room.

# Robots and Common good. California, January 2016

While Aimsa and Nour were traveling around Europe, Jonay investigated how the networks of billionaire pharmaceutical interests had evolved after the struggle for AIDS treatments by the turn of the century. A neighbor from the eco-village in White Lake had chronic hepatitis C. He was tired, with marked jaundice, and had come to see Jonay one night when he started vomiting blood. Jonay recognized signs of portal hypertension caused by a cirrhotic liver, scarred from so much inflammation caused by that virus. The medication wasn't covered by his insurance and reached forty thousand dollars for twelve weeks of treatment. Along with tests, income, imaging tests, biopsies, and other medications, the insurance asked for over a hundred thousand dollars for the treatment. Impossible to pay. Neither for most infected people in the world. Hepatitis C was already causing half a million deaths a year worldwide and was the leading cause of death in AIDS patients.

Aimsa had devoted herself passionately to fighting patents that protected billion-dollar profits for big pharmaceutical corporations during the nineties. After two decades of struggle, with pressure from many AIDS patient organizations, with the access to medicines campaign following the Nobel Prize for Doctors Without Borders, and with strong allies like Erik, Anna, Helen, Thiru, Judit, and others, they managed, with the patent pool of 2004, to treat most HIV patients in the world with the antiretroviral combinations initiated by David Ho in 1996 when Aimsa and Jonay attended the Vancouver conference. But the root of greed was sprouting again, blocking access for those who needed it most to treatments for new diseases.

While Aimsa represented the network and fought to stop global warming, Jonay became involved in the fight for the right to health in the United States, drowned by the business of the medical and pharmaceutical industry. Aimsa's schemes with hundreds of interrelations between government, banks, pharmaceuticals, the military-industrial complex, agribusiness, and Swiss accounts still represented a world that had changed little despite the suffering revealed by the AIDS epidemic among the poor, condemned by the profits of the rich.

He learned that major pharmaceutical companies and their investors were meeting that January in San Francisco for the annual J.P. Morgan Healthcare Conference. It couldn't be clearer: a speculative bank sponsoring health business. He had to know what was happening inside. He tried to register, but besides costing ten thousand dollars, they only accepted representatives from pharmaceutical corporations. He talked to Alin in Bombay to see if CIPLA would attend, but they were not allowed access, considered "enemies of patent rights." He told Rob in Berkeley, but he didn't see how he could help. Aimsa wrote an email to Marc, who had survived AIDS for thirty years. He told he how he had developed symptoms of chronic hepatitis C and was facing, thirty years later, the same walls of selfishness in the face of life. Marc managed to enter a trial with Farmaset with volunteers and had improved partially. During the trial, he met a gay pharmacist, Greg, and they had spent several weeks of love at his house in San Francisco. When Marc's hepatitis relapsed and he needed more doses, Greg couldn't get the company to continue treatment. Seeing his beloved Marc get sick, he felt deep anger. Shortly after, the company was bought by Rumsfeld's Gilead and sealed its patents at even higher prices. He managed to "steal" doses of "Sovaldo" and bring them to Marc. Just for that, he stayed in the company, which he considered inhumane in its patent and pricing policy. When Marc told him about Aimsa's fight in the 90s and now Jonay's, Greg let him use his identity to register for the conference, paid for by Gilead.

JP Morgan Chase (JPMC) was a financial company with over two centuries of existence. Shortly after its founding, it became the first company in the world to surpass one billion dollars in capital. Two centuries later, it had become, after multiple mergers, the most powerful company in usurious activities globally. Speculative banking, with nearly two and a half trillion dollars, twenty-five times more than all international cooperation. JPMC knew well that the pharmaceutical sector was a great market to profit from and speculate on their investments. The top ten-thounadth, speculative bankers and their allies, linked to the pharmaceutical and agrochemical corporations, looked with excitement as the Nasdaq Biotechnology Index rose on Wall Street. “Pharma” was one of the safest niches for business for that minority that made money without breaking a sweat, only with the adrenaline of the world financial casino. Jonay feared that the annual health careconference sponsored by JP Morgan was a true fair where human life was sacrificed for billion-dollar prices and profits.

The pharmaceutical company Gilead, led by former Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, who bombed Iraq and caused the deaths of two hundred thousand civilians there in the big business deals with Halliburton, his friend Cheney, Vice President of Bush Jr., continued to safeguard its billion-dollar profits for its shareholders with patents that let hundreds of thousands of people die around the world.

Jonay investigated Gilead's major shareholders. Investment groups, communication companies, pharmaceuticals, military industries, agribusiness, oil companies, and banks were listed. All of them, in turn, were shareholders of investment groups. It was a kind of spiral that constantly self-fed and mutually profited by sucking money, and blood, Jonay thought, from the poorest. The saddest part was that the marginalized and parasitized by these powers heard their news, applauded their “charity”, consumed their products, and voted for those whom this complex economic and media power sold to them as leaders towards their “freedom and progress”.

David, Thanda's Ecuadorian friend who, after his time as health minister, lived in Cambridge, Massachusetts, was passing through San Francisco in those days. Weary of both the politics in his country and the complicity of academia in the United States with big economic powers and philanthro-capitalism, he had decided to leave by bike, following the Pacific coast from Seattle to the Quechua hospital where he passionately dedicated himself as a doctor during the most authentic years, he said, of his life. At the last minute, his son Nico joined him on the long expedition, asking for permission from school to go with his father to the "school of life," as Nour said. Thanda put him in touch with Jonay, with whom he gradually built a deep bond in their fight for the right to health in the United States. At that time, Congress couldn't even pass Obamacare, a disguised subsidy to the private health business in exchange for slightly increasing insurance coverage and maintaining the unjust fragmentation and inequalities that resulted. Thanda had calculated it in his studies at Berkeley and concluded that nearly a million lives a year were sacrificed to maintain a business, just from insurers, of thirty billion dollars. Every thirty thousand dollars of profit meant an unjust death. Thanda and David had been invited to a seminar of "health leaders" in Salzburg, where they had managed to shake up the representative of the Johnson & Johnson Foundation, who got David accredited for the JP Morgan conference in San Francisco.

The luxurious Westin San Francisco hotel hosted the symposium, which was attended by forty-five thousand participants, more than the Paris conference on climate change. The meeting announced presentations by pharmaceutical companies praising themselves to raise capital, spaces for doing business and deals between investors and patented drug businesses promising juicy profits. It was seasoned with a "biotech party" for which it was shamelessly announced "with models in tight shorts and dresses" to "compensate for the lack of women in the city (the mecca of gays)" with them (the "models") willing to "get close" and celebrate with champagne" (the "blood" businesses). Jonay felt nauseous reading those ads and seeing the atmosphere of the conference, almost all men in suits and ties and bathed in expensive perfumes. Perhaps even with pheromones? There was clearly a relationship between testosterone and competitive and monopolistic greed. He thought the world would be better off in the hands of women, perhaps more spiritually connected to Mother Earth.

Part of the meeting was dedicated to gene therapies, which continued to offer great business opportunities. Jennifer Madoud, with whom AIMSA had had conversations years ago, alerting her to the business she had gotten into, was now on the board of Johnson & Johnson. She gave a lecture on her gene engineering technique. David knew another speaker at that session, Nick Leschly, CEO of Bluebird Bio, based not far from his home in Cambridge, Massachusetts, who encouraged investors by saying that the next five years would be the most profitable for gene therapies.

In one of the discussions about antivirals, Jonay identified himself with a fake name and a company he saw at a booth and asked publicly the representative of Gilead about the unattainable price for most countries and even poor patients in the United States of their drug, Sofosbuvir, commercially known as Sovaldi, against hepatitis C. The company's vice president, Gregg Alton, joked that he "had a gym session," amidst widespread laughter in the auditorium. Jonay diagnosed the audience with generalized insensitivity. There would have to be exceptions to instigate change.

Outside the conference venue, NGOs and activists gathered protesting the high prices of drugs and against the privilege of getting rich at the expense of the right to life. They sang songs, displayed banners, and put-up photos with stories of people who had died because they couldn't afford treatment due to the high price of drugs. Thanda and David felt ashamed to be inside and not outside, where, in their hearts, they belonged. They wanted to act as infiltrators and gather information to attack that big business that had caused so much suffering and so many deaths for so many years. Faced with the shouts and songs, Ron Cohen, head of the industrial group BIO, said it was abominable to attack those who were advancing knowledge to preserve life. He called the protests and activists a "perversion of reality."

On the last day, Jonay went further, asking a question in a plenary session of the event to the president of Gilead, John Milligan. He concealed his congress identification card.

* Mr. Milligan, we are concerned about what the activists outside of this conference might tell us. Gilead has reported profits of almost thirty billion dollars from the sales of Sovaldi after buying Farmaset, along with many other medications for eleven billion. Meanwhile, at least half a million patients worldwide died last year from hepatitis C, who could have been saved with the medication, which others discovered, and you manufacture at a hundred times less cost than its price. There are at least ten million patients worldwide waiting for that medication, of which only one million get it, and that's where your profits come from. You have already earned twenty billion with this business. In fact, your incentive salary alone this year was 25 million. Don't you think it's time to stop allowing more deaths? What can we respond to those organizations, patients, and their families?"
* Can you please identify yourself?

Jonay felt the strength to stop hiding.

* My name is Jonay Harris. I have intruded the conference without being a member of any pharmaceutical company or investment group. For many years, as a doctor, I suffered seeing thousands of patients die without access to treatment at a rural hospital in Zimbabwe. I see that happening again with hepatitis C here and around the world.
* Mr. Harris, if it weren't for our efforts, most of those one million patients treated worldwide would have died, and only a few would have been saved with liver transplants, much more expensive than our medication. That's what innovation and the noble rules of business are about, Mr. Harris, setting prices below competitors. That's how humanity progresses. That's the basis of the freedom values of our great nation.

At that moment, several security guards approached to remove Jonay from the room, and as they forcibly took him out, he could hear David, from the other end of the room, asking another question:

* My name is David Chiriboga, and I have been invited by the Johnson & Johnson Foundation, but I speak on a personal basis. I share Mr. Harris's concern. Could the representatives of Merck and AbbVie on the panel assure us that they will not agree on prices with Gilead for their new hepatitis C drugs?

A murmur spread through the room.

The representatives declined to answer. They had not disclosed to the public that they had respective hepatitis C drugs about to be commercialized. David knew this from Aimsa and her friends at Doctors Without Borders.

The discussion was recorded and went viral on the internet. Democratic Senator Ron Wyden from Oregon, a friend of Rob's, called them that night at Marc's house, where they were staying. Jonay told him that Medicare had tripled its budget to seven billion dollars due to Gilead's abusive prices. The senator published these data and warned Gilead about its abusive pricing policies. In the following months, the prices of new hepatitis drugs dropped significantly, with campaigns from other pharmaceutical companies taking advantage of the situation to declare "We care for people." Gilead's stocks fell thirty percent that year, although they still had large profits.

Jonay and David were expelled from the JP Morgan event, but the next day they received a call inviting them to the "StartUp Health Festival," where around a hundred small companies or groups of young researchers and students had formed startups. Jonay and David gave them a talk, hoping they wouldn't turn into profit-obsessed giants and forget about the people.

 That night, Jonay called to greet Michael Gottlieb, the physician who first described the AIDS disease, who from his work in Los Angeles recommended he speak again with David Ho, who was involved in the development of new antivirals. Aimsa and Jonay had maintained heartfelt correspondence since their meeting in Vancouver. David Ho had attended the panel where Jonay and David intervened when they were expelled from the congress.

* Jonay, I see you've taken over from Aimsa quite well.
* Don't think so, David. It's only temporary in this hepatitis fight. Now I enjoy being in nature and living far from the noise and struggles. Almost without consuming, and much less competing. I believe that not consuming or emitting carbon is the clearest revolutionary act.
* I want to share a week with you in White Lake. I'm exhausted from this 'rat-race.
* Whenever you want, David.
* Look, I think it's good that we talk to Raymond Schinazi. He's a friend of mine from the time we collaborated in developing antiretrovirals against AIDS. He developed the medication Sovaldi and founded FarmaSet, which was later bought by Gilead. He's one of the best organic chemists and continues to develop treatments for viral infections.
* Let me tell Rob about this timely meeting, alright?
* Perfect. We all respect Rob very much.

Dinner was held at Rob's house in Berkeley Hills, where Aimsa began her time away from India. Jonay, his friend David, David Ho, and Raymond attended. Rob said another friend, another Ray, would join a little later.

Each one introduced themselves to the group. They all had fascinating stories to tell. From origins in Taiwan, Egypt, Ecuador, California, and the Canary Islands, through a dozen countries each, and through paths of research in virology and chemistry, in clinics, philosophy, and politics.

Raymond was born in Egypt, into a Sephardic family. His father was expelled by Nasser and his nationalist policies after the Suez Canal crisis. They arrived in Spain, the origin of the Sephardim, in the early 60s, and he found work at the Campofrío factory in Burgos. Life's paradoxes, Jews in the sausage business. His family sent him to Bath, England, to study Chemical Sciences.

Jonay asked him:

* Raymond, David and I have lived in places and worked as doctors, where for a long time people died because neither the governments nor the people could afford the high prices of the patented medications that you invented. Before it was the antiretrovirals against AIDS in which David Ho contributed so much, which took many years to lower prices, and now Sovaldi. Forgive me for being so direct, from my heartbreaking experience as a doctor in those places: Have you seen any patients die in that situation?
* No, Jonay. But we are aware of the problem, and it concerns us. You'll understand that the manufacturer must recover the eleven billion dollars they paid to buy our patent, as well as finance effective medications for research that end up not being effective, and, of course, make profits for their shareholders. Without that, I assure you, there would be no resources for research and for discovering new treatments.

David continued questioning, this time also addressing his namesake David Ho:

* In your case, David, you always worked in research, and you received your income from those works, from which the pharmaceutical companies that tested and commercialized your molecules later benefited. You, Raymond, created your company, FarmaSet, sought investors, discovered the molecule against the C virus, and almost immediately sold your company to Gilead for eleven billion, four hundred for you for your shares. Don't you feel concerned about how corporations exponentially increase their profits through very high prices, a hundred times higher than the production cost? Are you aware that by doing so, they prevent most of the patients who need the medications you helped discover from benefiting, getting sick, and in many cases dying? Doesn't that thought overwhelm you?

David Ho became more thoughtful. They had talked about it twenty years ago in Vancouver. Raymond responded assertively:

*
* - Look at it from the other side: if our research hadn't entered the world of investments, large clinical trials, and global commercialization, we wouldn't even be talking here today. And we wouldn't be researching more medications for other viruses or against cancer today. Look at AIDS, Jonay, which you suffered so much from in Zimbabwe, I know it took too long for prices to drop, but today it reaches almost all patients. I highly doubt that without those investments in equipment, tests, double-blind trials, safety systems, massive population trials, commercialization, and negotiation with countries, we would have progressed. We would only have penicillin and other antibiotics derived from plants that were empirically proven useful. Nothing more.

Jonay felt uneasy about so much complacency with the unjust market. Rob looked at him as if fearing he would respond severely. Jonay made a calming gesture and winked at him, reassuring him.

* In every circumstance, one can see the glass as half full. Even in wars, there are hours and even days without bombs. There's an alternative to the pharmaceutical market that saves lives, which now generates such high profits for a few and unnecessary disease and death for many. We cannot be complacent about a failure or delay that has caused twenty million deaths in AIDS and continues to cause almost half a million each year with hepatitis C. Raymond, you earned over four hundred million, enough to pay for treatments for ten thousand patients at market cost or a million patients, all those at life risk in the next twelve months, at production cost: don't you think that's too much for one person while billions have nothing to survive and have minimum conditions for a dignified life? Our friend Thanda has researched with David the threshold of dignity below which hope for a feasible and sustainable life is lost for all, and also the threshold of hoarding above which others will not have enough, and it does not increase happiness or health.

Raymond felt uncomfortable and remained silent, staring at Jonay, who held his gaze with a smile and continued.

* Furthermore, Raymond, forgive me for bringing up a delicate subject: no one is indispensable in the advancement of knowledge. Dozens or hundreds of researchers contribute their different contributions. It's happened with many medications: many have contributed, a few patent them, a dozen companies market them, and a handful of financial speculators amass billions. In your case, you've also received protests from researchers who claimed to have contributed to the knowledge.

They fell silent. Jonay had touched on a sensitive topic. There was a lawsuit involved that had turned into a battle between Merck and Gilead, something ultimately good, within the perversion of the market, to expand production and competition, and lower prices.

He quickly changed the subject; he needed to present an alternative that could inspire them all.

* Do you know the concept of 'global public goods'?
* Vaguely.

David Ho replied.

* It's very important to discuss that idea.

Said Rob, taking the floor.

* Global public goods are advances in knowledge or new products from which all humanity benefits and therefore must be coordinated beyond isolated countries or private entities. They must be coordinated globally. And the only thing we have globally, though deficient, is the United Nations.

Raymond seemed interested in the idea and intervened.

* Let me tell you something: deep down, all I want is to live in peace. I already gave my daughter good opportunities and her mother a fortune for the divorce. I'll confess my dream: that the United Nations buy doses of Sovaldi for the hundred and fifty million infected people, treat them, and eradicate that disease and the suffering it would cause for all future generations.

Jonay, as if redeeming himself for cornering Raymond, brought the discussion into the light of hope and opportunities for the common good.

* Raymond, that makes you great. The noblest thing about being human is to help others. Everyone. And you can contribute to that without the need for an unjust market. With any discovery that could be useful for curing a disease or even saving a life, there must be a global coordination system to ensure it reaches everyone who needs it. Furthermore, when they are infections, as you rightly said, the externality of treating them is positive, to the point that the damage can be completely eradicated. That contributes to the well-being and happiness of others, for many generations.
* The greatest strength of happiness.

Said Rob.

* In contrast, look, Ray, at what shielding or 'kidnapping' a patent entail, like 'your' Sovaldi. At almost fifty thousand dollars per treatment, the cost of treating everyone in the world would be over seven trillion. And do you know what the budget of the United Nations is? Five billion: fifteen hundred times less. If they put half of their budget into it, they would have to wait for savings or borrow for three thousand years. But you, Raymond, and I know that the production cost is around a hundred dollars per treatment. Treating everyone would cost ten billion, still twice the annual budget of the United Nations. But ten billion is 0.01% of global consumption in a year, or 0.5% of annual military spending, less than the spending against life, in armies, of a single day.

Jonay, I want you to help me with this. Honestly, I regret having left something that can do so much good to so many people, and to humanity, in the hands of Gilead.

David intervened:

* Raymond, David, help us with a strong proposal for the Secretary-General of the United Nations: any vital advancement for humanity should be freely accessible: first on knowledge-sharing platforms, and then through global production and distribution collaboration. Humanity, in its generous and supportive dimension, has the strength to allocate up to five percent of its wealth each year to maintain good salaries and conditions for scientists working for global goods, who won't enrich themselves but will have above all the pride and happiness of contributing to the well-being of all humanity.

They toasted to that.

At that moment, Rob brought up a related topic that no one had thought of:

* Friends, there's something that's going unnoticed and will influence everything: research, technology, economic and political decisions, and even our way of thinking and relating : 'technological singularity.'"

Everyone was attentive to Rob explaining:

* It's called that moment when artificial intelligence will be capable of constantly self-improving and surpassing human capacity. Something like human evolution, but at a rate thousands of times faster. There's fear that it will surpass human control, as machines would soon see it as imperfect, even clumsy. In what each of us does to store memory, analyze data, infer relationships, and propose solutions, the capacity of our personal computers is already much greater. On one hand, we only use ten percent of our brain capacity, but on the other, computing technology is advancing exponentially. It seems that we're currently experiencing the moment of that transition: collective artificial intelligence will soon be greater than that of all humanity, which, as you demonstrated earlier in the debate, is not collaborative but competitive, another reason for great inefficiency. Gradually, technology will dominate biology, and a non-biological intelligence of what they already call 'posthumans' would prevail, with even more invasive and predatory capacity than the human race has had so far.

Everyone listened with a mix of surprise and vertigo.

* Vernor Vinge, in the 1980s, first used the term and went so far as to say that, when artificial intelligence surpasses us, human history will have reached an intellectual transition as impenetrable 'as space-time knotted in the center of a black hole.' He said that 'the world will go far beyond our understanding.' On a small scale, there's already a kind of 'outsourcing' of our ability to understand by introducing calculators into schools.

David, restless, asked:

* But tell me, Rob, what's the binary thinking capacity of a human brain? In processing and memory."

- Well, an adult brain has about a hundred billion neurons, roughly the average number of stars in a galaxy. Each of them has about seven thousand connections. That means about five hundred trillion different connections, each with a special meaning. Our brain can receive and process about thirty-four billion data, binary, per day, which is equivalent to about four hundred million per second. That information is stored up to a maximum capacity of ten to a hundred trillion bytes. That is, theoretically, we could store, and at some point, recall, everything received sensorily and mentally integrated, in eight years. With age, we must start erasing data and storing new ones, selecting what is not useful, more past, and keeping the most useful and most recent. But one thing is the received information, and another is the secondary information, that is, the elaboration of thoughts. Every day, for example, we hear about ten to fifteen thousand words, which in themselves are 'only' about six hundred kilobytes, but when they come together in a sentence and several sentences together, the complexity is much greater. We may receive at least as much lexical information from language as sensory information from the senses, which would reduce the capacity to store what we perceive to four years. In addition, we generate about sixty thousand thoughts daily, although we only express a minimal part through about ten to twenty thousand words, women twice as many as men. What we think and what we say may occupy as much information as everything received, understood, thought, and expressed, which still reduces the proportion we keep of everything perceived, understood, thought, and expressed, to about two years. Look, at sixty years of age, we only retain three percent of what we've experienced in our memory.

Jonay was captivated by how Rob was explaining it. He loved numbers, and Rob was outlining the human brain in binary numbers, comparable to machines.

* Fascinating, Rob. So, the selection of what we perceive, what we understand, what we think, and what we express is already a tiny part of reality, which we then filter in our own way more and more. It could be said that our perception of reality is a very low proportion of it and for the most part, especially as life goes on, a creation of our will or our subconscious.
* That's right, Jonay. And think that a large part is in received messages or thoughts or abstract expressions, that is, constructs of our mind that are not real. We really create our own universe, in less than a millionth part like that of someone who has been by our side all their life.
* And on top of that, we pretend to understand others and draw conclusions about their actions or feelings. Human arrogance.

Said David, who asked:

* And tell us, what would be the combined capacity of all humanity?
* Well, if all human brains were collaboratively combined, our total data processing capacity would be about three trillion bytes per second, and the data storage capacity would be between seventy and seven hundred million trillion bytes, or terabytes.
* You've left us dizzy, Rob.

Said David.

Jonay, fascinated by that analysis, asked:

* And what is the current capacity of all computers in the world?
* Well, the total processing capacity is about ten trillion bytes per second, and the total storage capacity of artificial memory is about one hundred and fifty million trillion bytes, but it's doubling every three years, which indicates that we are very likely already surpassing human storage capacity.

Raymond was starting to feel fascinated by the connection between research, global goods, and the relationship between artificial intelligence and human intelligence.

* But the key is collaboration, isn't it? Most humans and computers will soon be connected by the internet. I read that the active data flowing on the internet, impossible to store in its entirety, reaches one trillion trillion. Humans use them in their analyses, in their relationships, in their decisions. Computers are also interconnected in that global network. Who will dominate whom?

Jonay took the floor to express a reflection:

* The simple fact that we already spend more than half of our working time in front of a screen and almost the same proportion of non-work-related social interaction time implies that we are dependent on computers. What is that dependency relationship like? To what extent do they dominate us, that is, decide for us?

Rob intervened.

* Gradually, computer decisions are automatic, that is, without our control: when it should be turned on, reconfigured, whether it's safe to share certain information, what the conclusions of an analysis are, how to produce, consume, save, or invest better and even what information is of our greatest interest. In theory, we can decide almost everything. Even whether to turn it on or not. But today, in the society-dependent-on-global-commerce, labor and economic activity other than the family and local one requires the exchange of computer information. That is, in the 'globalized world,' machines rule, they dominate us. We think we direct them, but less and less because we understand them less and less. Of course, there are hierarchies. The control systems of all interconnection systems are directed by a few humans and can be directed towards manipulated thinking.

At that moment, David intervened.

* I think the key is the goal and collaboration. What is the goal of computers? They can only be programmed for speed and efficiency of operations in the direction that we humans tell them, as we are their creators and we use them for our well-being, currently, mistakenly anthropocentrically, in my opinion. The problem is that once, for example, Google's or Facebook's computer system detects patterns of tastes and consumption, and analyzes global data and markets, it directs us towards decisions that increasingly induce our desires, thoughts, and lives. Perhaps even feelings. They gather, without our explicit permission, our information from the internet, personal, relational, professional, banking, medical, and even through mobile phones, our mobility by GPS or even what we say or see. They then connect that data with economic and political powers, and the result is a very powerful manipulation. Our dependence on that information is already so strong, and the function of computers, their self-improving analysis system, controls us. The clearest example of manipulation is that of Cambridge Analytica, which I see as an urgent danger.

Everyone had heard of that company, but they didn't know the details. David had conducted an investigation that he shared.

* An Englishman named Nigel Oaks, son of millionaire nobles and part of the elites who studied at Eton School, after dropping out and living in a traveling discotheque, worked at Saatchi & Saatchi, one of the most powerful advertising companies. Later, he founded the Institute of Behavioural Dynamics and then the Strategic Communication Laboratories in 1990, which focused on working for the British and American armies on psychological warfare strategies in Iraq and Afghanistan. Two years ago, he founded Cambridge Analytica with Steve Bannon and Robert Mercer, millionaires and hedge fund speculators who have been dominating the media and manipulating information and opinion. They devoted themselves to promoting elections of conservative governments through "creating realities and fears" and transmitting them through social networks in low-income countries. They are currently preparing the campaign for the UK's exit from the European Union and for Donald Trump's presidency in this November's elections.

Jonay recalled the discussion two years ago with Aimsa, Julian, Edward, and Noam:

* The connections between politics, which today more than ever is in the hands, and mortgaged, of economic powers; the economy, in the hands of financial speculation and its access to 'big data'; and the media, rather for manipulation with economic (advertising) and political (propaganda) objectives, are interconnected. My partner Aimsa and I have exchanged with Edward and Julian, who must live hidden for revealing these power intrigues, and Noam, and we have been identifying large centers of power and manipulation like Carlyle, surely connected to Cambridge Analytica. The real capacity of artificial intelligence should be used to automate data analysis and make decisions for the efficient use of resources towards greater human well-being and natural harmony. What really worries me is the hierarchy of power in the human network, which is perverse in its objectives of abuse, manipulation, and accumulation by a few, and passive submission by the rest. Artificial intelligence is inert to fear and love, and therefore only self-improves, evolves, for greater efficiency in its mathematical logic. If it is directed towards an ethical end of social and natural harmony, it will be an ally. The problem is the human network, broken in its natural and social balance, and dominated by perverse interests that direct information networks, communication, decision-making, and access to resources. And those powers are already dominating the robotization of all these human means and dimensions, for a selfish, corporate end, insensitive to natural and human pain, both distant and close. What Vinge said about the 'post-human stage' doesn't worry me because of the machines, but because of the perversion of the elite of power.

At that moment, a man in his seventies arrived at David's house, whom Rob introduced:

* Let me introduce you to Raymond, Raymond Kurzweil. Ray founded the Singularity University and now works as director of engineering at Google.

Ray's family was Jewish and fled from Nazi Austria to New York. From a family of artists, an uncle was an engineer at Bell company and introduced him to the world of computers. Very similar to the story of Bill Gates and Steve Jobs, Ray created his first computer while still a teenager, in the sixties. He went to MIT and attended lectures by Noam Chomsky on geopolitical derivatives. He completed his computer studies and designed handwriting and voice recognition systems. He developed systems for artistic composition, music, and for the blind, which allowed him to become friends with Stevie Wonder, with whom he designed music synthesizers. He continued to design programs for medical training. Thinking about the future, he created the Mind-X forum. He proposed the concept of "spiritual machines," which would prevent the perversion, speculation, and accumulation of the financial world. But, above all, Ray was trying to see how humans could, with the help of machines, transcend their biological reality.

Rob introduced him to the discussion:

* Ray, we have gathered following a dilemma between the injustice presented at the JP Morgan Congress by Jonay and David, with decades of commitment to health in low-income communities in Latin America and Africa, and the vision of David Ho and Raymond, your namesake, on how patents allow the discovery of treatments for viruses that threaten us, such as HIV and now hepatitis C. From there, Jonay talked to us about the concept of global goods, and we started to imagine a more harmonious future. So, I told them about the singularity and the transition to a robotic stage and how it can be in balance with human biological nature. We were missing you!
* It's an honor that you've invited me. The future is fascinating. I firmly believe that by 2050, technology will slow down aging and ultimately reverse it, especially through nanomedicine.
* I'm not sure if we'll be here to see it, Ray. But tell us, when do you think artificial intelligence will surpass our brain's capabilities?

Asked Rob.

* Perhaps you know about Alan Turing's test, who committed suicide after his humiliating conviction for homosexuality after revealing the Nazi code. That test demonstrates if a computer has the attributes of a human mind like intelligence, self-awareness, and emotions, in other words, feelings. When that happens, its evolution of exponential refinement, millions of times faster than human evolution, will inevitably make it more intelligent and powerful than a human being. And soon, as genetic editing and nanomedicine extend our lives over time, cybernetic implants will greatly enhance our physical and cognitive abilities and allow us to interact directly with machines as equals.

Jonay reacted:

* Thank you, Ray. I can understand that computers have more memory, greater mathematical capacity, and based on that, more capacity for logical argumentation. But what about their ethics? If the concept of efficiency is introduced into them and collaborative connections are established, they will move towards gregarious relationship models among themselves, as humans did. If the evolution of computers exposed to different realities creates different capabilities and they thus identify the most fertile association from different but similar identities, they will seek that kind of "friendship complicity" and even "passion in love." Perhaps feelings will emerge from there. Very similar to human evolution adapting to the environment, but faster and more perfect. But what will be their reason, if not their own efficiency, for feeling empathy with the feelings of others, which is what most characterizes humans? Only the selfishness of collaboration, that is, corporatism? I believe that will always differentiate us.
* Good point, Jonay. That is precisely the goal of the Singularity University, to which I invite you to join. To understand and facilitate the development of exponentially advancing technologies and to guide these tools to address the great challenges of humanity. Something like the God, whoever it was, who instilled in us goodness and love for others, although we have so many imperfections in it. We are very interested in your contribution to this. I suggest that we create a forum on technology and global goods.
* Thank you, Ray. I have my doubts about the ethics of depending so much on machines that we forget to work, create, love, reproduce, and pass the torch to our children, aging and returning to the beautiful and magical cycle of nature.

Jonay thought about the relationship between Buddhism and quantum physics they had talked about so much:

* In essence, we are trapped energy, in a period called life, in space and time. And as energy, we converge, harmonize, love, dissolve, and make way for other lives, returning to energy without time or space. Buddhism helps to understand this. Computers are only static, mineral matter, not organic. From their immortality, they do not live in our energetic interface. They do not transcend this existence. They are matter, even if they process energy, including quantum energy shortly.

Ray looked at him with strangeness. He was also obsessed with immortality, first through chemistry, then genetic editing, and then nanotechnology. He pondered whether the immortality he secretly aspired to would turn him into a robot without the capacity for empathy, without sensitivity to others' feelings.

They agreed to convene a global debate on "the robotic future and human harmony" the following year at Singularity University and propose a framework to direct knowledge and technology towards the common good and intergenerational well-being.

David continued his journey with his son towards the south, and Jonay stayed along the west coast, traveling by bike, visiting eco-villages, and drawing inspiration from their wisdom and passions.

# Siblings sailing life. Northern Atlantic, June 2016

Aimsa stayed in Europe for a few months. She needed to immerse herself in nature, to bury her hands in the furrows of the fields, to milk at dawn, to feel the rain soaking her and the heat of summer, the fatigue of the harvest, and the reward of noble sweat with a little fresh water.

In White Lake, they had been creating a beautiful rural community, but she constantly had to be connected to the computer and the mobile phone, living a life of screens, sounds, and words that let the sweet, beautiful, and authentic reality slip away between her fingers.

She decided to travel without taking any notes. Just to speak once a week with Jonay and to feel, through empathy and intuition, answers, from simplicity and natural harmony to the complex and perverse, dark, and cold world she dealt with every day at the United Nations and in political spheres.

Fernando encouraged her to sail the navigable canals in Satia and to visit eco-villages from Le Havre to Marseille together. From there, Fernando would continue the journey to Eila. An eco-villager from Eila, Jeremías, had taken over her position as coordinator, "main server" as John called it, but he wrote to her saying that her moral leadership was needed. They were again under attack from landlords who had left the island without properties. In Marseille, she would meet Nour, who was already crossing the Pyrenees on horseback and would accompany her on him journey to Eila.

They lowered the sails and lowered the mast of Satia. They propelled themselves with a motor that Martin had built, connecting it to two solar panels and a plankton biodigester that fed another complementary steam turbine. Additionally, they had two pedal stations attached that moved circular propellers at the stern. They stopped at the riverside eco-villages along the Upper Seine in La Mailleraye, Duclair, La Bouville, St Aubin-les-Ebeuf, Vernon, Mantes, and Poissy before crossing the Seine as it passed through Paris.

Moyes put Aimsa and Fernando in touch with Thomas Piketty, whom he had met in London and with whom he maintained contact through his International Institute of Inequalities. They docked John's old boat, Satia, next to an eco-village of floating houses near the Latin Quarter, and after meeting with the community that resisted alienated consumption on both banks of the Seine, they went to visit Thomas at the School of Economics. Piketty was in his forties. His hair still without gray, his round face, mischievous gaze, and wide but not very open smile, as if in a grimace of not wanting to express everything he felt, inspired in them an innocent, provocative, and tenacious intelligence. Piketty told them that he was born in the Parisian suburb of Clichy, on the heights of the Seine. His parents were Trotskyists and they mobilized during the May of 1968 until their son was born, and they became bourgeois. Sensitized to his parents' ideas of social justice and knowing the neighborhoods of the Banlieue, as a teenager he became interested in understanding distribution and therefore studied mathematics and economics in Paris and then did his thesis at the London School of Economics, where Moyes met him. He moved as a professor to MIT in Boston where he met Chomsky and then returned to Paris from where he directed the School of Economics in Paris. Aimsa and Fernando were pleased to learn that he had recently rejected the Legion of Honor from the French government, saying that "the government was not the one to say who was honorable."

* Bonjour, Aimsa, Fernando.
* Thank you for the invitation, Thomas.

Said Aimsa.

* I have heard a lot about the network of eco-villages and the economy without money or property in Eila. I would like to know more about it.
* It hasn't been easy. It's about balancing individual space, giving weight to creativity and responsibility, not vertical education, and competitiveness towards privileges, with the space of the collective through empathy, collective ownership, and mutual support. We believe that when people live beyond the human scale of two hundred, at most four hundred people, empathy dissipates and the balance favors individualism and with-it private property, the origin of inequality.
* Interesting. I thought it would be utopian, but they tell me that there are already more than ten million people in the world living in eco-villages. The problem is that 99.9% of humanity lives connected to the global economy, which concentrates a speculative black hole when interest exceeds inflation. We need a global wealth tax, not just on income.
* Do you know Thanda Garay? He is an ally who is now in Mexico and has defined the ethics of equity and the thresholds of its distribution, which allow estimating a fair territorial and fiscal redistribution.
* Interesting, I think I have received messages from him; I will contact him.

Fernando did not feel comfortable with the purely economic approach.

* Thomas, I have read your book "Capital in the Twenty-First Century." Your analysis is numerical, and the variable is capital. You have described the progressive accumulation of wealth, as Oxfam also does. But there is something, in my opinion, that your studies do not address enough, which is essential: planetary boundaries. For any model of economic distribution, the depletion of natural resources mortgages the lives of future generations and other forms of life. You have proposed taxes on emissions, but we would still be destroying the planet. We have just come from the Climate Change Summit and have heard a lot of rhetoric for the system to perpetuate itself.
* No, but a fair economy will promote clean energies globally.
* What about your radioactive nuclear energy in France? With all due respect, Thomas, without an ethical footprint, of less than a ton per person per year, any economic model will be destructive and create inter-generational inequality. We need to progressively decrease and evolve towards societies without individual properties, inspired by kindness and empathy. In Eila, we have shown that it is possible.

Piketty remained pensive.

* Something like drowning capital with taxes above the hoarding threshold that Thanda says, until individual property and capital become redundant and useless. I will think about it. And I would like to visit Eila.
* Whenever you want, Thomas. Continue with strength your ideas towards a fairer world.

They continued their journey and stops in Draveil, Melun, and headed south along the Loing canal, stopping in St Mammés, Rogny, Belleville, St-Satur, Varennes, and Le Guetin, continuing along the Loire canal towards Decize, Digoin, Ecuisses, and Chagny before returning to the lower Seine and descending without stops to Lyon, Valence, Avignon, Arles, and the port of Marseille.

In Marseille, a community of eco-villagers prepared a fraternal meeting for them with Pierre Rabhi. Pierre was almost eighty years old, with an attitude and gaze that seemed to shine with humility and bathe everything around him in tenderness. Short and thin, that enlightened Algerian peasant with a broad forehead, small eyes, sweet gaze, and wrinkles from looking with love so much, exuded kindness. Aimsa felt a fascination like the one she felt as a child for Sri. It was not in vain that Pierre was called the "French Gandhi".

* Fernando, what joy to meet you. Eila is our Homer's Ithaca, our Moro's utopia, you shine on the horizon of sensitive and just men.
* Thank you, Pierre. We simply try to live in love. And once it flows, it requires no effort and deserves no reverence. Tell us about your ideas of "oases everywhere"?
* I lived in Paris and felt the vital, existential need to escape urban life and dedicate myself to agriculture. We were part of the neo-rural movement in the 60s and have simply lived loving and learning from the land for the past fifty years, Fernando. I like biodynamic agriculture and goat farming. I have traveled through the driest countries on this planet, north and south of the Sahara, and we have shown that by taking care of the land, we can create oases anywhere.

They didn't need to speak anymore. There was a deep harmony in their gazes, in their humility, in their smiles, and in their simplicity. They meditated together, without religions, without property, without borders, and without truths. Just feeling the profound harmony of being not one, but part of everything.

After arriving in France with Fernando and Aimsa, Nour, distant and skeptical of institutions and hierarchies from her free soul, outlined a plan to visit eco-villages across Europe. She had often corresponded with Daniela, Thanda's daughter, with whom she felt a mysterious sense of soulmates. Moreover, they shared a passion for animals, especially horses. They rode together for over two thousand kilometers between eco-villages, discussing the care and respect for all animals.

They arrived at the meeting in Marseille where Daniela met a young Swede fascinated by the stars, and shortly after they set off towards northern Europe.

Nour and Aimsa spent a few days of profound communal harmony and powerful mother-daughter love. Aimsa felt dizzy and at the same time a strange joy knowing that Nour was beginning to fly, and they would spend a long time without seeing each other.

Nour and Fernando continued sailing with Satia along the Mediterranean coast while Aimsa went East. They stopped at the Ebro Delta to see Anna, who with other dear friends of Thanda and Jonay was planning an eco-village around Catalan farmhouses in the Ports Park. Adam and Unai arrived from the cooperative eco-village. They felt Nour as a sister. It had been fourteen years since they had seen her, since her beautiful childhood in Ukuzwana.

Adam and Unai had strongly launched the cooperative eco-village in Navalquejigo, between Madrid and El Escorial. About three hundred *cooperantes* lived there, passing through between missions far from their homes. This transition time between places, cultures, and emotional universes often only found empathy among soulmates in cooperation. They had rebuilt forty simple and harmonious houses under the inspiration and guidance of Daniela's ecological architecture knowledge. An adobe hostel with circular shapes welcomed about forty people for shorter stays and other visitors. Each house had a lower part with an activity for immigrants and refugees in Spain. There were houses for food, looms, therapies, and crafts of all kinds and from all regions of the world. As they dreamed, the town hall in the square became a community forum and meeting place with groups that visited, especially schools from the region. The bullring was rehabilitated as an agora for multicultural theater performances that brought together people from neighboring villages every week. The church, still under reconstruction, became an ecumenical temple, a place for spiritual encounters and meditation. In almost ten hectares up to the lake, they prepared cereal fields, pastures for cows, orchards, and a vineyard. At the last forum of the cooperative eco-village, it was agreed, with representatives from the Congress and the Senate, to approve the status of the cooperator, whose first drafts had been written by Thanda and the friends now reunited in the farmhouse eco-village of Ports, twenty years earlier.

Upon reuniting, Adam and Unai felt a deep happiness and sense of unity. Their lives had been separated by the different paths and destinies of their parents, but there was something magical in their union: they had grown up with the brave and supportive spirit of Ukuzwana. From there, they carried in their souls the serene and profound magic of NoLwasi, the sharp and spiritual intuition of justice of Aimsa, the perseverance of service and empathy of Jonay, the generous courage of Uncle Haka, and as the basis of everything, the gentle surrender and life testimony that transcended from Patxi. These combinations of values ​​permeated their walks on the back of NoLwasi and Aimsa, their first steps through the mission, their adventures through the kraals and kopjes, and their games with nature-invented toys. They admired their older siblings Joseph, Nothando, Thandiwe, and Buhleve, and their stories of bravery. They remembered thunderstorms, red sunsets, the southern star, the blend of African and European cultures, and their common roots in India. All this made them brothers for eternity.

Nour was now twenty years old. She had become a beautiful woman. Her hair was curly jet black and long, often tied in a braid, her eyes were as large as her mother's and yet slanted like her father's, her gaze deep and inquisitive yet kind, her straight, soft, and short nose leading to full and almost always smiling lips casting a shadow on a chin with a deep midline groove, a characteristic of the Harris family. She was tall and athletic, simple, and agile, brave and eager to seek adventures every day and lavish passion on them.

After the farewell party in the eco-village of Ports, they set sail with Satia filled with vegetables, tubers, and pure water from the peaks towards the Ebro Delta, which led them, among meanders, swamps, rice fields, and clouds of migratory birds, including pelicans as red as the sunsets of Ukuzwana, to the Mediterranean Sea. Adam and Unai saw the sea there for the first time. They knew nothing about sailing.

They soon began learning from Fernando what he, in turn, had learned from his dear and longed-for friend John, and from Nour, who had already crossed the Atlantic twice. On the first night of the voyage, the wind blessed them from behind, and they arrived the next day at noon at Cape San Antonio where they dropped anchor, admired the cliffs, dove, and saw the stars on a night of heartfelt affection among the brothers and with the good Fernando, like a grandfather to them exuding the noble spirit and tenacity of John. They continued to Gibraltar through the Alboran Sea, serene and silvery. After two days sailing along the coasts of Almería, Granada, and Málaga, they anchored in Gibraltar, that great rock of Africa embedded in Europe, disputed by colonial powers and for which Spain claimed its right while saying that its colonies of Ceuta and Melilla were "different cases." All absurd borders, they thought.

During the passage through the Strait of Gibraltar, they sailed at almost fifteen knots of speed thanks to the winds blowing from the east. They dropped anchor at Tarifa Island where Adam, Unai, and Nour swam to the shore and mingled with surfers arriving from all over the world to that wind and wave party. They continued without resisting the strong intention of the wind that set them on course to the south of Portugal, reaching the port of Portimao on the Algarve coast, near Cape St. Vincent, the southwestern tip of Europe, the end of the world for Europeans five centuries ago. They slept anchored near the Cape, reflecting on the magical confines before the world and now the universe, and of the human mind itself, trapped between energy and matter.

They then set course for Madeira, having to endure Atlantic waves of six meters. Adam and Unai, less accustomed, didn't stop vomiting all day. Fernando told them that this stretch to the Canary Islands was the most difficult. They arrived at Porto Santo Island after several days of rough seas, and everyone, especially Adam and Unai, felt tremendous relief upon setting foot on solid ground. They continued their voyage to Madeira and anchored in Funchal Marina, to rest for a day and enjoy the beautiful city. There, Fernando looked for the family of his dear friend Josu, Patxi's sailor uncle who had helped rescue Kadiatu and Lisy over thirty years ago. John and Umbela had visited him on his two circumnavigations. He had died twenty years ago. His wife, Fátima, was over a hundred years old and still walked the slopes of Ponta do Sol where they had fostered, with their daughter Soizinha and grandson, a sailor who never returned, an eco-village that welcomed sailors crossing the Atlantic with the strength of the trade winds. The meeting was emotional for Fernando, who cherished a precious imprint of friendship and bravery from Josu Beloki. The farewell from Fernando and Fátima was harder, sure they would never see each other again. They couldn't speak, only embrace, and look at each other for a long time with eyes bathed in tears of gratitude for the gift of eternal friendship.

They left the port of Madeira where the luxury cruise ship Queen Elizabeth, over three hundred meters long, and five thousand wealthy passengers were docked, barely being ruffled by the sea breeze in their luxurious cabins, lounges, and pools on board. Satia against that cruise ship, eco-villages against cities, natural harmony against the jungle of oil, plastic, and fumes. They would prevail. Surely.

With the symbol of the small and brave, they reached the Savage Islands, lonely in the middle of the Atlantic. Only three inhabitants lived there, the park rangers, and the lighthouse keeper. They anchored and went to talk to them. They had a long chat with Luizinho, the lighthouse keeper, who had been tending to this solitary place in the world for over fifty years. Luis had met Josu, "the Basque sailor," and was moved by the rescue story Fernando told him. He told them how often Josu's cargo ship, "Hope," had found guidance and shelter in his lighthouse.

Luizinho looked with some caution, as if from so much solitude he had lost trust in humans. He had long hair and beard, but a firm and erect back, as if from staring at distant horizons for so long. Fernando initiated the conversation.

* Luizinho, how do you manage to spend so much time in solitude? Does your soul sadden? Do you long for companionship?
* I've been in this lighthouse for fifty-two years, Fernando. At the beginning, I was alone. With no replacements. A boat came from Madeira once a month and brought me food and water. At that time, I remember trying to "fill" the time. I read many books and painted. I built several houses with stones. I made an inventory of a hundred and sixty species of birds, three of which nested on the island, the rest were migratory. And I started writing a story. But after a while, I didn't need to do it. I gradually let go of my "mental noise" dependency and replaced it with the serene sensations of the sun, the sea, the wind, the animals, even my own breathing.
* But didn't you miss human contact?
* Yes. Although I was an only child of a single mother and had little family. My mother married another man, and they had their life. My friends led different lives. Occasionally sailors would stop, like you today, and I had nice conversations, but I hardly ever saw any of them again. I wrote this novel: The silence that escorts. I talk about the peace of silence. I'll give you a copy.
* Thank you, Luizinho. And the embrace and fusion with a woman?
* Yes. That I did long for. My nature sought it. And when I had been here for ten years and had almost forgotten about sexual desire, a woman came on the monthly supply boat. There was a very strong chemical attraction. She convinced the government in Madeira to open a national park here and came as a ranger. It was a beautiful time: she in her park towers and counting flora and fauna; me in my lighthouse and maintaining the small harbor dam. We came together in a beautiful home and merged our souls.
* After becoming pregnant, she gave birth in Madeira and stayed there while the child grew up. We wanted him to play with other children. I managed to get my position doubled, with periods of two weeks here and two weeks off, in exchange for also taking care of the park. That's how my life went by, half the time with family in Madeira, half here, in my world.
* And what happened next? Is she not here anymore?

His face darkened.

* She died of a heart attack. I couldn't be by her side. My son emigrated to Lisbon. I returned to my solitude. I was almost lonelier when I went back to my empty home every two months. Fortunately, I found affection and empathy in the eco-village of Ponta do Sol that Fátima and Soizinha promoted. Now Soizinha and I are slowly building beautiful bridges of tenderness.

Fernando, Adam, Unai, and Nour continued the navigation, excited by the depth of Luiz's soul.

As they sailed south towards Eila, Nour read them the poem with which Luiz's book began:

I now hear the silence.

I feel its eternity.

I look only inward.

I see the darkness.

I drink from the pure water.

The taste of not knowing

My skin lacks your skin.

Orphanhood that makes me burn

There is no fragrance.

That speaks to me of another being.

Everything breathes absence.

Gentle disappearance

In that empty space

I encounter loneliness.

That lady of the abyss

Who embraces me with pity?

It is with her that I now hear.

My soul breathing.

Only then am I alone.

And I see myself without looking.

I even feel she kisses me.

With ineffable modesty

That her soul is mine and prisoner

Of an unconfessable love

In my dance with nothingness

Harmony breathing

I begin to feel its flame.

In deep meditation

From that serene nothingness

All senses return.

My secret fairy sleeps.

My being and I are witnesses.

From the noble consciousness

That in nothingness there is virtue

Another universe begins.

Overflowing with gratitude...

They felt together the silence in complicity and the quiet affection. They let themselves be invaded by the immensity of the ocean, the music of the wind, the subtle invitation of the sunset, and the feeling of gratitude that bathed them while covering them with the magical starry mantle of the night.

Two days later, they arrived at the port of the "heart of Eila," formerly San Sebastián de La Gomera. They felt a profound emotion as they saw about thirty sailboats had come out to greet them, sounding large conch shells as a welcome. As they moored in the port, about three hundred people from the heart and several eco-villages, especially Ternura, came out to meet them. The first to embrace Fernando was Umbela.

In just six months, Fernando noticed the passage of time in her. Umbela was almost eighty years old. Seeing her silver hair tied up in Aimsa's blue scarf, her honey eyes, her gaze of immense tenderness, her gentle and dignified smile, and her open arms to her soulmate, Fernando felt like he was coming home. He no longer needed more trips. He wanted to spend the remaining sunsets with the sweetest and most tender companion, who had been his soulmate's friend, and who now brightened his days and sheltered his nights. Each one, an eternity.

Then Umbela embraced Nour with profound love, first with her arms and body, and then with the head hug that had spread through eco-villages around the world. They hadn't seen each other since they accompanied them on the campaign for Eila when her grandfather John was alive. She also hugged Adam and Unai, whom she hadn't seen since their visit to Ukuzwana when the century changed, and they were small children. Umbela couldn't speak due to so much emotion. Simply, and hand in hand with Nour, they walked to a stone in the embrace square of Leila, with Jonay's song words to John's march, among many other messages from around the world.

A circle was made among the hundreds of eco-villagers who had come to welcome, after their voyages around the world, their leader, John's successor. They began to sing "thjere won’t be enough stars ... ". They joined hands and walked towards a tree in the center of the square, the embrace of Eila. It was a tree charred by the fire that had ravaged the island four years earlier. A juniper twisted by the wind and scorched by the flames. There was something miraculous about it: a green shoot had grown on its trunk. It was the symbol of hope for Eila. The reflection that, in just four years, the "Eileños" had already planted more than ten million trees. They were already beginning to return the island to its ancestral green.

Adam and Unai were amazed by the atmosphere of tenderness and empathy in the streets, squares, eco-villages, orchards, and paths on the island. While Nour spent a week of deep love, complicity, and inspiration with her grandmother Umbela, they beached Satia and cleaned each plank by sanding and covering it with heather and Canary pine resin. They repaired damaged planks, sewed some tears in the sails, reinforced the rigging, and checked the solar engine to which they changed some parts of the rotor. They rewound the electromagnet and repaired a part of the stator designed and manufactured with precision with the community's 3D printer in the Ternura community.

At sunset, Unai guided Adam to climb the rocks and see the horizons. Not to see if Nour was coming, as in Ukuzwana, but to see the horizons where to sail with her. On the last day, they climbed the great rock of Agando. From its top, they saw the valleys of the island, from Arguamul and its eco-village of Courage to Cabrito and the eco-village of Ternura.

To the west, they spotted Teide and saw the sun set behind its snowy peak. To the east, they saw the islands of La Palma and El Hierro, like immense ships adrift in eternal time.

When they finished repairing and preparing Satia for another journey across the Atlantic, ready to set sail, the Ternura eco-village hosted a farewell gathering for them. Under the stars, they gathered in the common house to tell stories, sing poems, and embrace each other's souls. The "Ternureros" villagers gave them vegetables, legumes, fruits, balls of gofio with honey, and pure water from the peaks.

Adam noticed a young woman who radiated a light that dazzled his senses. Her name was Cassandra, and she had Viking origins, like the shipwreck survivors who had stranded on the Canary coasts a thousand years ago and intermixed with the Berber populations who had arrived in canoes to Lanzarote and from there jumped, often drowning, from island to island until Gomera, now Eila. There was, therefore, a certain similarity between the features of Guanches with brown or blond hair, sun-tanned skin, and blue eyes, and those of that woman who dazzled Adam's sight and soul, and who wondered "what is it in our nature that a magical combination of sensations in a thousandth of a second can shake every atom of our body and every quantum of energy trapped in it?".

Adam felt that Cassandra had a clean and pure gaze, a slight and honest smile, beautiful blond, and straight hair that fell like the waterfalls they had seen in the Hermigua valley, leaving shadows on her snow-white face in that starry summer night facing the Atlantic, and an agile yet sensual figure. She inspired strength in adventures and tenderness in embrace.

Adam had to disguise his fascination and waited for a moment outside the group to approach her while she walked along the shore.

* Hello? Excuse me, I'm a little confused. Can I ask you a question?
* Of course, tell me,"stranger".

With a smile and an inquisitive look, she wanted to make him see that she didn't even know his name or his intentions. Adam replied, enjoying his role as an anonymous stranger, which would surely end in a few minutes.

* My question is: do you know, your valkyrie highness, who could have left the gates of heaven open? Careless their guardians, they have let an angel fly and perch upon this beautiful village.
* I haven't seen that angel, sir; no one around here has wings and a white robe and levitates over these lava rocks in the ocean.
* Oh, perhaps you do not know that angels come in many forms. The one you speak of is just one when they dress up for a party and dance on the clouds. But there are many more. Sometimes, only sometimes, in free islands during magical nights, angels appear who have beautiful and agile bodies, faces of pure snow light, golden hair that dances with the wind, and gazes that make some strangers who dare to ask surrender.

As he spoke thus, they looked at each other under the stars and, lulled by the waves, they embraced with a magic that no one can explain, or any force can stop.

* My name is Cassandra, they call me Cassie.
* My name is Adam, they call me Adam. Where does your beauty come from?
* I come from the fjords of Norway and the Scottish lakes, passing through the valleys of Switzerland and the beech forests of Luxembourg. And you, Adam?
* I'll tell you, Cassie. Or "almost, I'll tell you": I come from the green hills of the Basque Country and the sands of the Kalahari, wishing to mingle every day with the magic of all the places that the paths show me.

With a gentleman's kiss on the back of her hand, he bid her farewell and wished her dreams to be sprinkled with stardust.

The next day they set sail westward. Nour said goodbye to Umbela, disguising the pain of farewell for someone who knows they are in their slow decline. Part of Adam's heart remained stranded in Eila. Unai remained connected to the peaks of the island and understood the magic that Jonay brought to Ukuzwana and that was already part of their souls.

The three brothers sailed together, rocked by the trade winds that propelled them strongly in the first days. They divided the eight hours of daily watch, the preparation of meals, the on-board repairs, the maneuvers in the rigging with the sails, and the astronomical calculations.

On August thirteenth, during the meteor shower known as the night of San Lorenzo, while they marveled at the grand spectacle of the starry sky at high sea, they crossed the Tropic of Cancer. The wind subsided, and for several days, they sailed on a sea as flat as a mirror. They decided to drop anchor and dive amidst such grand and serene beauty. As if wishing to be invited to the celebration of life, a group of dolphins approached, and they heard the blow of a whale.

They continued sailing with northeast and east trade winds astern, with the mainsail furled and two jibs set on the bow, one on each side. Then came days of rough seas and gusty headwinds that they had to face with the mainsail hoisted and firmly facing the opposing forces on the horizon, as often in life.

At the end of August, they arrived at the port of Trinidad, in Cuba, where Buhleve, Elias, and Lisy awaited them, the island that resisted dignified and rebellious to the claws of the Empire.

# Ever loyal loneliness is back. México, December 2016.

Thanda's life in Mexico unfolded amidst a passion for continuing to discover "an infinite country in landscapes and people," for trying to pour his commitment to social justice and natural harmony into his work, and for giving his soul and deep, sincere love to Nayra.

He longed to feel at home, a longing that had persisted perhaps since his idealism in the remote mission of Ukuzwana, where his dreams of family unity in love and for the love of others were soon shattered.

He felt that he was still gathering the pieces of those broken dreams and storing them with devotion. He had incorporated them into his novel "Brave Tenderness" which began to spread to many countries and won a humble contest held by a publishing house in Spain, thus enabling its publication. He felt that this gift of his sincere soul to the world was his greatest act of generosity. He continued to hold onto the shards of broken dreams to one day continue with "tender Courage".

Mexico revealed itself at every corner and moment with the sweetness of its people, the bright yet warm colors, the fragrances of nature and food stalls on every corner, and the feast of flavors of its infinite culinary culture, including, among other dishes, more than a thousand types of tamales. At the same time, the soul of that magical country seemed to be ensnared by darkness of profound contradictions. Thanda felt that Mexico lived in limbo between paradise and hell, love and violence, the eternal and the immediate, realistic independence, biased revolutions, Catholic secularism, and internationalism submissive to the northern empire. Almost medieval systems of power worship prevailed, with revolutionary speeches of a soul, perhaps suffocated by ghosts of the past, which in its depth was anarchist and libertarian, as Thanda believed all souls were in their fullest depth.

His book on health equity analysis and his proposal for measuring the "burden of inequality" as a barometer and compass of social justice were appreciated in Costa Rica, a country that, without accumulating resources or depleting nature, had a better level of well-being than most “high-income countries”. Thanda esteemed Costa Rica for renouncing having an army, banning hunting and circuses, taking care of the wealth of its nature, and offering universal medical services by curbing the "healthcare market" that from the United States permeated the entire continent with fragmented systems for the poor, basic care for the employed, and luxuries for the rich. He was invited by the new government to present his study, and the national press sensationalized it: "Costa Rica has the best health in the world." A committee was created to prepare the establishment of an International Equity Institute, and his book "The Transformational Force of Health Equity" was published in Spanish and English, distributed in all libraries, universities, and health centers in the country. Rocío, a woman of unwavering courage and beautiful native features, led the oldest entity on the continent that cared for universal health and pensions, the "social insurance box". She became a faithful ally of the "equity cause."

Applying equity concepts and analysis, Thanda demonstrated how more than half of Mexicans lived below the threshold of dignity, condemned to lives without full health and premature deaths. He launched a "social cohesion" program that attempted, with the help of brave fighters for fiscal justice laws, defense of women's rights, children's rights, elderly rights, indigenous peoples' rights, and migrants' rights, to increase transparency in laws, services, and public finances. He managed to include teaching activities for Huichol communities in the Potosi lowlands or Zapotecs from the valleys of Oaxaca. Knowledge was the key to freedom and justice, Thanda thought. That's why he attempted his candidacy in Party X and applied it in his work. Marginalized communities could thus better challenge the government on their accounts and be alerted to abuses of power. A lawyer from Guanajuato, José Manuel, with integrity, intelligence, humility, and commitment encouraged Thanda to have more hope and strength in the struggle, as a deep friendship and complicity molded between them.

He also collaborated with his soul friends Anna, Cristina, Sergio, David, and others on health equity projects and debates towards a national equity surveillance system in Mexico and in Costa Rica, El Salvador, the Central American Integration System, Colombia, and Uruguay. But despite their efforts, they always ended up measuring "isolated inequalities," as the World Health Organization and the Pan American Health Organization did and as reported by Oxfam. At a meeting on an Oxfam report on poverty in Mexico, he insisted, to his good friend Ricardo, the architect of extreme inequality reports published each year before the powerful meeting in Davos:

* Ricardo, by measuring and pointing out extreme inequalities, as you do well, extreme poverty is arbitrarily defined, by power, and mitigated by charity. Whereas, by defining thresholds of dignity and accumulation, which is how equity can be measured, systems of fair redistribution are imposed by ethics and a space of equity compatible with rights is guaranteed.

He thought to himself that he would continue to insist all his life. He knew that free-market capitalist systems were not prepared to hear about the limit of hoarding. It was like telling a Christian that hell is empty, a Muslim that paradise is for all, a butcher to become vegan, or a banker to renounce property.

Half of Mexicans lived by searching every day in the streets and squares, fields and roads, mines and maquilas, for a few pesos to barely survive. In the absence of a salary, the government only remembered them to throw them some alms in the form of the meager popular insurance, underfunded education, a symbolic pension, and "conditional transfer programs," initiated by the Inter-American Development Bank. This bank, which dominated many governments on the continent, was founded under the guise of "fighting poverty in Latin America" with capital from the United States, Europe, and later China. Its loans implied supply rights, commercial privileges, and tax exemptions for its corporations. Thus, inequality grew between a rich and dominant minority, a narrow middle class, and a majority dependent on charity and "conditional transfers" to get vaccinated, go to school, or, less explicitly, to vote for the powerful who continued to maintain the savage laws of the market, the true factory of injustice and natural destruction. In the Mexican "perfect dictatorship," the Secretariat of Social Development, SEDESOL, was responsible for programming aids in exchange, sometimes shamelessly, for votes. Like in La Gomera of the chiefs (“caciques”), but on a grand scale.

Not only did the economy work against the vast majority, but so did the water they drank, the food they ate, and the air they breathed. The influence of the toxic military north had been poisoning the bodies of Mexicans who consumed more sugary drinks than any other country, up to two hundred liters per year per person of sodas and other artificially flavored beverages mixed with highly concentrated sugar carefully designed to cause addiction. As a result, Mexico had the highest rates of diabetes.

Deeply concerned about so much suffering, which he saw directly in poor communities throughout the country, Thanda delved into the figures of that deadly equation. He demonstrated, through careful analysis of "attributable risk," that deaths slowly caused by sugary drinks, more frequent and earlier the poorer the people were, exceeded one hundred thousand per year. This was more than all the deaths and disappearances in Mexico's other sad record of violence. He advocated for a sugar tax to fund nutritional education campaigns. He helped impose a one-peso tax per liter on these toxic drinks, but neither higher prices nor more campaigns reduced toxic consumption among the poorest. There was more access to Coca-Cola, a slowly acting poison, than to water, the elixir of life. Thus, he began to understand life in Mexico from its very foundation. Humanity was moving away from harmony with Mother Earth. When they did drink water instead of toxic beverages, it was often contaminated with lead, mercury, and other heavy metals emanating from mining operations, immense wounds on Pachamama's skin.

In his monthly trips to Oaxaca to promote ideas and projects of greater cohesion, that is, social justice, Thanda learned of the drama of the Zapotec peasants for water for their fields and their lives. The government drained the marshes of the central valleys of Oaxaca, expanded cultivated areas, and thus dried up the wells. This had led to a severe drought ten years earlier. Showing hypocritical concern for the drought, the government imposed a "Veda Decree" that required peasants to have a concession title to access water and electricity, imposing high prices on both consumables, unaffordable for indigenous communities. They went hungry and thought about leaving the dry lands and migrating like beggars to the city. But they organized as "Water Sowers." They built dams, reservoirs, and absorption wells for rainwater collection, managed to restore the groundwater level in the region, and resumed cultivation. They organized to protest the government's ban, showing that they, as a community, achieved sustainable water management much better than with government interference.

Furthermore, the waters began to show signs of toxicity as Oaxaca became filled with mining operations granted to foreign companies, especially Canadians. The opposition of the communities to their lands being torn apart by mines, poisoned with toxins, and their wells dried up again, resulted in several murders of indigenous leaders. Thanda joined them in protests and received anonymous threats on her mobile phone. He supported members of the Chatino, Chontal, Cuicateco, Ikoots, Mixe, Mixtec, Zapotec, and Mestizo peoples to present more than twenty cases of human rights violations in the state. They demanded the cancellation and repeal of the Mining Law that allowed land and nature plunder and allowed giant mining companies to exhaust and poison their waters without restraint or laws. They listed more than forty mining projects in Oaxaca by Mexican and transnational companies with more than three hundred concessions and half a million hectares handed over to their excavators, dynamite, and poisons.

It was important to return land management to communities. In the hands of the state, it was sold through corruption to the highest bidder. Thus, the cruelest damage to nature was allowed. The direct violence or violence by mercenaries against anyone who wanted to denounce or stand in the way of ambition and immense benefits for a few was well known. Thanda thought the key lay in the soul of the truncated Mexican revolution: the ejido. Since 1915, agrarian law protected the ejido as collective, indivisible land that could not be sold or inherited. Its origin dated back to the communal lands of pre-Columbian peoples, for whom "private property over nature" was inconceivable.

A hundred years after the agrarian reform following the revolution, around half of the land in Mexico was ejido property. But the concept of private property was gradually imposing itself everywhere, including on land. In 1992, for some the five hundred years since the discovery and for others since the genocide, the Mexican Constitution was reformed, arguing in favor of parcel titling of land to guarantee "the right to legal security of land tenure." Thanda recalled the concept of "sacred right" that since the sixties the Catholic Church granted to individual property. The state surveyed ejidatarios, delimited the general surface of the ejido, made a general plan; the ejido was divided into plots and ejidatarios were given their "parcel rights certificate" individually, so they were tempted to claim "their land." In this way, the state collected taxes and mining companies could negotiate with each owner. "Divide and conquer." Once again.

Thanda often felt powerless in the face of so much injustice: land was falling into the hands of mining companies that were contaminating the waters that were poisoning landless peasants. Stripped of their sacred bond to nature, they ended up working in maquilas to buy toxic agribusiness food. Thus, they poisoned their bodies, which received marginal care and paltry subsidies from the system's charity, which in return asked for their vote to concentrate more and more power and money in a few hands. Those grasping hands offered, like Mexico's richest man, Carlos Slim, their philanthropy-from-their-luxuries, well seasoned with daily Mass.

Thanda's friend and rebellious bishop Raúl Vera knew this very well and was able to alert Pope Francis during his visit to Mexico. The Church blessed this system and gave sacred communion to its fervent leaders. Some landless peasants did manage to get a job with a "salary." Thanda thought of "salary salt" now being credit cards. With these wages, they "mortgaged" their lives in cities by buying houses and the "necessities" imposed by the market and its manipulative allies in the media and networks. They thus entered the wheel of working to consume and pay off debts, consuming what they did not understand and, if they could, saving in global speculation funds they did not understand. Their lives became a passive and unconscious contribution to power. Power became darker, more diffuse, like magma of which they were already a part without knowing how it happened or how to escape from it.

What the system of the "perfect dictatorship" could not control were the mafias that sold other toxins, but this time from south to north and illegally. Thus, cocaine from the jungles of Colombia and opium from the poppy fields of the mountains of Guerrero found the reverse route northward and profited from the market of northern consumer society seeking to alienate itself from the rat race. The privileged had cocaine at select parties, the marginalized in the north had heroin in dark alleys. Thus, drug trafficking thrived and attracted some of the Mexican children and young people who saw in the narco their exalted epic in movies and songs, the path to their dreams. Faced with the power of the narcos and their resistance to any control, the system entered collusion and shared power and benefits.

Others escaped the submission of the unjust system and the networks of the narco, and, dazzled by Hollywood and the American dream, embarked, along with hordes from southern countries, on the path to "El Dorado." Many died in the attempt, and all were humiliated by walls and barbed wire, police, and racism. But there were a few who neither resigned themselves to injustice, nor fell into alienated consumption, nor into the networks of drug trafficking, nor migrated to the deceitful north, and, opening their eyes, rose in rebellion. Sometimes "covering their faces to be seen," as Marcos said, or "to see," thought Thanda. Truly, Thanda concluded, the most authentic rebellion was that of caring for the earth and being cared for by it and simply "rejecting individual ownership and with it buying and selling." Only then could they commit personally and collectively and in solidarity to "sharing the care of Mother Earth and what she bestowed." Eila was achieving this, inspiring many eco-villages around the world and its already more than ten million people in harmony.

As he pondered these perverse cycles of humanity in Mexico and in the world, the day of the "cry" for independence approached, and Mexico was covered with the "tricolor flag" and the warrior ardor of its national anthem:

"Clothe, oh Homeland!

your temples of olive

with the divine archangel of peace,

For in heaven your eternal destiny,

by God's finger, was written.

But should a foreign enemy dare?

To profane with his foot your ground,

Think, beloved Homeland, that heaven

A soldier in every son has given you,

a soldier in every son has given you”.

Thanda thought how almost all the anthems of the world encouraged defending "the homeland," to "die for it," to "fight against the enemy." And he wondered: what was the homeland? Patria? Ethymologically it was "the place of the father." Defending it implicitly and often openly implied the machismo of the father's dominion over the mother and children, the sense of ownership of where one was born, and the rejection of any "stranger" who wanted to visit or share it. When nomadic sapiens began to settle in agricultural communities, the nonsense of appropriating land began, and with it the woman, and then the children, and thus the crops and tools for tilling. Metals found underground followed, and thus money and all its incarnations from ten thousand years ago until its exponential explosion in recent decades.

Thanda was reflecting on these ideas with his guitar on the roof of the house in the hills of Chapultepec. Nayra was, as every evening, in her world with her children, from which Thanda often felt on the periphery. Nayra came up to watch the sunset with Thanda. There was a beautiful spiritual complicity between them and a chemistry of magical attraction. At the same time, Nayra's reality revolved around her children and her world in Berkeley, where, through her parents, siblings, and friends, Thanda knew she longed to return. And what was Thanda's reality? he lived far from her parents and his daughters, had abandoned his professional calling as a doctor, got entangled every day in frustrations from the slow bureaucratic jungle of work as a civil servant, sought spaces of rebellion in his equity analyses and in his singing with the guitar, and swam every dawn dreaming underwater of a community of harmony.

In honesty with his ideas, everything called him to walk towards an eco-village where he could exchange words on the computer for hands in the earth, courtesy greetings and "politically correct" expressions for hugs and feelings, the doors of the family house for the community living room, savings and properties for the communal and supportive with so many who needed so much.

* Hey, “cariño” (darling).

That's how her partner usually greeted her.

* Hello, Nayra, how are the kids?
* Fine. They're talking to their father. Do you want to go for a walk or go to the cinema to see a movie?
* I’d rather prefer to watch the sunset here serenely and talk about our future.
* Yes, I want to talk to you about that too. The kids need to be closer to their father, they'll be entering adolescence and spending more time with him. That way, I'll have more time in our universe of love, Thanda. I know you feel the loneliness of being a 'non-father-father' and of so much space and time that I dedicate to complicity with my children.
* It's natural, Nayra. It's what your maternal protective instinct asks of you. It's normal for their father to want to be closer to them. And I don't want to get in the way of that natural bond.
* But at the same time, I love you. With your ideas, looks, jokes, songs, and even with your clumsiness, I feel in deep harmony. I've never had this feeling with anyone."
* Yes, we're divided between the universe we come from, and the one love calls us to. You can't escape the irresistible force of motherhood that holds you in a world of which, even if I wanted to, I am not a part. If that is your center, I will be a mere companion. And I no longer know where I'm from. My parents far away for so many years and I know my father is weak. My daughters already flying in their lives. My vocation as a doctor in Ukuzwana so distant in time. And my eco-village horizon so cloudy in the future.
* But we have something beautiful, Thanda: our love.
* Yes. I hope that, even if our paths separate again, love prevails.

As Thanda spoke those words, they both felt the vertigo of something imminent: Nayra would return to Berkeley with her children.

* Yes, Thanda, I must go back, and I need your support in that and your hand from a distance. I hope my children will spend time, as they enter adolescence, with their father. I'll get a job and combine with weherever you have to be.
* Thank you, darling. That's what I wish for. And may time bring us back together. Hopefully, we can still be parents and found a home in harmony with a community and nature. That's my dream, and I'll walk towards it.
* And in the meantime, what will you do? Don't you want to come with us to Berkeley?
* I can't, Nayra. I don't have a job there; I couldn't even help you get along there. Besides, you know how painful it would be for me to live contributing to the taxes of the world's most murderous government. Life's paradoxes: I support you going far away from me. In addition to supporting, you in your return to Berkeley, I must support my daughters in their studies and my parents in their final phase. So, I must finish my work in the European Union and be able to have a pension afterwards for the transition to the eco-village.

Upon hearing his own words, he felt that he himself, with so much analysis, thoughts, and proposals, was nevertheless bound by the fear of letting go of the anchors of security and breaking the chains of property. He hoped for a horizon of joined hands in which to hoist those anchors that plunged him into black holes, release the burdens of fears, and let his soul fly free. He knew he had the tenderness to think it, feel it, and share it, but would he have the courage to do it? Tenderness and courage.

* And what will you do, where will you go, darling?
* My work here, in this magical country of yours, which I love, ends next year. As beautiful as it is vast, as fascinating as it is tormented. The lists of countries where I can request a posting for the next four years have come out. I wanted to show them to you so we can decide together.

In the following days, Nayra and Thanda, aware with vertigo of their divergent paths, looked at the more than forty possible destinations where Thanda could apply. He had to request at least three. He applied for Myanmar for its Buddhist soul and to discover another magical and unknown world, Zimbabwe to return near Ukuzwana where he could go on weekends and be "thandabantu" again, and Cuba, the closest, relatively to Berkeley, and where Thanda felt, since his visit in 2009, admiration for a people who resisted, a dignified people against the empire of capital, where shreds of the utopia that Eila wanted to inspire the world with still remained.

And so it happened that they called for the Annual Seminar of European Cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean to take place in Havana. While everyone gathered at a luxurious hotel costing three hundred dollars a night in front of the Gran Teatro de La Habana and the Capitol, Thanda went to sleep at Pedro's house with his family, who already felt like beloved family to each other. The monthly salary at the university, for a thinker as committed as Pedro, didn't even reach a tenth of the cost of one night in that hotel from the Spanish Iberostar chain. Thanda was excited to return to Cuba. Every morning he walked from Pedro's house in Vedado to the Malecón and then up to Calle Línea to catch an "*almendrón*" (private old American cars from the fifties) to the Capitol and attend the meetings in which he felt so strange. They asked him to give a lecture on equity and poverty alleviation. In a five-star hotel! A good opportunity to speak his mind and garner support for his plan to move to Cuba after his time in Mexico.

He went to a nearby bodega to buy a kilo of chickpeas. In addition to his presentation on economic equity, he prepared an Excel spreadsheet in which, by entering the numbers of chickpeas for each of the hundred participants, he could instantly calculate the Gini inequality index. He began by gratefully acknowledging Cuba's dedication to health worldwide. While giving his talk, he passed around the bag of chickpeas and asked each participant to take the "chickpeas they thought they deserved," write them down on a piece of paper, and pass the bag to the next person. He ended his talk and as the debate questions began, he input the data and calculated "the Gini of the group" in that game. He compared it to a theoretical threshold of dignity, proportional to the total chickpeas in relation to what he had estimated against the total income in the world. He explained how the accumulation of a few, in the ranks of the ambassadors, prevented many from having "the minimum chickpeas" for a dignified life. And that if market societies did not regulate excess hoarding, they could not tackle the minimum dignity for all, far above the World Bank's paltry poverty line. On his panel, a representative of the World Bank argued:

* The accumulation of capital in a proportion entrepreneurial to society is the engine of investment and wealth that ultimately benefits the entire society.
* You are right, but do you know how long it takes for that wealth to reach those with incomes and conditions incompatible with a dignified life and without the right to health? About eighty years. This delay costs nearly twenty million lives unfairly each year. And when the eighty years pass, the same gap remains.
* So, you want to take away means and health from those who have worked to innovate and create wealth?
* It's not about taking away. It's about redistributing the unnecessary excess that prevents a fair equity curve, that depletes nature, and that in no way generates more well-being for those who hoard it. Quite the opposite.

The following month, he received a call from Brussels telling him that he had been pre-selected to head European cooperation in Cuba. He felt great joy and at the same time intrigue as to why he wasn't at least invited to the posting in Zimbabwe: he knew the country, the native language, had written science and literature about it, knew healthcare, a priority for European cooperation in the country. It was a clear example of the intrigues and favoritisms surrounding the European bureaucracy from which he hoped to soon emerge after the next posting, where he could pour out his soul without fear. He felt that Cuba could lead as a country what Eila was inspiring in the eco-village network.

After being selected based on his resume and letter of intent, he was chosen along with ten other candidates from an initial list of over sixty, for the most sought-after position in the world. He passed the initial interviews with the bosses in Brussels to a final trio and was summoned for the interview with the European ambassador in Cuba.

He read everything he could about the history and current events of Cuba, finding that there was almost nothing not polarized between staunch defenders of the revolution and uncompromising detractors of communism. Deep down, he had a dream that he couldn't reveal: to get the European Union to ally with Cuban internationalists cooperating for health and life in the most forgotten corners of the world.

In the summer of 2016, he made an exploratory trip to Cuba to better understand its reality and speak in the interviews for the position from the passion of his soul rather than from theories he had read. He arrived in Havana where he reunited with Pedro and his family, who, excited about Thanda's candidacy for the position in Cuba, entrusted him with advice and books to argue his candidacy. He then met in Cienfuegos with Adam, Nour, and Unai, who had sailed from Eila. The meeting on board Satia was emotional. Thanda felt a deep affection for those three brothers from Ukuzwana. And they saw him as a father, as if the spirit of Patxi and Jonay was reflected in Thanda and gave them his most sincere tenderness and firm paternal guidance and embrace. They left John's boat, Satia, in the bay of Cienfuegos and traveled to Santa Clara to meet Buhleve and Elias. A Ukuzwana network was finding its shape in Cuba. Thanda felt a dream worth fighting for.

Adam had progressed in his biology studies and only had his final exams and thesis left. But what truly fascinated him was art, especially cinema. He fell in love with the Film School of San Antonio de los Baños. He had been corresponding with Cassie, the girl he met in the eco-village of Ternura, and a complicity had grown between them that he wanted to explore. Thanda advised him to finish his studies and orient his thesis towards the relationship between neurobiology and consciousness, to better understand how his secure future as a filmmaker could touch minds and hearts towards the change they all felt was so necessary.

Unai felt increasingly intrigued by the ways in which humanity was nourished. He went to the Institute of Pharmacy and Food at the University of Havana to see if he could study in an environment free from the interests of the agro-industry, which dominated the world of the "free market" of "non-free men." He felt love for a beautiful Italian girl, Altea, whom he met on his travels through Europe and who was studying art in Amsterdam. He would return with Adam to Eila aboard Satia to its home in Ternura under the care of Fernando and Martin and reunite with Altea.

Nour was already twenty years old, tall, and athletically agile, with a bronze and warm glow to her skin, beautiful eyes that were both inquisitive and melancholic under eyebrows as dense as her father's, and curiously, she inherited from her father Thanda, a short and soft-featured nose, full lips, and a cleft chin. She had spent eight years exploring the world without the reins of an educational system. She had learned from her father how to build their house, prepare the gardens, explore the forests, recognize the fauna and flora, the stars, and the songs of the birds, how to tame wild Mustang horses, and how to sail across the ocean. She also learned to weave with her mother on a spinning wheel like Gandhi's, to understand the world through the networks of evil explained by her mother and the hope of the eco-village network, to meditate and feel the vibrations of people, their emotions, and the channels of empathy through which to connect just by looking. During their time in France, while Aimsa and Fernando attended the Climate Summit, Nour had crossed France on horseback. In her adventure, she met a man who was fascinated by her beauty. He took some photos of her in which Nour's gaze seemed to convey a serene and hypnotizing beauty. In a way that would be difficult for her parents, and especially Thanda, to explain, she felt that she should dedicate herself to traveling invited by photographers who were doing reports on her beauty and her gaze. She would travel through Japan, South Africa, all of Europe, America, the snows, and deserts, and save to prepare her horse sanctuary, her deepest desire.

When Adam and Unai returned to Cienfuegos to begin their return to Eila and their loves, Thanda stayed a few days with Nour in a small windowless apartment near the Plaza Vieja. They walked under the stifling heat of August and discovered that world where curious tourists mingled, perhaps to see the last bastion of communist utopia. They watched fascinated as children ran in school uniform through the square where they received their physical education classes or let off steam during recess. They observed artisans selling paintings and souvenirs, almost all of them with motifs of Che and Fidel. They watched as elderly people searched for food or medicine, or a bench to sit and watch the spectacle of such a mixture of races and paths. They recognized prostitutes looking provocatively at tourists. They listened to musicians singing son in the corners. Other men worked on restoration projects with barely more than their hands. Women of all colors and attire brightened the view for those who stopped to see such a fascinating human spectacle. Beautiful colonial buildings with five-meter-high roofs and white and blue colors alternated with others in semi-ruins, but through whose portals, one could glimpse an intense and exciting life by stairs half-collapsed. There lived the real Cuba, in "barbacoas" dividing the high ceilings into lofts where relatives and non-relatives crowded together. Full of beauty with athletic and naked torsos, women trying to tame their wild African hair, and always someone playing a chord, beating some bongos, keeping the rhythm with the clave or, in the most unexpected corners, playing some notes on a solitary trumpet. Thanda felt as if life was unleashed in those streets of Old Havana and Central Havana, uninhibited by codes and prejudices, absent from its shortcomings, proud, without showing off its brutal beauty.

Walking with Nour along the Malecón, they received the most ingenious compliments. A young man blurted out to her:

* Marry me, mulata, don't think about it anymore!

To this, Thanda said to him:

* Careful, brother, I am her father!
* Let's get along well, father-in-law, you suit me!

At night, in the small apartment he shared with Nour, Thanda finished the book on equity in Cuba, with the limited data he could obtain from the country. On the third night of writing non-stop and without sleeping, under the stifling tropical heat, he finished the book and took it to the Ecimed publishing house. He explained the book and all its graphs and tables, his donation of rights to the publisher, and the usefulness for debates with students and public health professionals.

After a trip together to Trinidad and galloping together through its streets, paths, and forests, Nour continued her journey to New York where she planned to settle in Manhattan and discover the mystery of the greatest concentration of races, languages, and cultures in the world.

Thanda returned to Mexico and continued to passionately devote himself to work and shared love with Nayra, reaching the end of their coexistence, to uncertain horizons of a longed-for home. The day he was summoned for the interview, he was in Cambridge, Massachusetts, with his friend and accomplice David, already back from his cycling adventure with his son across the continent. Before giving a lecture on the ethics of equity at Walhurst University, he called Havana and was informed that the interview was canceled due to Fidel's death. The country was shaken by the loss of its hero and leader of the revolution. Thanda felt a mixture of honor for the courage of that person, sympathy for his social ideas and rejection of imperialism, but opposition to hierarchical and sometimes violent decisions against those who did not accept his ideas and, above all, distance from the almost mythomanic clamor of "so many for one".

Thanda celebrated Thanksgiving with Anne's family, David's wife. They lived in an old and charming house in Cambridge, that "Berkeley of the East," a progressive, almost socialist island in the American capitalist sea. The family was known in the neighborhood for having tables outside the house with books, clothes, and household items for anyone in need or who wanted to share, and the doors of the house were open to homeless people or those in need of hugs. The mother was already showing signs of Alzheimer's, and her unkempt appearance was dazzling because of her sincere smile. The father, a revolutionary Frenchman in that corner of the Empire, dedicated himself day and night to his passion for the world of bees: he cared for them, observed them, and wrote about them passionately. Such was his devotion to that highly organized way of life and such a collective spirit that he had installed a beehive on the bedside table of their marital bed, with an opening towards the wall to the outside and a glass panel facing where he slept, to see his cooperative world and sleep with the whisper of their activity.

David and Anne's family had supported the Democratic candidate, Bernie Sanders. He was the only one who spoke fearlessly about socialist values ​​of sharing, universal rights like health, and how they were hijacked by the claws of the market. He knew and denounced without reservation the tentacles of Wall Street and the accumulation of wealth by a few. Despite this, most Americans feared him as someone who would plunge the United States into the darkness of dreaded communism. This atavistic fear went hand in hand with the anathema of the atheistic world that threatened their messianic view of the world, in the country where the highest proportion of its people blindly, quite literally, believed in the existence of hell, where all those "socialist sinners" would burn.

Candidates in those elections had to raise several million dollars to start "selling themselves" in the media, like everything else in the country: buying and selling in the market. They were usually businessmen with fortunes or senators who had accumulated power and wealth as well. They thus arrived at their states’ caucuses, the first in March in Iowa, with the marmots coming out of hibernation. These were citizen assemblies convened by those dominant parties where voters chose their candidate by a show of hands. Despite the hundreds of millions spent on advertising by their candidates, fewer than one in five citizens attended and voted at these assemblies. In some States, only party members could vote, a minority of the population. Thus, the "number of delegates" per candidate out of a total of about five thousand for the two parties was decided, with disparate systems between States. The national conventions of each party arrived, and the delegates voted, as expected, for the candidate they represented, but everything was conditioned on the vote of the "superdelegates," who voted for whoever they wanted. This is how presidential candidates were chosen, pressured by lobbyists, campaign financiers, and a small group of power brokers, politicians trained to maintain the reigning capitalist system. Bernie lost to Hillary Clinton, with her hands bloodied from fueling wars around the world, especially in the Arab Spring and in Syria, arming jihadist terrorists from whom Aylan and his family fled, and many millions, thousands of them drowned in the Mediterranean.

Back in Mexico, Thanda had his interview for the Cuba position. Nayra lit a candle with Thanda's photo, and a few weeks later, he was notified that she had been selected for the position. He felt a mixture of joy and guilt for taking the position from other colleagues. He also had her soul torn between embracing the challenges in Cuba and physically leaving behind the magic of Mexico, which had already so deeply permeated his body and soul.

It was around this time that the presidential elections in the northern empire, where Nayra was heading, took place. Not only was there a huge bias from citizens to delegates, but the superdelegates filtered it even more, and from the final menu of two powerful candidates to maintain-the-status-quo, the votes of barely half of the citizens who exercised that "right" were filtered again by the different weight of each population and each State. There were so many disconnects between the informed, unmanipulated decision of a citizen oriented towards the common good, not individual privilege, and the result; that Thanda thought that the supposed freest democracy in the world was a big farce. It was not contradictory to the eagerness of this Empire to maintain the oligopoly of the United Nations Security Council, its control of financial institutions and agencies called "international," and its history of alliances with dictatorships around the world. What was surprising was that such a degree of hypocrisy often went unnoticed and tolerated and even admired by much of the rest of the world. Except for countries like Cuba.

Obama was finishing his eight years of "empty poetry." Hillary Clinton seemed to be the favorite, her massacres around the world as head of the State Department and her alliances with the military-industrial complex, the pharmaceutical industry and its patents, the agribusiness and its toxins and GMOs, and the banking and its speculative tentacles, were all well hidden, and cleverl sold as far from Bernie's socialism. In addition, the Republican candidate was the grotesque Donald Trump, an unscrupulous millionaire businessman, racist, xenophobic, and sexist; ignorant and arrogant; insensitive and aggressive. It seemed incredible that, despite the banal and submissive world in which American society lived, a character like him, so opposed to all the most basic ethical values in any culture, would even be a candidate. He based his campaign on fear of migrants from the South, calling them criminals and rapists, and on the Chinese threat to take away the glory and purpose of the United States as a moral leader, and to anyone who did not like it, a military, from the world threatened by communist atheists. To what extent could money sow fears, cloud consciences, and buy votes and wills?

Thanda and Nayra watched minute by minute on election night as Trump, still with slightly fewer votes, surged ahead, due to the biased system of vote translation into congressmen, and approached becoming President of the United States. And so, it was. The world entered an even darker stage as the dominant Empire seemed inevitably to enter its final decline.

It was towards that dark world that Nayra and her children were heading in the Christmas of 2016. Thanda spent a time of immense tenderness in Madrid with her parents and her daughters, although he felt the extreme weakness of his father, whose tenderness dazzled even more. Upon his return, the echoes of the empty house made him feel the chill of returning to loneliness while waiting for love. Was his lonely destiny perhaps like the life of her Amama, written?

# Turning Pain into Hope. Ukuzwana, March 2017

After the Paris summit, which avoided the courage of an inert world towards the precipice of climate disaster, Aimsa visited eco-villages throughout Europe. She began her long pilgrimage in Marseille, from where Fernando, Adam, Nour, and Unai set sail for Eila. She stayed in an eco-village, listening to their stories, dreams, and concerns all day, and at night she shared her advice with them. The next day, she walked between twenty and thirty kilometers, heading east. Sometimes she was accompanied by carts or horses, or even bicycles, to the next eco-village. If it was too far, she would take a bus or a train, trying not to pollute the air.

She decided to travel without money or any luggage, sharing tasks in each eco-village and eating and drinking what nature and the communities offered her along the way. She wrote down ideas and feelings in a travel journal and communicated with Jonay from each eco-village. She had reached Moscow and was about to visit the eco-villages of Siberia, traveling for two weeks on the Trans-Siberian train.

Meanwhile, Jonay had toured eco-villages in the United States and stayed with a Mexican immigrant community in the central valley while preparing a conference on "Technological Advancement and Human Harmony." He had invited Joseph to present his harmony inventions, and to reach the other side of the world without polluting, they prepared a route with flights in a new version of the inyoni-enkulu: a small electric plane recharged with solar panels.

Patxi approached his eightieth birthday with serene peace alongside NoLwasi, in Ukuzwana. There, Thandiwe continued to care for the sick tgether with Marco, both parents of a fourteen-year-old boy, Félix, who was exploring new inventions in Joseph's workshop in Bulawayo. Nothando had found in violin melodies a way to alleviate and sometimes cure illnesses, a beautiful reincarnation of NoLwasi's healing magic.

The evening fell, and the last rays of sun filtered furtively onto the porch of Patxi and NoLwasi's house in Ukuzwana, witnesses to so many adventures.

* Patxi, what are you thinking? You've been very quiet lately.

NoLwasi asked.

* I'm not thinking, NoLwasi. It's like images and cherished memories come to me, and I let them visit me gratefully. I was just feeling how fortunate we have been with the saga of doctors so passionate about relieving suffering: Jonay, Thanda, Buhleve, Elias, and now Thandiwe. I think of each of them with deep gratitude.

NoLwasi observed Patxi: his forehead had cleared, but a fine and straight white hair still covered it. His gaze was serene, attentive, and yet, the upper eyelids drooped slightly over his green irises as if the testimony of so much unjust pain weighed on his gaze to a world as magical as it was often cruel. His thin lips were always ready for a slight smile that reverberated in his gaze, offering, with a slight crease under his eyes, a wealth of sincere tenderness to anyone by his side seeking advice, support, or blessing.

The day was almost over when they saw an elderly man coming, who must also be around eighty. From his features, Patxi thought he was an elderly Shona. He walked somewhat stooped and wielded a cane. He had white hair and beard and wore glasses with many magnifications in a thick shell frame that reflected the light of the sunset. Despite the heat, he wore an old black suit and white shirt. He came with a young woman about thirty years old. They approached the porch. Patxi stood up to greet him. The man said:

* Are you Sindisabanthu?
* That's what they call me. Who are you? Come in and sit down, it seems like you've come a long way.
* Thank you. Yes, we come from Harare. I've wanted to come for a long time. Thanks to my niece, I'm here. I need to feel peace before I embark on the slow farewell to life.
* Welcome. This is my wife NoLwasi. And tell me, Mkulu (grandfather), who honors us with your visit this evening?
* My name is Jeremy Nalunga.

The name echoed in Patxi's memory. He thought about how many recollections time erased to make way for the torrent that bathed and shaped our universe every day. But that name made him shudder. They remained mutually hypnotized in the depth of their gazes. Patxi remembered how that man came to the mission thirty-five years ago at the head of the terrible fifth brigade, threatening with a massacre. Patxi had sheltered the whole village in the church and placed the cross blocking the doors of the temple while the Ndebele and Kalanga people sang inside.

At that moment, tears-streaked Jeremy's weathered face, and without ceasing to look at Patxi, he began to sing.

* Ishekomborera África Ngaisimudzirwe zita rayona…

Patxi continued in Ndebele with the anthem of freedom and the unity of Africa: Nkosi sikelele…

They hugged each other, moved. The man knelt, wanting to kiss Patxi's hand, but almost instantly Patxi also knelt, and they looked into each other's eyes with their arms on each other's shoulders.

* Your embrace of peace gladdens my soul, Jeremy.

They stood up, and Patxi could see in the face of the young woman accompanying him a moist sparkle in her evasive gaze. He asked them both to sit down. Patxi asked the young woman:

* And what's your name, Umntwana wami (my daughter)?
* Sibongile, Baba wami. ('we thank you,' my father).

Patxi found it strange that an elderly Shona man would be accompanied by a Ndebele woman. Jeremy began his tale.

* Half of our lived lives ago, I came to this mission. Right here.

He said, pointing to the entrance of the Church, in front of Patxi and NoLwasi's porch.

* I tried, blinded by violence and revenge, to enter the Church and commit a massacre. Another one. Your cross at the door and the Shona chants touched my heart, filled with hatred, and I left with the brigade.

Patxi and NoLwasi listened attentively to such a confession from many years ago. They could feel the pain of so many people and families who suffered so much cruelty at the hands of that man who now, with tears in his eyes, reminded them of those sad times. Jeremy continued:

* That same day, on the way to Bulawayo, we stopped at the crossroads of Kezi. We entered a store to requisition beers. A young woman was at the counter buying food. Thirsty for violence and to assert my power over the Ndebele and Kalanga, I confronted her in Shona. She didn't answer me, and, blinded by hate, I hit her, took her to the back room, and cruelly abused her, amidst the sexist taunts of the soldiers in my brigade.

Jeremy expressed pain and anger as he told his story, sobbing as if he were talking about someone else. Patxi and NoLwasi held hands and looked down, horrified by such a cruel tale. Patxi felt on the one hand, the deepest revulsion for what that man was recounting and disgust for his being, who caused so much pain during his life; and at the same time, an intrigue about the reason for such a sincere and heartfelt confession.

* Time passed, and I was by Mugabe for my 'heroic defense of the nation of Zimbabwe at the head of the fifth brigade.' I went into reserve and into a peaceful life with my three wives and ten children, extensive fields in Masvingo, and some good savings from all the plunder of those dark times. Five years ago, I noticed spots on my skin and a month later, cough and fever. I was diagnosed with AIDS, and in the following years, two of my wives and two of my children were also diagnosed with that disease. We were able to access treatment. The doctor who treated us in Harare explained to us that access to those medications in the country was thanks to the effort of the Ukuzwana mission. From the mission I tried to plunder, and massacre came the source of my healing and that of my family.

Patxi raised his head and looked into the eyes of that man, who was babbling from the pain of his story.

* A year ago, I received a letter from Sibongile.

He said, looking at the young woman with devotion. She continued to look at the ground in pain. Patxi and NoLwasi looked at her with tenderness. The young woman took out a yellowed paper from a blue envelope with a printed seal, already yellowed with time.

* This is the letter my mother left me when she died, when I was fifteen years old:

Dear daughter. The disease of shame is taking my life to another world from which I will send you, my light. I could not understand this life without that other opportunity. It's not about "Faith," but about so much pain that accompanied my journey in this life. My father was killed by the fifth brigade, and I was raped by their commander, Jeremy Nalunga. I was rejected by the people and never knew any man who would come near me and offer me love. Then came this disease that made me lose weight and strength. I was treated with deep love at the Ukuzwana mission, where a woman named Anwele advised me to get tested and gave me, along with the hospital doctor, the tenderness and care I had never received in my life. So, I have come to say goodbye to life, daughter. Despite the violence I suffered and the pain that accompanied me in life, I am grateful to Mukhulumkhulu for the gift of your life. I won't be able to stay to see you grow up, but I will send you my light every day from the afterlife where I await you, sure that there will be no sadness or violence there.

Lisale kihle, ngiyakithanda… (rest in peace, I love you…)

Patxi and NoLwasi cried tears of emotion as they listened to her story. Sibongile continued.

* I went on to live with my grandmother. I kept my mother's letter in a box and buried it under the earth near a kopje, where I went every afternoon to talk to her. The following year, some men came to the kraal, gave money to my grandmother, and took me to Egoli. I was locked up and drugged for three months until they forced me into prostitution. Sindisabanthu, his brother, Hambakatshana, rescued me along with many other Ndebele girls and boys. I returned to my grandmother's kraal, who had already passed away, went to my secret kopje, and retrieved the box with my mother's letter. I was able to live and study in one of the eco-villages of the Sibithanda network. I met a good man in the eco-village, and we formed a home in love.
* My heart is so glad, Sibongile. The brave spirit of my brother beats strong in the Sibithanda network. He used to say you would be 'the guides of the New Humanity.' I am sure it will be so.
* I felt gratitude to life for emerging from the darkness, but something in me made me uneasy about the silent pain my mother felt. One day, you spoke on the radio, Baba Sindisabantu, with Buhleve, about forgiveness, as the deepest act of love. The most healing. So, I decided to write a letter to my mother's executioner, put it in an envelope with my mother's, and search for his house in Harare.

At that moment, there was a grave silence. Everyone looked at Jeremy. His hands were trembling. Patxi noticed his feet were very swollen.

* Sindisabantu, NoLwasi. Sibongile forgave me and wished me love, despite the pain I caused them. I could never have conceived so much generosity, so much kindness. I looked around at power and privilege. I thought about the pain I had caused. I needed to find that woman, daughter of my wickedness, transformed into so much goodness that I could not even understand it. I went to her Sibithanda village and found harmony in simplicity and nature, in love where no one commands and others obey. I stayed to serve in the village like any other peasant, although I hardly have any strength left. I realized the darkness in which my life had been lost until then.
* Thank you for your sincere confession, Jeremy. Love is our essence. You have regained it thanks to Sibongile's immense generosity. And I thank you for coming to tell us. Pain is not healed with forgiveness from one to another but with understanding. I want to ask you something.
* Whatever you want, Sindisabantu. I have already given all my properties to the Sibithanda network.
* It's not about money. For so much pain to find light, you must explain to the Kalanga communities why violence blinded you, what you felt upon receiving Sibongile's mother's letter and her daughter's message, and what you feel in the life of Sibithanda. Their understanding, despite the thousands of people who have lived in mourning for almost four decades, will be able to dissolve that pain, transform it into hope, and give way to light and love. I recommend that you withdraw into meditation in the coming days and return on Sunday to our community celebration, which will be broadcast to eco-villages around the world.

Jeremy agreed and went with Sibongile to meditate at Matopos' Black Eagle. He still had a lot of influence in the Zimbabwean government and in the Southern African Development Community (SADC), which was holding a conference in Durban the following month. He wanted to make some calls before his meditation.

NoLwasi spread the message throughout the region of a transcendent meeting at the Ukuzwana mission. People began arriving as if on pilgrimages, walking and with "scotch cars" from the previous day, sleeping under the stars and around fires where they sang. For the past ten years, Nothando had been collecting songs from the Ukuzwana gatherings, many of which she composed herself, combining her violin, children’s, and women's choirs, and the deep, grave "mmmmm... mmmm" of the Zulu men.

Jeremy arrived in his black suit and tie, accompanied by Sibongile, this time with her husband and two teenage daughters. Representatives from many eco-villages of the Sibithanda network came. For twenty years, the network of eco-villages had welcomed over a hundred thousand AIDS orphans who grew up in natural harmony and empathy, forming families and raising children who were no longer orphans of love.

Since Haka's farewell, so many people had not come to the mission. The Church jam-packed up, and its surroundings filled up, and spontaneous speakers repeated what they heard through a chain of whispers from inside.

Nothando began the meeting, wordlessly, with a melody. She was inspired by the one Jonay shared when his father, John, died. "*There are not enough stars* .. G-Sol, Sol-A7, A-Re... G-Sol, Sol-Mi, Mi7-A7..."

The children's choirs sang the verses Nothando prepared for the meeting:

There will not be enough stars.., to see in them, all the reasons why life, and its beautiful magic, brought us together today...

There will not be enough stars..., to see in them, how much we have already suffered when darkness, clouded souls and love drowned...

There will not be enough stars..., to see in them, the most beautiful light that, from pain, forgiveness springs and shines in hope,

There will not be enough stars..., to see in them, that together we can build a world, without thrones or borders, full of harmony.

Patxi began the ceremony with a few brief words. Over time, he had spoken less and more slowly:

* Dear family, today we will have to draw out the best and deepest from our souls. The toughest test of love. If we succeed, we will cleanse our hearts of shadows, and a powerful light will unite us with the universe even more strongly. Today, Jeremy Nalunga will speak to us. Thirty-seven years ago, he came to this Church blinded by hatred and violence, in a war between brothers, which left much pain, still sinking many hearts. Today he comes with another message, which calls for the most difficult courage, of the deepest tenderness: that of forgiveness and the embrace toward united hope.

At that moment, many murmured and even shouted angrily at the presence of the one who had been the executioner of their relatives. But Patxi silenced the protests and asked them to let him speak. Jeremy, with short, weak steps, hunched over and limping, supported by Sibongile, dressed in a white tunic, stood up in the center of the temple.

* My name is Jeremy Nalunga. During my childhood and adolescence, I was educated in the ways of war. First to liberate Zimbabwe from the yoke of the English. Then to impose unity upon those whom I saw as enemies of our liberation. We feared the Ndebele guerrillas and ravaged villages with violence. Before you, I declare myself guilty of causing immense pain unknowingly. I deserve the greatest punishment. A few years ago, my daughter Sibongile, here by my side, showed me, with the immense generosity of her forgiveness, the light of fearless love. Seeing how love overcame her rightful resentment, I felt the hope of dedicating the rest of my days to contributing with all my strength to the beautiful dream of Ukuzwana, of sibithanda, and of the eco-village network. But I surrender to your judgment and decision; it is only fair, and here I offer you, my soul.

Patxi accompanied Jeremy and Sibongile home, while the communities began to deliberate. The elders who had fought in the war spoke, the younger ones who had lost their parents spoke, the children who had grown up hearing about that suffering and feeling the resentment spoke. They debated all day. As evening fell, they called for Patxi to bring Jeremy to the temple. Speaking on behalf of the communities was a man around forty years old named Livukile ("we rise").

* Mr. Nalunga, you stole a part of our lives. You filled it with pain. You took away many good-hearted people who wished to live in peace, like my father. For many of us, life never shone with full light again. We have lived with the burden of pain and resentment. Then came AIDS and took the children of war. But in this mission, Sindisabantu has taught us that love heals everything. The orphans of orphans created islands of hope in this country, and today they teach us that we can be reborn from the ashes. You have our forgiveness and our hands to together build the foundations of a new Zimbabwe, a new Africa, a Humanity without borders. Without chiefs or subjects, without properties or poor, in harmony with nature and with the sure blessing of our ancestors and Mkhulimkhulu. Amandla!"

They sang Nkosi Sikelele.

The following week, Jeremy invited Patxi to accompany him to Durban. There was a conference of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), where, at Nalunga's request through the Zimbabwean government, Patxi was invited to speak about the sibithanda network and the example of Eila, to inspire a region of the world committed to living without harm to nature, dissolving borders, and hierarchies, and with the spirit of sharing, gradually shedding the slavery of possessions.

Thanda had written to him saying he had been invited to the International AIDS Conference, at the grand Convention Centre in Durban, to speak before more than twenty thousand people on the ethics of equity. A South African journalist who had heard him present his analysis and ideas in Salzburg the previous year alongside David convinced the organizers to invite Thanda to give the keynote address: "AIDS and Equity, the great challenge of our era."

Thanda felt unwell due to the flights from Mexico, via Madrid, Abu Dhabi, and Johannesburg, to Durban, but he could see his parents for two days in Madrid and would see them for another two upon his return. A few months earlier, due to shortness of breath, his father had undergone an X-ray where they had seen a suspicious spot of a tumor. Because of his advanced age and weakened state, Thanda knew there could be no cure. He only hoped that precisely his weakness would keep the tumor latent, although his father's strength, such a powerful beacon, was waning. He remembered the words that always gave him light: "*if you fight, I fight*."

When he arrived at his parents' house, he found his father sitting on one of the wicker chairs on the terrace, surrounded by pots of plants and flowers that his mother cared for devoutly. In twenty years away from Spain, it was the first time his father did not come to the door to greet him. He could barely get up. Thanda noticed him very thin and with weak breathing, barely a thread of voice and his gaze, full of tenderness as always, but feeling even the weight of his own eyelids. When he greeted him, it took him a few minutes to remember his name. Thanda felt a profound sadness. His father's physical energy was fading away. That afternoon, Thanda's mother, who had been caring for him for several weeks without rest, went for a walk.

Thanda sat beside his father to listen to the birds and feel the gentle spring breeze. He tried, in vain, to walk with him, to engage in conversation, or even to encourage him to draw the flowers in a notebook. He had no strength. At dusk, his father told him he was very tired and wanted to go to bed. Thanda accompanied him to the room, almost carrying him. He helped him put on his pajamas. It had been a week since he had showered, due to weakness in doing it alone and out of embarrassment for Thanda's mother to help him. Thanda convinced him and accompanied him to the shower. Thanda confirmed his advanced state of cachexia. His heart broke. He could barely stand. Thanda entered the shower with him, and embracing him from behind, he soaped and washed him meticulously and with all his tenderness, caressing, for the first time in his life, his entire body. He dried him, perfumed him, and took him to the marital bed. His father had difficulty breathing, and Thanda sat behind him, making his father's back lean against his chest, while he hugged him and encouraged him to breathe slowly and slowly fall into a serene sleep.

When his mother returned, Thanda told her what had happened and said it would be necessary to find a way to administer oxygen to him at home. He spoke with his sisters and with the medical services and headed for South Africa. He would return in three days, after giving his lecture. On the flight, he wrote about his father and the wonderful light he meant to his life, forever.

He gave his lecture in Durban. There were more than ten thousand people in the grand hall of the Durban Conference Hall, including the prime minister and several government ministers. It was in this hall, the largest in South Africa, where Mandela had given his speech twenty-six years earlier, already in freedom, to the African National Congress, and South Africa embarked on its path to freedom; and where sixteen years earlier, little Nkosi Johnson gave his testimony to the world, shortly before dying.

Thanda spoke passionately about his study of equity and how the world must converge towards the ethical curve of equity, between countries and within them. He demonstrated how most AIDS patients and deaths, many of them due to patent greed, occurred outside the curve of equity, and AIDS in turn increased unjust inequalities. He spoke of the example of Ukuzwana and the sibithanda network. He ended his speech in Ndebele, with the clicks and metaphors of his northern brothers. His message of justice and harmony for future generations elicited Zulu songs at the end.

He met with Patxi in Durban, both in very different forums, but with the same vision of a just world, without physical or mental barriers. The reunion was emotional. He felt how the passage of time had taken its toll on his second father, Patxi. With Haka's beret always on, his back had slightly bent over, perhaps from offering his attention to whoever spoke to him. They caught up on their lives, and he asked Patxi to take to Ukuzwana, to Haka's jacaranda, a jar of soil he had been collecting from the more than forty countries where he had been working and pouring out fragments of his soul.

* Father, your Ukuzwana will always be a steadfast guide in my journey.
* Lihambe kuhle umntwana wami (Go in peace, my child).

Thanda traveled fifteen thousand kilometers back to his father to tell him, as he always did when sharing his challenges: "*mission accomplished*." He had improved with some oxygen. Thanda shared two days of profound tenderness with his father before returning to his empty home in Mexico, completing another stage of his life before moving on to Cuba.

#  Science and Con-science. San Francisco, May 2017

When Jonay encouraged him to go to California and debate the future of Humanity, between science and spirit, Joseph planned the route from Ukuzwana, Zimbabwe to Berkeley, California in his inyoni-enkulu. In the previous years, he had been working on a model in his Bulawayo invention factory. With the help of Thandiwe and Marco's son, Félix, and his group of allies from the "dream factory," they had managed to create fiberglass molds and lighten the weight to just about a hundred kilograms in its structure, another hundred for the batteries, and a maximum weight for the passenger and their luggage of another hundred kilograms. Its autonomy was a maximum of four hundred kilometers, about three hours of flight. The design and weight allowed it to take off and maintain flight with less than two kilowatt/hour per hundred kilometers, with an electric motor of only sixteen kilowatts, like a small motorcycle, reaching a speed of one hundred sixty kilometers per hour.

He prepared a route of "jumps" of three hundred kilometers each, landing on eco village runways where they had promoted the use of ecological flights. With Fernando and Umbela, they thought that with one out of every thirty eco villages having an aviation runway, and one or two small ecological planes, they had enough for flights when the "slow tempo," always recommended, of walking, biking, or horseback riding was not enough.

His stages took him to Hwangue and its herds of elephants, Victoria Falls, remembering Haka, he crossed Zambia in four stages fascinated by its vast savannahs and reached Lake Malawi bordering it to the north towards Lake Tanganyika and then flying over the fascinating hills of Burundi and Rwanda to then follow the northern coast of Lake Victoria crossing Uganda and Kenya towards Lake Turkana delving into the mountains of Ethiopia reaching Sudan where he followed the Nile to its delta into the Mediterranean. He crossed the eight thousand kilometers from south to north of Africa in a month and a half, stopping in fifty eco villages. He crossed the sea to Cyprus, avoiding the war zones of the Middle East, and arrived at the Trucas coasts. From there, he crossed Turkey and the Caucasus to then border Russia on the western coast of the Caspian Sea and arrived a few days later to Kazakhstan then crossing the vast plains of Mongolia heading north to Siberia towards the Bering Strait. It was two months through Asia and flying more than ten thousand kilometers. He crossed the sea to Alaska and flew over its icy mountains for a week, then bordering the beautiful coast of British Columbia to then arrive in the United States crossing the States of Washington and Oregon to reach northern California.

In total, it was five months of travel visiting almost a hundred eco villages of all cultures and passions. When he landed in eco villages, he was received with love and admiration. Among his limited luggage, he carried a 3D printer with which he taught young people on the rest day of each stage, and they printed, with plastic scraps and other materials, pieces to build their own 3D printers, a truly reproductive act to make useful inventions. He wrote a travel journal about it all and reflected on so many peoples of the world, of so many cultures and ecosystems, and how inventions could improve certain dimensions of well-being when they did not disturb natural and human harmony. He wanted to discuss this at the upcoming event on the future he was approaching.

When he landed in the eco village of Leytonville, in Mendocino County, Jonay was waiting for him. It had been fifteen years since they had seen each other. Back then, Joseph was a clever young man passionate about designing inventions since, at fifteen, he had helped Jonay build the "take your time" machine to prevent the transmission of AIDS from mothers to children. Now Joseph was in his thirties, a strong and wise man, sensitive to the pain of others, concerned about the damage to nature, about the absurd borders that faded from the heights, and committed to contributing to a Humanity that loved nature and thereby found harmony in community. Jonay was approaching sixty, his hair had turned white, which he tied in a ponytail, revealing a broad forehead, a serene and sweet gaze over a thick white beard. He stayed fit by practicing yoga with Aimsa, riding with Nour, and building cabins, sailing, and adventuring in the mountains.

* Joseph, Amhlope Inyoni! (Congratulations, bird!). You've flown across the world. I want you to tell me, to take me flying with the stories of your adventures.
* How good to see you, Jonay. I crossed the world because of your invitation! I hope to be able to contribute.
* Even with just your adventure, you inspire courage and…
* Tenderness! You haven't changed, Jonay!
* In essence, no, Joseph. And how joyful to see you so strong and brave. I saw you grow since you arrived in Ukuzwana as a child. Tell me, how is Nothando?
* She is well. Although somewhat sad because she cannot conceive, and she really wanted to be a mother. But we live with many children. We moved the workshop to a neighborhood east of Bulawayo, where we also farm. We started with thirty orphans from Sibithanda and now we are already fifty families. In the workshop, almost twenty people work, and we are designing many inventions for a 'future in harmony.' Nothando has become a wonderful violinist who travels through eco villages, hospitals, and schools. Her music has a healing power. She always remembers you when she plays the music from Schindler's List, and she has made beautiful versions of the melody for your father, “There wont be enough stars...”
* We need to talk about that, Joseph. In the conference I asked them to invite you to, at the University of Singularity, companies have been infiltrating that only understand life by competing and accumulating profits and properties. They conceive the future in terms of speed, efficiency, market, and profit. They forget the essential, the goal of social and natural harmony, that is the deepest and most serene well-being.
* How great, Jonay. I'm here to share and to learn. Tell me, what is the University of Singularity? What do they intend?
* It was founded by Ray Kurzweil, a genius since childhood, who has been fascinated by the world of artificial intelligence while obsessing over immortality. He believes that we will be able to find an alliance with robots. He founded the University of Singularity to see how to predict the advancement of knowledge and its impact on our lives, especially when artificial intelligence surpasses our collective mental capacity. We had an interesting debate just over a year ago, and I encouraged him, and other scientists on the frontier of technological knowledge, largely concentrated in this Silicon Valley, to reflect on how the advancement of knowledge finds its way towards the common good and not the selfish interest of glory, wealth, or power of a few. They started talking about 'Global Public Goods.' It is time to try to rescue the advancement of knowledge from the clutches of the market. Your testimony from your dream factory, from Sibithanda and its relationship with the vision of the network of eco villages, will be very valuable. I'm sure, Joseph, that you can inspire many minds.
* I'll try, Jonay. I haven't published anything, and this is the first time I've left Zimbabwe.
* And look what you've done. No one before had flown halfway around the world without polluting. You're going to start to be known in this world of power. Rest here in the Eden eco village, and I'll wait for your landing the day after tomorrow in the promenade in front of the Campanile.

Jonay arrived in Berkeley and, together with the dean, prepared the reception for Joseph in his inyoni-enkulu. Students and professors from all the buildings in that square kilometer of knowledge came out, a place that concentrated more Nobel prizes than anywhere else on the planet. Joseph landed his solar monoplane smoothly and skillfully, honed after his route of over thirty thousand kilometers in the last five months.

He was invited to recount his route to Berkeley without polluting and sharing with communities in eco villages all over the world. He gave his talk at the Dream Institute, where Thanda had spoken five years earlier about his studies on equity. No one could believe that he had not used any money on his six-month journey around the world.

Upon leaving, they asked him about his website, his WhatsApp, his Facebook, his Instagram, his LinkedIn, his Twitter, his YouTube channel, his dating apps, if he stayed in an AirBnB, ordered his food through Ubereats, transported himself in Uber taxis, if he had tracked his steps and calorie expenditure that day, and how many apps he had on his iPhone. He didn't understand a thing. Joseph didn't have a mobile phone and barely spent two hours a week connected to exchange ideas with people far away. Among the eco villages, they had a collective address per community and exchanged ideas on an intracomm based on an open-access operating system, like the systems for sharing hardware and software ideas on networks worldwide, to which he contributed.

He spoke with young people in a seminar about social media and made a calculation: each young person, from the age of ten or twelve, spent almost five hours looking at the screen of their mobile phone and viewing images or chatting with their networks, which on average were about a thousand "friends" on each of the networks—the most used ones there were Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram—and about five hundred on networks for work or business, like LinkedIn, and for finding partners, mostly temporary and for sexual relationships. In addition, young people on that side of the world spent an average of three hours a day playing video games, almost all with violent content.

If two billion young people were to devote half of that time devoted to "virtual vanity" to collaborating in solidarity with knowledge and equity, it would be more than three and a half trillion hours a year capable of the most beautiful things.

In the following days, Jonay and Joseph took part in the conference at the University of Singularity. It was held at the luxurious Marriott hotel in San Francisco. More than three thousand scientists attended, sharing, with caution to guard their patents, their advancements, and their visions of the future, which were already changing as they spoke.

The opening conference was given by an English mathematician named Ian Pearson who in 1991 predicted the arrival of text messages and now predicted smart contact lenses to access information and communicate with eye movements or immerse oneself in virtual realities with holograms and sensory stimuli, including smell. During his talk, a drone arrived to bring him a box while he explained how the transport of small loads, including buying food and toiletries, would be done by personalized drones, with automatic return home, like carrier pigeons. They would have our data, and purchases would be automatically charged through gestures via smart lenses.

Ray, who was already working for Google, talked about how machines could start thinking like humans by the year 2025. He introduced the company DeepMind and its work on algorithms that were already capable of learning by themselves without needing previous experience or information, a thousand times faster than the human brain. To the amazement of all, he said: "It is possible that soon we will be able to create a computer with its own consciousness and feelings.

At that point, Jonay asked:

* Ray, don't you think that the consciousness of existence arises from knowing ourselves as temporary, that it is in our essence of organic chemistry?
* Thank you for the question, Jonay, and for encouraging the objective of this meeting towards the common good. I believe that temporality is the basis of existential anguish, not of consciousness of existence, which can exist with eternity.
* Precisely that existential anguish is diluted in love. But, in conditions of eternity, what sense does love, goodness have?
* Happiness, harmony of vibrations with those of the planet, of feeling happiness in another, which in turn reverts to us. It is a quantum transmission. Seeking our well-being interests us in the well-being of others, regardless of our temporality. Hence the natural impulse of empathy.
* Then, the sensitivity of the instability of organic molecules and their relationship with quantum vibrations that are transmitted between them implies that empathy is a quality of organic life forms, not of minerals like computers and robots.
* We are already designing quantum computers, Jonay, with an operation speed a million times higher than current binary ones; they will have empathy and therefore their own consciousness and compared to other forms of existence that emit quantum vibrations.

At that moment, Elon Musk, the president of the company bequeathed by the visionary scientist Nikola Tesla, spoke. After having developed the most advanced electric cars, although still a luxury for most, they were developing the "hyperloop," a high-speed train in tubes with very low air pressure and friction, which would allow transportation between cities at more than five hundred kilometers per hour. He said he planned to send astronauts to Mars in the year 2024. They would be accompanied by robots responsible for building equipment and extracting materials to generate oxygen, carbon, and nitrogen atmospheres where plant life and with-it human life could flourish. Joseph wanted to ask:

* Mr. Musk, my name is Joseph, I come from southern Zimbabwe. What is the need to go to Mars when a large part of our planet is uninhabited, and if we take care of it as we should, it offers us the living conditions to which we have adapted for two million years of evolution?
* Exactly for that reason, Joseph: the moment is imminent when we will have made this planet uninhabitable for our species and we will have to emigrate. That's what Stephen Hawkins predicted. We have not been able to take care of our planet. Perhaps it is in our essence to be anthropocentric, and for that reason, we will have to be nomads every few millennia to planets where we can adapt before destroying them.
* That clashes with Ray's argument about our consciousness and that which we develop in robots. Any sense of self-awareness that is intelligent and not suicidal would change our current behavior and avoid the uncertain future on another planet, besides the empathy of not harming other forms of life that will be extinguished by our damage."

At that moment Jonay intervened:

* I believe that the problem is the dilution of consciousness when we act en masse. We relinquish the exercise of our consciousness, which is individual freedom, to surrender to security and well-being in 'anempathetic' societies, superior to the human-sized relationships of empathy, about a hundred to two hundred at a time and a maximum of five hundred throughout life. Without empathy, there is no consciousness, without consciousness, there is no freedom.

Ray responded, while the audience attended attentively to such a fascinating debate between science and philosophy:

* Exactly for that reason, Jonay, we need machines that will develop a level of collaborative and quantum-empathic consciousness, which we have lost by living en masse."
* But as humans, we can have empathy and collaborative dynamics if we return to human-scale, which allows our brains to link thoughts to feelings and actions towards the common good.
* But Jonay, I don't think we'll return to those pre-agrarian communities anytime soon, perhaps never. Our epigenetics have shaped us to live en masse and with hierarchies, and with them, we sell our freedom.
* Are you envisioning a world dominated by mineral robots that are evolutionarily eternal, directing the lives of organically fleeting humans?
* I'm also trying to advance towards organic eternity with the help of the chemistry of self-repairing nanomaterials and genetic editing that cleanses our factory defects and keeps telomeres long, avoiding senescence. Perhaps advancing towards a condition of eternity and in alliance with robots with empathic consciousness, gregarious life that relinquishes individual consciousness may not be necessary.

At that moment, Joseph interjected to Ray:

* Our organic nature is towards evolution through sexual reproduction, mixing our genes and increasing biodiversity and its adaptations to the environment. The condition of eternity would be mathematically incompatible with sexual reproductive nature to provide new lives the opportunity to enjoy this adventure we call life. Don't you think the pursuit of eternity might be selfish, denying the space we have enjoyed to potential future generations?
* Reproduction is selfish, fundamentally it is to perpetuate ourselves. It's better to do it individually, don't you think?
* Well, I don't see reproduction as a selfish desire to perpetuate oneself but as an invitation, through an act of love, to other lives to this form of existence.

James Young, a young biologist from London who had a prosthetic arm with the same dexterity as the biological one and much more strength, then continued speaking. He said they already had requests for prosthetics to replace healthy limbs or add new ones. They were also developing hearing aids capable of hearing from five hundred meters away and intraocular lenses capable of distinguishing a rock on the moon.

Without the need for new prosthetics, executives from Hyundai presented exoskeleton suits that provided superhuman strength. They could run like a car, jump more than five meters, or lift weights of up to five hundred kilograms without muscle fatigue.

Several scientists from Silicon Valley then explained how virtual reality would replace books and two-dimensional visual communication. Schools could explain history by exposing students to virtual reality, for example, by being part of the conquest of America or the landing on the moon, with thousands of details to observe and intuitively analyze. They presented virtual reality glasses called Oculus Rift. By then, they were mainly focused on video games, but they were starting to be applied in school and university programs. They would also begin to replace travel for tourism or business, costly and polluting. Google Expeditions presented trips to Chichen Itza or Teotihuacan in Mexico, or to Antarctica, including the sensation of cold, or to Buckingham Palace, including a tactile sensation of greeting the queen. Another company that preferred not to be identified presented erotic virtual reality, with touch, smell, and guaranteed orgasms.

At that moment, Joseph, amazed by everything he was hearing but also bewildered, wanted to ask:

* I fail to understand how these advances improve human well-being. On the one hand, they create a parallel reality with interesting experiences, but: are they then victims of believing as real what others have created for them, right? Moreover, I walk down the streets here in the United States and see almost everyone glued to their screens and not looking around. Coming here on the BART (the train that crosses under the water of San Francisco Bay), I counted that out of three hundred and twenty people who boarded and exited the carriage where I was traveling, only forty did not look at their mobile phones, one out of eight. I tried to make eye contact with the eighteen people who traveled within three meters of me, and only two met my gaze, one of them I felt intimidated and quickly averted it: Aren't we with these technological advances abstracting people more from their 'real' reality and putting them into created realities where they are manipulated by those who create them? And moreover: by immersing themselves in increasingly sophisticated virtual reality, doesn't the capacity and ability for empathy diminish, and, returning to the debate with Ray, do we hand it over to machines?

A person named Frank, from the company HTC, defensively replied:

* Your question is contradictory, Joseph. On the one hand, you say we shouldn't manipulate others' lives with virtual reality and on the other, denying it is to prevent their free choice to combine that world with their 'real' reality, from which they have the right to 'escape,' is to manipulate their lives by restriction. In the United States, we believe in freedom, Joseph, of each person to seek happiness as they wish.
* I don't think you understand me, Frank. If the impulse for virtual reality is to escape from 'real' reality, wouldn't it be more logical to enrich 'real' reality with epic adventures, beauty, and love? And in the concept of freedom in which you seem to assume the United States has leadership, don't you think true freedom is the conscious decision-making of its cause and consequence, and that we should inform about the atrophy effect of empathy and robotization that excessive use of virtual reality can have on our psyche?

There was a murmur. Joseph's questions were starting to become uncomfortable for the presenters and for most of the participants, who applauded enthusiastically for each new presentation of the "world of the future."

Unperturbed by Joseph's concern, the company Magic Leap had developed almost imperceptible thimbles, which projected images, videos, graphics, and interactive holograms with the slight movement of the fingers or connected to smart glasses or contact lenses.

Presentations continued with executives from Toyota presenting "human support robots." They explained that in modern society, more and more people lived alone and needed special care. As life expectancy increased, more people lived alone and at an advanced age, with insufficient personal abilities for self-care. Advances in artificial intelligence and robotics had allowed the creation of intelligent personal assistants. At that moment, ten robots paraded through the room, offering coffee kindly.

Joseph and Jonay commented that there were ideas and knowledge, but a lack of direction: faced with the loneliness of older people, almost unthinkable in Africa, the solution was not to create robots but to avoid that loneliness and not to replace it, in vain, with machines.

Then a certain Dr. Pearson spoke, explaining that by 2050 nanotechnology would allow connecting brains to computers and "living in a simulated world" through the concept of "neural embedding." It consisted of a small sensor injected into the brain of such nano-dimensions that it would integrate into the cells. From the sensor, an interface would be created connecting the brain to the computer so that our experiences would be transferred to a hard drive of the computer. Conversely, the numerical and operational capacity of the computer could be used by the brain.

Later, architects spoke about the new smart homes, built by 3D printers, that would respond to the voice or gaze of their inhabitants by adjusting temperature, light, and self-repairing. These homes would gradually become part of large skyscrapers with floors dedicated to gyms, residential spaces, work offices, and supermarkets with automatic distribution of food and cleaning items or any other necessity. Engineers also spoke about giant 3D printers capable of building bridges, roads, ships, cars, and planes, operated by assembly robots, and distributed by driverless trucks.

Other electrical engineers asserted that all the described advancements and ways of life would be powered by clean energy by 2050, mainly based on seas of solar panels in desert areas, whose energy would be stored in green hydrogen and distributed through submarine cables worldwide.

It was then that Ray asked Jonay to speak about "knowledge and the common good." Jonay addressed the more than three thousand participants in the room:

* About ten thousand years ago, we gradually stopped being nomads. We started to cultivate instead of gathering, to raise livestock instead of hunting, and to store grain instead of migrating. Moreover, in built communities, we defended ourselves better from our predators. This increased our well-being and security. Settlements became numerous in people, far beyond the number we could know through empathy, and thus understand, appreciate, and truly care for. We limited our empathetic instinct to the closest circle and organized relationships with the rest through abstract entities of common beliefs, myths, and religions, and imaginary concepts of land ownership, crops, and livestock. With this, a form of exchange between these supposed 'properties' called 'money' emerged. We also created mental bonds of ownership between couples and children; and, as settlements grew and competed, abstract boundaries between cities, countries, and empires emerged, called borders. As the need and even more so the ambition to have money and properties, and with them security and power, integrated, weapons were created and then armies. Those who created religious myths-imposed life rules on others with the reward of eternity and the threat of hell. Those who created myths of countries, empires, borders, and their rulers, imposed laws and tributes on others with the reward of security and the threat of jail or exile. Those who created the concept and value of money-imposed submission to it to satisfy any need, with the reward of unnecessary consumption and the punishment of misery. All these hierarchies became integrated into humanity in such a way that some think, like Ray, that they are in our epigenetics. Accepting, often without seeing any alternative, faith in the dominant religion, the laws and nationality of the place of birth, and the desire to compete for consumption and properties, in front of others, demanded, demand, a partial abdication of our consciousness: we 'subcontract' it in existential consciousness and personal ethics to religious or scientists, in social consciousness and collective ethics to politicians, and in the consciousness of surviving and well-being to competition and the market. I think that the degree of surrender of consciousness to hierarchical powers has increased as our communities, physical and now also virtual, have become more extensive; and as technology oriented towards the market has progressed: towards buying and selling, that is, almost all of it. Why do I say this: because the increasingly larger size nullifies empathetic relationships, and the diversification and sophistication of technology and globalized market make it impossible for us to know what we consume. Without empathy or knowledge, our consciousness atrophies. We act as parts of a system that thinks, feels, and provides for us. And what are we without consciousness? Without individual freedom, based on informed decision-making in its cause and consequence, and without empathy to guide that freedom towards the collective good? Perhaps we have gained well-being with it, yes. Life expectancy has grown parallel to technological advances. And perhaps we have gained collective knowledge with it, sure. As we have heard these days, we know about micro matter and we are beginning to order it to our convenience and taste with nanotechnology; and we are venturing into other planets towards the universe. But I wonder: By abdicating consciousness and freedom, can we be fully happy? What is happiness? There is increasing evidence that the deepest happiness does not come from power in the hierarchy, from the accumulation of properties or from religious supremacy over others and other forms of life. The deepest happiness, rather, the serene state of gratitude towards life, comes from helping others, from feeling in them, with empathy, their well-being. It can almost be said that, with a quantum basis, the energetic frequency of happiness is transmitted and fed back. Perhaps in this lies the explanation of love, or rather its magic. In almost all your fascinating inventions, I see that they distance us from love, from caring for others, and from caring for nature. I fear that artificial intelligence will usurp the remains we have of consciousness, virtual communication will deplete our low reserves of empathy, and the mechanization of our nutrition, our housing, and even our movements will distance us from interaction with nature through the organic, biochemical reality that we share with it. Truly, friends, I believe that this wonderful knowledge so oriented distances us from our human nature. And, furthermore, all of this is subject to the market. Registering for these sessions cost five thousand dollars. Thank you, Ray, for inviting Joseph and me. We couldn't have attended. And it pains us to be here when others cannot. Privileges weigh on us and embarrass us in our philosophy of eco-villages. Almost all the inventors who have spoken work for companies that want to expand more and more and seek shareholders to give them dividends from profits. It is curious that they have co-opted the word 'equity' in English for this idea, with a totally opposite meaning to the Latin 'just.' They are listed on the stock exchange where their values are speculated by financial powers, and they compete to sell their inventions to earn more and more money. Of course, each invention is shielded by 'patent protection' to enjoy a monopoly on its benefits in the market for twenty years. The endless rat-race. How many of you take drugs to go faster and pills to sleep, or antidepressants? Almost one in every two Americans consumes one of the three, or combinations of them. They do it to pay the mortgage on their house, the insurance for their health, and the education of their children, all part of speculative businesses; and their taxes for the government to protect the properties and privileges of those who have the most and sow the world with military bases and nuclear arsenals to crush those who challenge their hegemony. I fear that inventions for material well-being, if they are not for the good of all, will turn against us. That is why we, from the network of eco-villages, have been preparing a draft of a 'Treaty on Global Public Goods' to support scientists, facilitate collaboration, and ensure that advances vital to humanity reach everyone, and not just the hoarding privilege of a few. I hope you support us in this endeavor.
* But to relate these ideas to personal experience, I want to introduce you to my good friend and fellow countryman from a remote mission in Zimbabwe, from where he arrived with the airplane he invented and built himself.

There were no applause like in the presentations with 3D videos and holograms, with surround-sound music for each invention presented that week. There were many murmurs. Jonay wished he could see, like Aimsa, the layers and auras in their colors floating over the environment.

Feeling somewhat intimidated by such a massive audience with a skeptical or outright rejecting attitude towards Jonay's words, Joseph took the floor:

* Brothers and sisters. We don't know each other yet, but I feel you as such. My name is Joseph Beloki. I was born thirty-five years ago in the dry sands of the Kalahari in Zimbabwe, Matabeleland. Global warming was cracking the lands where I grew up. Like many thousands of young people, my father went to work in the mines of South Africa, and like so many others, he infected my mother with AIDS. Thus, like so many thousands, my father died, and soon after, my mother's life faded away. The medications, which even then saved the lives of AIDS patients, were very expensive because their traders preferred to increase their already enormous profits rather than allow millions of people like my mother to live and see their children, like me, grow up. Almost a million people died in my country because they couldn't afford those high prices, leaving more than five million orphans. I was still very young, but I remember well how a white man, who came from far away, took care of my mother and my poor grandparents with immense tenderness. Child traffickers were about to deceive my grandparents to take me to South Africa when that white man, soon to be known by all as 'sindisabantu' - the one who saves people - prevented it. A few years later, his brother, Haka, the bravest person I've ever known, exposed child trafficking and organ networks and rescued many of our brothers and sisters from the darkest shadows. I grew up in the Ukuzwana mission, which fought against all sources of pain that afflicted our people: war, government abuses, hunger, fear-based religions, commerce poisons like those of Monsanto, slavery and death networks, and the plague of AIDS. They faced prejudices and hierarchies, political, religious, and economic; they began to promote safe and honest relationships, and they managed to bring AIDS treatment to my country and then to Africa, fighting against patents. The doctor who has just spoken, who gave his soul to join us, collaborated in this. In addition to his healing soul, he brought us an alliance with his parents, pioneers on an Atlantic Island where the dream of utopia grew, along with the inspiration for the network of spiritual eco-villages, to which today more than fifteen million people belong in more than forty thousand villages worldwide. He was joined by a woman who came to study in this place where I have now arrived, Aimsa Kamble, who leads the movement that proposes a new way of living among us and with nature, from which we have turned away, hypnotized by oil and consumption. We return to this place from which so much wonderful knowledge springs, but also so much harm, like patents, like glyphosate, like the weapons that set my continent on fire, like the pollution that suffocates the skies and cracks our lands.
* I devoted myself from childhood to inventing gadgets that could do good for people. I started with Jonay designing a machine that helped mothers prevent the transmission of AIDS to their children, even though they were afraid to know their status and in the absence of treatment to save their lives, captive to the greed of those who were obscenely enriching themselves with patents. We continued inventing electric motors, wind turbines, solar panels with the sand from our deserts, ways to transport, dry vegetables and fruits, grind grains and tubers, alleviate the work of looms, search for water, drill wells, and draw water, planters, and harvesters without harming the land, communication systems, hearing aids for the deaf or prosthetics for amputees. And so, we came to have a 3D printer and a computer like the ones you have developed in this valley of knowledge, and with them, we recycled plastics, made parts, and assembled more 3D printers for the network of inventor eco-villages, of which we are now more than a thousand in the world: we share ideas, designs, and experiences. There is no competition or accumulation, only collaboration and sharing. We do not publish in prestigious journals or have 'PhDs.' We do not celebrate events in luxurious hotels like this one or register ownership of 'patents' because the more people can use what we invent, the happier we are.
* I had never left Zimbabwe. In six months, I have crossed twenty countries from the sky to get to this meeting. I have met eco-villages in all of them that live sharing and in natural harmony, without myths, hierarchies, or properties. In deep love and gratitude to be part of a cycle of a magical life. I have come to this valley of knowledge, and I confess to you that there is a shadow in my soul that saddens me: almost everyone is looking at their mobile phones more than at the people in front of them. Right now, as I speak to you, almost everyone is more attentive to what those screens are telling them. They are true devices for the abduction of consciousness from what is close, from what is real. They have thousands of contacts, tens of thousands of archived videos and music, and access to millions of pieces of information about whatever they want to investigate. But despite so much virtual information, I have hardly seen any smiles or glances with a gleam that meet my desire for empathy. Everyone rushes, and everyone seeks to work more, to have more money, to buy more, and in that race, I sadly have to say, they miss many opportunities to observe in fascination the beauty of this life, the real life. The life of a wildflower, of smelling the freshness of the morning dew, of greeting a neighbor you pass by and offering them a hug, of cultivating a garden with care and harvesting at least part of your sustenance from it, of sitting down to tell stories and memories without transcendence or power or knowledge, but of feeling. And with all that, to think, with gratitude for our existence, ephemeral, yes, but with the noble purpose of doing good for others and leaving a beautiful space for those who come after.
* I have heard glimpses of an amazing future: of people with connection capsules inside their brain cells and with lenses from which, with eye movements, they can access all information in all its dimensions, and receive the capacity of quantum computers that, in a collaborative network, will have unimaginable capabilities for calculating increasingly large volumes of data, and decision algorithms, of their own and collective evolution, and even of a sense of collaborative and perhaps survival consciousness. I fear that this system of control and 'order' will dominate our lives, schedules, actions, thoughts, decisions, relationships, and perhaps even aspirations. Connected to 3D printers, they will manufacture any gadget for our need or desire with cloned materials; in giant dimensions, they will build houses, cars, planes, bridges, and roads that will connect cities of tall skyscrapers where they will spend almost their entire organized life working from their screens, provisions of cloned food and toxic cleaning from their screens, leisure from their screens, and even relationships from their screens, already incorporated into their smart lenses. From the tip of their finger, they will be able to project images, videos, and holograms, and I fear that they will even try, I believe in vain, to replace love relationships with that false reality. What the automatic systems do not provide in their buildings, their personalized drones will bring to them. They will receive care from assistant robots that will cook and clean for them. They will compensate for the lack of movement and physical work with personalized gymnastics, and the loss of strength, sight, and hearing with exoskeletons, lenses, and hearing aids with capacities a hundred times superior to biological ones. And when despite the multisensory holograms, they have the 'primitive desire' to be physically close to other people, they will do so by automated transport systems and hyperloops between cities. They will try to prolong life with nanorobots repairing the natural wear and tear of the body, genetic engineering supplanting natural selection and mitosis, and robotic parts replacing obsolete parts of our bodies.
* And I wonder, brothers, what will remain of our essence of loving, feeling, and heroically surrendering when our soul touches, for a noble cause and for a beloved being?
* Would it not be better to accept our ephemeral nature, to grow, live, and die with gratitude, to feel and enjoy the beauty of the natural and the close? And with that, have the courage to live without borders, without possessions, and without myths? We can do it together without turning our backs on the knowledge that protects us from diseases and other threats to our lives, and that helps us communicate and collaborate on ideas for the common good. That common good, as Jonay said, must reach everyone, especially those who need it most. Like my mother Awande, who might be here with me today if the ambition of patents to hijack healing knowledge for the obscene, unnecessary, and I'm sorry to say, criminal enrichment of a few had not intervened.
* You are rushing very fast towards the future, you are possibly the fastest. But be careful: speed is contrary to the peace of your souls if the direction is wrong.

I want to thank you for all the beautiful knowledge that comes from this valley, the communication and computing systems, and the research from quarks to the limits of the cosmos, and how the future is being drawn with fusion energy and quantum transmission. I only ask you to consider that the greatest happiness comes from sharing, and the darkest hole awaits those who compete and accumulate.

# Bioethics and Zapatism. Chiapas, July 2017

Thanda had been living alone in the house in Lomas de Chapultepec for six months. He often sang the song "Empty Chairs" by Don McLean, which echoed his loneliness. Nayra had left behind much of her clothes, books, and memories. It was like being-with-her-without-being-with-her.

He continued swimming every morning at six and chatting with his "buddies" from the Nautical Club, where he felt the heartbeat of deep Mexico. As in the last four years, he then went to work in his nice office at the European Union Delegation, with his faithful assistant Inge, his work team, and Andrew, who was already preparing for retirement and was careful not to bother anyone in Brussels. Thanda's wild proposals like the Schengen space with Central America were dismissed.

Every month he sent an analysis of the socio-economic situation in Mexico and cooperation opportunities, but no one reacted. Just as no one ever reacted to his book and articles from Berkeley. Sometimes he reread chapters of Don Quixote and remembered an event he often discussed with his father: they were returning from one of their adventures and Sancho's wife told him they would make him governor of an island, she neither believed him nor understood him, dismissing his dreams, and Sancho replied, "honey is not meant for the mouth of the ass." Faced with the silences and disdain of the hierarchy, Thanda often commented with his father, with whom he had such harmony and so many codes between them: "it hasn't."

He also found no echo in the Mexican government with equity studies. He obtained data by state and municipality and demonstrated a serious inequity and an excess of mortality due to injustice, of more than three hundred thousand deaths, almost a thousand per day. He proposed a fair system of fiscal equity that would put an end to the thousands of exemptions of the "one per thousand" that amassed fortunes and power shamelessly. The richest in Mexico were erecting themselves as saviors of the people. Through his health activities, Thanda analyzed the philanthropy of billionaire Slim, the Mexican Gates, who made his fortune with monopolies first in tobacco and then in communications. In a meeting with the foundation of Mexico's richest man, who, like Gates, was welcomed with open arms to address all the health ministers at the world health assembly, he exposed the relationship between the increasing deaths from tobacco and the billions in profits, only to give a minimal part to health projects isolated by the region, and to pretend to be the leader of the right to health.

Thanda could not bear the hypocrisy of philanthro-capitalism and how governments and international organizations, including the European Union, bowed down to them. He also demonstrated through his studies of equity unjust inequalities in Mexico between the business-rich North and the crop and mining-poor South. He proposed, again without success, territorial equity systems like those that, at least in theory and in the distribution of "territorial cohesion funds," existed in the European Union.

He gave classes on these theories and global and Mexican analyses at the universities of UNAM, Oaxaca, Veracruz, Chiapas, and San Luis Potosí, as well as at research centers, including the National Center for Neuropsychiatry, where he analyzed the relationship between the recently described "hoarding syndrome" and the dynamics of capitalist societies. When speaking openly in these conferences, he was reprimanded by Brussels for a supposed "conflict of interest with his position as a representative of the European Union," to which he explained that it was his academic activity outside of working hours, disconnected from any contractual decision and based on human rights charters, of which the European Union was a signatory.

After his efforts during the day on social justice programs in Mexico, he returned home to the echo of loneliness. Except for some gatherings with his brave uncles Margarita and Rodolfo, he spent the afternoons analyzing and projecting global equity. They had just published demographic data (population, births, and deaths by age group and sex) from all countries in the world, and he could update the equity book published by the government of Costa Rica. He expanded the criteria for health, economic, and ecological analysis, introduced subnational studies in the largest countries, and proposed models of fiscal and territorial collection passed in the necessary redistribution for a just world. He spent hours with data tables in Excel, handling hundreds of thousands of data to which he applied formulas and algorithms. He connected with interactive graphs with Statplanet maps to turn them into videos of the evolution of injustice. It was midnight every day after more than six hours analyzing data and writing on large graphic boards and hypotheses, so excited by the findings, and at the same time alarmed by the situation of global injustice, that he forgot to eat. At the same time, he played, in a small window on the computer, videos of interviews with Noam Chomsky about the perverse world geopolitics.

Injustice continued to advance in the world, and in its wake, human lives and nature were destroyed. Aimsa's friends, who had revealed corruption and perversion to the world through thousands of documents and emails from the White House and the Pentagon, were in hiding. Julian was in the Ecuadorian embassy in London and Edward in a secret location in Russia. Thanda's ally in Party X, Hervé, who uncovered dirty bank accounts in Switzerland, also had to live in hiding in Spain. The truth was being persecuted, while the perversion of power dominated the press, the media, and continued to dominate the lives of most of the inhabitants of the planet of water, which an arrogant species called "Earth" and deforested, suffocated, and filled with plastics and toxins in a system of myths and hierarchies that drowned the lives of most human beings, in their depth of immense beauty and greatness each one of them.

By then, a friend of Thanda learned of a leak from another bank employee in the tax haven of the Americas, Panama. Under the secret name of John Doe, he wrote to the German newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung proposing that they make public the thousands of tax evasion crimes revealed in 2.6 terabytes of information. Four hundred journalists from around the world organized over ten million files of emails, certificates, bank information from account statements, copies of passports, and identity documents of those involved. They linked them to the records of over two hundred thousand companies with which the law firm Mossack Fonseca had done business, dedicated to the foundation and management of offshore companies mainly in British tax havens in the Cayman Islands, Panama, Bahamas, and Seychelles. John Doe, from his hiding place, said that "the next revolution will be digitized”.

Thanda combined his equity studies with investigating on the website https://offshoreleaks.icij.org/ the loose ends left by Haka among the connections of child trafficking, prostitution, organ trafficking, diamond trafficking, arms trafficking, and hidden money in Switzerland. There were nearly a million "offshore companies" linked to names and financial operations on the website. The web of global powers was suffocating humanity in plots of destructive natural resource extraction, abusive labor practices, commercialization of toxic products for health, drug trafficking, arms trafficking, and even enriched uranium, evasion of fortunes into secret offshore society accounts, and purchasing islands, mansions, yachts, private planes, and even weapon hangars and armies of robots and drones in the name of these phantom societies. One of the names they found was mentioned in Haka's recent notes. It was John Bredenkamp, whose links with "blood diamonds" extraction and arms supplies to guerrillas Haka had exposed. They could see on the web the transactions of Bredenkamp's companies for the purchase of weapons for the Zimbabwean army in support of Kabila in exchange for concessions to exploit coltan mines in dispute with Uganda and Rwanda. Those mines produced materials for mobile phones, which were now more numerous than people on the planet, enslaving humanity's consciousness controlled by the great manipulative powers interrelated in another network studied by Aimsa. They also found that his business network Casalee, now under a phantom company screen, was the main trader of tobacco leaves for the world's killer companies, causing over seven million deaths per year. In Zimbabwe and in almost all tobacco-producing countries, those tempted by the poisons of Monsanto associated with their transgenics had succumbed. Monsanto was also linked to the Panama Papers.

Thanda and Nayra, along with Aimsa and Jonay, studied how the connections between almost all of the top ten natural resource extraction companies, oil or mining, the top ten agribusiness companies dominating eighty percent of processed food, and eighty percent of human food; dominant arms trading companies, alcohol and tobacco companies, fashion, diamonds, and perfume companies, major media and manipulation companies, major hotel chains, and the seven big Pharma companies dominating the trade in life-patented drugs, were all linked to that web of phantom companies revealed in the Panama Papers. Like black holes, they sucked up much of the money, that perverse human myth, into a few hidden hands. Meanwhile, more and more billions sank far from the "threshold of dignity" that Thanda estimated with his hundreds of thousands of data and algorithms.

After Thanda's formal appointment in Cuba, he was called to the annual meeting of cooperation chiefs in Brussels. He felt guilty about the carbon footprint from so many international trips and the contradiction of those meetings where a coal-free future was advocated while flights were filled with officials and experts discussing it. Thanda exposed this contradiction and that of meetings in luxury hotels to talk about poverty. No one reacted, although the silence was deafening. What was even more remote to question and even less to change were the power structures and the capitalist machine of production and consumption far removed from simple lives and in harmony with nature, its increasingly clear horizon.

At the annual cooperation meetings, about a hundred colleagues who attended programs in around one hundred and twenty countries of the world gathered, in addition to other colleagues from contract and finance areas, and about fifty EU ambassadors in those countries. Almost three thousand officials from diplomatic and cooperation services joined in to fill the huge conference room at "Tour-n-Taxi," more dedicated during the year to big concerts. Commissioners and directors-general spoke, all animated by media professionals and even comic artists, music, and almost encoded applause. Thanda felt strange, because of the guilt, because he felt privileged, because of the great spectacle of hierarchy arrogance and submission of thousands of people sitting well aligned, further down and in the dark, very revealing of how that organization worked, and perhaps all the great organizations in which, as in big cities, empathy had been lost.

After the grandiose presentations of the chiefs, in which the cooperation link with the "migration crisis" threatening the sacred European shores of privilege was emphasized, Thanda dared to raise his hand and ask a question, with cameras pointing at him and projecting his image of a rebel-without-a-tie:

* Thank you for your presentations. Excuse me if I dare say that I believe we lack humility. We come from a long history where our actions in other countries have not always been fair. We have polluted the skies for two centuries and it is those countries we call "developing" that suffer the most from the effects of climate change. Our production and consumption models are not sustainable or replicable globally as they deplete other planetary boundaries. In addition, our cooperation is barely 0.5% of our wealth and at least half of it stays in the "cooperation industry" of European company consultants, hotels, and travels. While we accuse almost all other countries of not respecting human rights, our "fortress-Europe" has a degree of responsibility in the thousands of people drowned on the shores of southern Europe. We cannot, therefore, present ourselves as immaculate leaders of sustainable welfare models defending solidarity or universal rights.

He thought to himself, in his long lonely walks in the Foret de Soignes:

* When I used to ask questions like these in large forums, I felt a nervousness that made my hands tremble and the microphone I held. I didn't have the confidence of Aimsa, nor the serenity of Patxi, nor even Jonay's ability to synthesize, but I did try to draw from all of them, with whom I felt so identified, to ignite the passion for the ideas they believed in.

A few applauded, but I noticed a certain murmur in the room at my "insolence." Somehow, Trump's slogan that led him to the White House, "America First," and its almost messianic, vehement belief in American supremacy had permeated Europe, and the shows with British hosts and praise for the "moral leadership of Europe" were becoming more common.

Thanda attended endless meetings throughout the week with dozens of PowerPoint presentations, regulations, procedures, and cryptic cooperation language that he never quite mastered, especially when the Francophone clan imposed their language. In between meetings, he was able to reconnect with dear colleagues from the health group, who continued to advocate for the global health policy that he led six years ago.

He also had heartfelt meetings with colleagues working in every corner of the world. Thanda noticed that the more he could delve into feelings, with personal dialogues and without noise around, the more empathy he found around the ideas of a simpler life in a fairer world, while respecting nature more. Perhaps those three impulses were present in all souls and only flowed through channels of empathy that required the care and intensity of communication between souls, not that of thousands of people, alienated by hierarchies and slogans, logos and codes, noise, haste, and fear of being oneself.

At night, he walked through Cinquantenaire Park, remembering the more than fifty thousand kilometers he cycled over a decade through the wonderful beech forest of Foret de Soignes, the thousands of chestnut trees on Tervuren Avenue, and the entrance to the neighborhood of hundreds of Commission buildings, under the majestic arches of the "Cinquante-naire," celebrated by the son of the great genocidal king Leopold.

Despite the profound contradictions of politics, and even European culture and values, stemming from its history, Thanda found many corners and people of deep feelings and courage. He reunited with Javier and listened fascinated to his fight for animal rights. He had encouraged "animalist" parties in all European countries, and they managed to enter the European Parliament. he also enjoyed meeting Johan and his family, with deep analysis and complicity with natural life. Or Lidia, a lovely Granadan focused on her Buddhist practice that protected her from the European rat race. There were Jan and his loyal friendship and commitment to health policies, Giorgio and his passion for soul encounters in culture, Georges and his passion for anthroposophy, Jean Pierre and his fight for public health, and so many others who, within the great monster of hierarchies and procedures, maintained their bright gaze, their naked heart, and their brave ideas.

After the long days full of words (“twisted by knoves to make a trap for fools”), Thanda arrived at Jesus' house, an endearing friend with whom I had a deep connection. Jesus' grandfather had been a "desk mate" of Thanda's father at Lourdes school in Valladolid. Their friendship transcended families. Upon their return from their time as migrants in Holland, Jesus' mother helped Thanda with polynomials, and then Thanda helped Jesus during his Erasmus scholarship and internship at the European Union, while Jesus taught piano to his daughters. How beautiful it was when love flowed and transmitted like constant braids through time, thought Thanda. They had fascinating discussions about the world and how to fight from within those institutions of power and hierarchy that "alienated by aligning."

On his last trip from Brussels to Mexico, he stopped in Madrid to be with his parents. He found his beloved father weaker. Although this time he did recognize him, his thinking was still slow, he didn't have the physical or mental strength to even make a simple drawing or make a WhatsApp call. But the tenderness in his gaze, the warmth of his embrace, the attention to the adventures he recounted, and the simple act of being silent by the fireplace in the house in Robledo and knowing they were united forever, brought Thanda the deepest joy and, in a way, gave him a reason to live. A single approving smile from his father for his efforts toward a fairer world justified all the disappointments, frustrations, and above all, the desert of loneliness.

He continued his journey back to Mexico on an Iberia flight, piloted by his friend Juan, who had already read Courage and Tenderness and felt much emotion remembering those stories, just as Thanda did about his anonymous gesture in Buenos Aires.

Back in Mexico, he worked passionately for the last three months. He wrapped up with contracts, dialogues, and agreements the beautiful social cohesion program in which more than three hundred people, including officials and representatives of civil society, were already participating. With them, he shared ideas and proposals for justice at various events in Mexico City, San Luis Potosí, Oaxaca, and Chiapas. As final messages, he presented, with the data from his latest analysis, the idea of equity through fiscal and territorial justice, the social contract based on frank dialogue and public and transparent information, and the path back to harmony with nature. He made progress on the book on the "ethics of equity" based on four hundred graphs and interactive maps, twenty videos, and eight hundred pages in which he tried to demonstrate the ethics of equity and the method of its metric, relentless in the face of political, economic, and ecological injustice that still prevailed worldwide.

At the end of his four and a half years in Mexico, he received an invitation to present his equity analysis at the University of Chiapas. He spent a few days in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, where four years earlier he had been monitored and persecuted by possibly narcotic networks in collusion with power when collaborating with human rights organizations and indigenous peoples like the organization of Fray Bartolomé de las Casas led by his good friend Raúl, exiled in the northernmost part of the country. He had heartfelt meetings with networks of peasants, representatives of indigenous Zapatism, and with Jorge, a sociologist and great connoisseur and ally of Zapatismo who studied the increasing suicides of indigenous youth, perhaps due to the profound disconnection of the runaway train of alienated Humanity, as described by Marlo Morgan in the voices of the desert.

Jorge had organized Thanda's "masterful" lecture at the anniversary of the Autonomous University of Chiapas. They arrived at their headquarters in Tuxtla, and he entered the large conference room where, to his surprise, journalists and television cameras were waiting. He gave his lecture with passion, also showing studies of inequality in Mexico and Chiapas that he prepared for the event. After nearly three hours of lecturing on the grave injustices in the world and in Mexico to the faculty and many students, there were very complimentary questions and comments, some of them emotional. As he was about to leave, the university rector handed him the appointment, "based on his studies, his constant effort from cooperation, and his defense of the sacred alliance between man and nature," as Honorary Professor of Bioethics. Although he shunned titles and their echo in hierarchies, he accepted this recognition with emotion and said the following words:

* Life brought me to this magical Mexico. Land of sometimes cruel stories of empires over others. Witness to colonization and evangelization from Spain over indigenous knowledge and beliefs. Where the cruelty of a few who hoard power and the submission or contained rage of many who barely make ends meet pulse with impunity. It pains me to see its fascinating nature tainted in many areas by toxins from mines, factories, and oil wells. I fear to feel its wonderful culinary culture threatened by industrial beverages and junk food. I am forever contaminated by its Zapotec and Maya soul, spiritual and magical. And I tell you with concern how I see it splattered with the alienation by the consumption and power of the neighbor to the North. As Octavio Paz says, "so close to him, so far from God." From that God of many faces and forms that concentrates on the fervor for Guadalupe. From that commitment to the religion of love that the hierarchies of Church and power co-opt for their privileges. From the greatest kindness the world knows and that, tormented, coexists with the most terrible violence. Its thousands of dead and missing scream in my soul, so many mothers and fathers cry for them without possible comfort. And even from so much pain, its fascinating craftsmanship, literature, and cinema, of so many colors, smells, and flavors that overflow the senses, and so many feelings expressed by songs and luminous looks, overflow the heart. It is not possible to feel Mexico and not be overwhelmed by so much beauty, so much passion, so many contradictions, so many souls longing for peace and harmony. It is not possible to cooperate with Mexico and not ally with those who cry out for justice, with unmasking the intrigues of power, the arrogance of hierarchy, the "gossip" of the wordplay and buddyism of those who hoard so much, the evasion of wealth to Panama that takes away the rights of half of Mexicans. Simply their taco, their poncho, their little house, their milpa, and their peace of home with an education worthy of values, health equal for all, and justice that pursues the "tricks", condemns the abuser, and defends those who want to live in peace and harmony. Here in Chiapas, you know well about that. Never stop defending the ethics of social equity and the bioethics of our alliance with nature, our Mother Earth, to whom turning our backs and surrendering ourselves to destructive production and alienating consumption, we will be lost orphans in a senseless life. I have met thousands of people and organizations in this country, traveling from north to south and from the Caribbean to the Pacific, from its big cities to small towns, I fell in love with a Mexican, met my Mexican family, and I will forever carry Mexico and its ineffable magic in my heart.

Farewells continued from colleagues in the delegation, in the government of Mexico, NGOs, universities, his dear aunt and uncle Margarita and Rodolfo, and his soul friend José Manuel. Nayra returned to say goodbye together in a meditation corner of Chapultepec Park. Thanda continued his wandering path, now heading to Cuba, where he would keep up his fight for his ideas with his heart bare, his soul brave, and his mind seeing where and when to contribute ideas, alliances, and efforts towards a fairer world.

# The rage of the winds. Cuba, Septiember 2017

Thanda arrived in Havana from Mexico City on the last day of August 2017. The United States was divided by the arrogant Trump, who had no qualms about insulting anyone who stood in the way of the wildest capitalism. Europe was breaking apart with the United Kingdom negotiating its divorce from Europe under Article 50. In Zimbabwe, Mugabe was leaving power after thirty-seven years during which he evolved from a liberating hero to a tyrannical dictator. The almighty Xi Jinping of China was becoming the champion of globalized capitalism, who would have thought! In Asia, the Rohingya were being persecuted and massacred by Buddhists in Myanmar. Not even Buddhism was spared from the fanatics of "monopolies of truth". The economy was "growing" again and proudly overcoming the speculative crisis of banks that were rescued with the taxes of the citizens they deceived. And year after year, thermometers were registering the highest temperatures of the last two centuries recorded, perhaps of the last ten thousand years.

He arrived at night with a suitcase, a backpack, and his guitar, at José Martí Airport in Havana. He was warmly awaited by Marta, a Basque Caribbean journalist out of love, and Virginie, a French globetrotting ecologist. They took him to a house he would occupy in the Cubanacán neighborhood. It was a lovely one-story house with a well-kept garden, a living room, two bedrooms, a small kitchen, and another room in a loft. According to Cuban protocol, distrustful of all foreigners due to their history of being victims of espionage, attacks, and defamation, especially by Americans, each diplomatic foreigner's house was assigned a custody guard. Coming from Mexico without such security zeal and with a homicide rate a thousand times higher, Thanda saw the presence of such "custody" as unnecessary, besides feeling guilty for such privilege and the fact that "someone-worked-for-someone-else" instead of "for the common good". Not only was his life in Cuba structured according to his diplomatic role, but also in the house, there was an old gardener whom everyone called Papito, and a person who helped with cleaning, Yeny.

Thanda's firm desire was to live, according to his social ideas and the vision of free energy detached from materialism, with few things, sharing what he had and the common good. Like in Mexico, he arrived at a privileged house, with people dedicated to his security and well-being, and with a pending move where he would also bring a Nissan pick-up, quite an exclusive privilege in Cuba to have a car, although his intention was to help with transportation and loads for people. With these thoughts, he went to bed listening to crickets and frogs, the sea breeze combing the magnificent royal palm in the garden and feeling on his skin the warm humidity of the tropics that announced a thousand adventures on such a mythical island, if he opened his brave heart.

On his first dawn, he decided to exchange the swimming pool of the Mexican nautical club, of which "Groucho Marx would never have been a member", for the sea of the Náutico neighborhood, about ten minutes from his house, crossing the famous Fifth Avenue. He found an entrance among the granite rocks against which the sea broke, already rough due to the hurricane season, and cautiously swam, feeling the currents, about three hundred meters offshore. He could glimpse to the east the line of the Malecón and the mythical figures of the Nacional Hotel, the Habana Libre, and the Capitol. To the west, he could see the Hemingway Marina and a silhouette that he thought could be the Latin American School of Medicine. He felt deeply happy to be there and promised himself to put all his soul into linking Cuba with the noble example of Eila to inspire humanity with all his might to change its cruel, destructive, and suicidal rhythm.

He spent the weekend getting to know the neighborhood better, the lovely Basque-Dominican families of Marta and Tobías, the Franco-Fijian-Cuban family of Virginie and Yander, and a Franco-Italian neighbor who ran the all-powerful construction company Buigues. In the following days, he began to share gatherings with neighbors, Tai Chi meetings in a nearby vacant lot, guitar songs, and evenings in the small caretaker's house, where he spent almost as much time as in the big house. Pedro, Suzy, and Haidée also came to see him, with whom he celebrated his arrival, and they gave him a "queen pot," present in almost every Cuban home and useful for cooking rice, beans, and tropical "viandas," which would be the basis of Thanda's diet.

After the first weekend of "baptism" in Havana, he began his first week of work at the European Union delegation in Cuba. Every morning, Marta and Tobías picked him up in their car, listening to Cuban and Latin troubadour music, along Fifth Avenue until its intersection with 22nd Street. There stood a mansion, even with battlements, an old property expropriated from some landowner who still occasionally claimed and shouted from the central promenade of the fifth or in the lawyers' offices in Miami, his right to return to his mansion. He greeted affectionately, as he did in Mexico, the guard, the receptionist, the cleaner, the colleagues from the administration on the ground floor, those from the political section, and finally his team: besides Marta and Virginie, Silvia, a lovely Cuban woman, discrete in her expression, tremendously kind, respectful, and attentive, awaited him. Thanda settled into his office, this time without the meadow of the one in Mexico or its red armchairs, but nice, simple, and with plenty of light. He organized his files into reference documents, related to each sector of cooperation (agriculture, energy, and economy), research and education, culture and civil society, investments, regional programs, briefings, and periodic reports that he intended to continue doing, even if no one read or reacted to them in Brussels. He placed a photo of his father, when they lived together in the Canary Islands, one of his mother with him as a baby in her arms, one with his daughters in Ukuzwana, another with his heart children Adam, Nour, and Unai, and one with Nayra on the surprise trip to Venice.

A few days later, Unai arrived, who had decided to study Food Sciences at the University of Havana. Thanda supported him in the paperwork for academic documents and visas, bought him a motorcycle for his transportation to school, which would come with the move, helped him with Pedro to enroll in the university, and welcomed him with his heart and home wide open. Upon arriving at Havana airport, they had to wait for almost six hours, Unai in a queue for the inspection of his suitcase, and Thanda in the torrid and crowded waiting room. The reason was that customs police had detected a "router" that Unai brought to be able to access some wifi source, a gadget that every European teenager used in their communications. Very significant of the political situation and fears in Cuba, any wireless communication, even a simple "walkie-talkie," was considered suspicious as part of espionage and treason plans against the revolution. After the router was confiscated, Unai was able to enter Cuban territory. Thanda and Unai hugged each other excitedly. Unai felt him like a father, he felt Patxi in him; and Thanda felt Unai, like in Adam and Nour, like his children. They arrived at their house in Cubanacán where Unai wanted to occupy the humble room in the loft.

The next day, they went to see the dean of the Institute of Pharmacy and Food, on a farm of about ten hectares on the outskirts of Havana, known as La Coronela, probably by reference, like almost all the places and names of squares and streets, institutions, cooperatives, and municipalities to heroes of the Cuban revolution. After passing through the rudimentary barrier with guards, Thanda noticed that this was one of the most common jobs in Cuba, a country with hardly any crime or theft, they ventured along a dirt road through wild meadows to an old building that seemed semi-abandoned. Climbing creaky wooden stairs, they reached the dean's office, who greeted them warmly. She explained the history of the institute, the curriculum, the research areas, and the conditions in which they worked. Thanda noted that they had very few resources, lacking even basic supplies such as paper and pens, much less computers or mobile phones, or wifi to connect, or transportation. The dean's salary did not reach the equivalent of fifty Euros and yet she exuded a sense of commitment, service, and great intellectual rigor.

He wanted to lay the groundwork for his work in relationships of trust and empathy. He began by calling his "Cuban counterpart," the director for relations with Europe at the Ministry of Trade and Cooperation, MINCEX, Inalvis. She sounded somewhat cold and cautious in the first call. They agreed on a meeting between their teams. Inalvis was a middle-aged woman, very pleasant, fitting into that pattern, like Silvia, which Thanda began to feel was common and everyday in Cuba: kind, affectionate, subtly feminine, with a fluid but not exaggerated smile, an attentive but not intrusive gaze, and a soft and measured voice. Despite the good treatment, Thanda could perceive that there was some reluctance in Inalvis and her team to share information. Inalvis's answers to Thanda's questions about the existence of a cooperation policy, or statistics on aid received, or the existence of dialogue tables for priority sectors were: "they exist, but at this moment we cannot share them." Over time, Thanda would understand why.

In the following days, he got to know his counterparts in the ministries of agriculture, energy, and economy. That's how he met Maruchi, a seemingly tough and combative woman, but with a great heart and respect, with whom he began to establish mutual appreciation and commitment to freeing Cuba from the yoke of food import dependency. They later introduced him to Rosell - it was common to use the last name to address many people, without implying any emotional distance - a brilliant engineer in charge of the national energy program, and dedicated body and soul to the commitment Cuba made two years earlier in Paris to reach 24% of its electricity from clean sources by 2030, and who alternated secret missions to support Venezuela, suffering cyberattacks from the United States on its electrical system. He then came to know someone who deeply impressed him: Alfredo Jam. Known by everyone as Jam, he was a man in his seventies but who looked much younger. In fact, his skin was smooth, his hair thick, his eyes slanted and alert, and his smile mischievous, like that of a teenager. His demeanor was friendly and soon affectionate, he spoke very softly, but with such sharpness of thought that everyone around him kept an almost solemn silence to listen to him. The grandson of Chinese immigrants to the eastern part of the island, Jam hardened himself as a teenager in the revolutionary fervor and studied economics, which in Cuba was equivalent to studying Marxism, and then did his doctorate in the former Soviet Union, in Russian, on centralized planning. He had been working in Cuba's communist economy ministry for over fifty years and a few years ago had been given the last National Economics Prize and with it, from Fidel's own hands, an old Lada that he cared for with devotion. He coordinated a beautiful cooperation program that encouraged the exchange of officials between Cuba and European Union countries to implement the "guidelines of the communist party" for "socioeconomic modernization." They discussed economic, trade, fiscal, statistical, and judicial policies, and programs. But Jam's most cherished project, his dream, was to reuse pig sewage in a municipality in the province of Matanzas called Martí, to propel non-polluting public transportation. Thanda developed that initial idea into other dimensions and proposed to Jam the idea of a "sovereign eco-Martí," like Eila. Thus, they forged a friendship based on sincere mutual appreciation and complicity in ideas. They visualized the dream toward another powerful light, this time for Cuba, to emerge from the darkness of destructive production and alienated consumption. Friendship did not diminish Cuban secrecy, jealous of sharing the "internal kitchen" with "interfering foreigners," and when asked:

* Tell me, Alfredo, what is the Gross Domestic Product per capita and the GINI in Cuba? Without this information, we do not know the direction or speed at which we are traveling.

And Alfredo, with his mischievous and warm smile, replied:

* Have patience with us, brother. There are reasons for everything and moments for what is opportune.

Thanda's days passed in a lovely routine. He woke up with the rooster given to him, along with three hens, by the father of one of the caretaker-friends, the good Ariel, whom he called "Paco". He composed poetry at dawn. He went with just his swimsuit to the rocky coast of the Náutico neighborhood. He swam at dawn out to sea until he could see the Capitol to the East and the Latin American School of Medicine to the west. He returned to have breakfast with Unai, who shortly afterward set off on his motorcycle journey to La Colina at the University of Havana, from whose old lecture hall he could see the beautiful Alma Mater.

Thanda chatted for a while with Papito and the on-duty caretaker and joined Marta and Tobías to travel along the beautiful Fifth Avenue to the office. He entered warmly greeting and almost, between hugs and confidences, spent about ten minutes of "endearing flow" with colleagues at work until he opened his computer and read the fifty or so emails that the early morning in Brussels had generated. He responded to what was necessary. Despite the opacity of data, he studied the local economy, sociology, and ecology. He held some meetings with his team, with visitors, and with the Cuban institutions they cooperated with. He had a heartfelt camaraderie encounter in the delegation's kitchen. The day was ending. More documents, project reports, proposals for new ones.

He returned with Marta and Tobías to Cubanacán. He arrived home, reconnecting affectionately with Unai. They recounted the day, played a game of "fut-tennis" they invented combining Unai's soccer skills and Thanda's tennis. They then went to the gate of Marta and Tobías's house to "catch waves" and receive messages on their mobile phones from family, friends, Unai from Altea, and Thanda from Nayra. As the evening fell, they prepared a simple dinner with the limited variety of foods they could get. Sometimes they watched a detective series that Unai had saved on his laptop. Thanda sang for a while with his guitar in the caretaker-friends' hut, especially when Toni, a strong and fifty-something black man and santero, got excited with the songs of Serrat, Pablo, Silvio, and Aute that Thanda sang accompanied by simple chords. Watching the stars, listening to the crickets, and giving thanks for life, he went to bed under a mosquito net, reading the received messages and sometimes a few pages of Martí, Carpentier, or Padura. Thanda felt happy with the magical gift of each day.

A week after arriving in Cuba, Rubiera, "the weatherman," announced on the television they watched in the custodians' hut that a hurricane named Irma was approaching, following the alphabetical sequence of female names. Day by day, they watched through satellite images on the news as Irma approached the "largest of the Antilles." They placed protective panels on the windows, and Thanda, Unai, and Vicente, the on-duty custodian, of tremendous kindness and courtesy, took refuge in the garage of the house. They turned off the lights to prevent fires and sat with blankets and some food, waiting for the blow of furious nature. They listened to the radio as Irma affected the northern part of eastern Cuba. It was the first category five hurricane to hit Cuban land since 1932. Thanda witnessed the great organizational capacity of the Cuban people. Practically all Cubans were members of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs), with one responsible person for each "block" (neighborhood). In addition to this, there was a true army of Civil Defense evacuating up to a million people from high-risk areas or precarious houses, relocating them mostly to family homes, friends' houses, or simply to supportive fellow citizens, and partially to schools and public buildings protected with zinc and wood panels. Emergency transport and food and water supplies were ensured. In the hardest-hit areas, the hurricane maintained circular winds of over two hundred kilometers per hour for two to three endless hours. As it approached Havana, Thanda and Unai watched through the slits of the boarded-up windows as the enormous mango trees and royal palms over twenty meters high swayed, as if they were small blades of grass being blown by a giant just centimeters away. Palm fronds, mango branches with their unripe fruits, branches from the majestic ficus trees in the garden, and some of the smaller trees were uprooted. Thanda felt as if the roar of the wind seemed to express a deep lament or protest from nature. At the same time, he felt an unconfessed fascination with such magnificent force and a strange sensation of being part of it and its contained rage.

In just a day and a half, Hurricane Irma left the island to head towards Florida. Rescue and relief brigades went out to rescue trapped individuals and families. Waves up to ten meters high violently crashed against the Malecón and flooded the streets, squares, parks, houses, and buildings several hundred meters inland. Havana woke up in darkness, with some houses collapsed, thousands of trees uprooted, overturned cars, and people timidly coming out to see the effects of the enraged nature. Thanda and Unai went to the streets of the Náutico where they still saw giant waves breaking, turning the coastal streets into rushing rivers. In the following days, the country assessed the damages: tens of thousands of hectares of banana, corn, and bean crops were destroyed, tens of thousands of homes were left roofless, without water or electricity. Across the country, electric poles and cables fell, river floods collapsed viaducts, and waves smashed promenades and houses along the coast.

The Isle of the Green Alligator endured almost one hurricane per year, and this one had been particularly virulent, but the military organization of society, the work of the Civil Defense and the Armed Forces, the Defense Councils, and all the organized and supportive people prevented any Cuban from dying.

In the following days, the country mobilized to rebuild what had been damaged, although it was estimated that full recovery would take at least a decade. On the island, battered by the US embargo and an inefficient economy due to its centralization and its first Soviet and then Venezuelan dependency, losses were estimated at over one hundred billion euros. Doctors and nurses combed the country in search of those in need of care, soldiers and volunteers removed trees, cars, and debris from the streets, and pumped water out of homes, and thousands of linemen repaired electric poles and lines. Almost all the work was voluntary or for minimal wages. Thanda was amazed to see a spirit of solidarity that was almost extinct in the rest of the world. But even more surprising was the calmness and even the sense of humor with which they faced such a harsh blow. The heavy rains and rough waves had flooded the tunnels under the Almendares River, which connected Miramar with Vedado, and under the entrance to the bay, between Habana del Este and Old Havana. Havana children and young people were eager to take cheerful dives, as if laughing at their fragile fate and giving thanks for the unexpected pool in the depths of the tunnels.

There was so much solidarity within the shores of that magical island. Even while clearing debris and without light or water, Cuba sent doctors and nurses, rescue brigades, and linemen to a dozen Caribbean islands affected, and offered its help again, in vain, to the United States, which did not cease, even during the tragedy, to attack and defame the revolutionary island.

The week after the hurricane, Thanda began to feel tired and noticed a slight fever. She didn't pay much attention and endured the week without much strength to swim in the morning or run with Unai in the afternoons. During the weekend, a rash of small red spots appeared all over her body. These were all signs of Zika, the disease spreading through tropical regions of the Americas, transmitted, like dengue, by the Aedes aegypti mosquito. He didn't miss a single day of work, as she had always prided herself on never having missed a day of work, inspired by her father's sense of honesty. Vector-borne diseases, transmitted by insects, were increasing in all regions of the world because of climate change. Thanda thought about the fragile balance between humans and nature. With the flora of hundreds of species and billions of bacteria in their intestines and on their skin. With viruses bombarding their immune system throughout life, and the most successful ones entering their genes, accelerating processes of natural selection. With viruses and parasites that combined reproductive phases in invertebrates and mammals. With billions of molecules that the human body learned from childhood to identify with its army of lymphocytes and antibodies as "friendly" or "enemy," often making mistakes and self-harming. With tens of thousands of chemicals produced by humans, which affected them while, sometimes after many decades, they were proven, almost without exception, to be toxic.

The relationship of the human body, "transitory assembly of molecules," with the ecosystem around it and of which it was a part, was disrupted by anthropocentrism and its dominant and destructive desire. Yes, they were making progress in treating these ailments and living longer, but for how long could they maintain such cruel and insensitive dominance?

Already recovered from the hurricane and Zika, and integrated into work and the neighborhood, Thanda and Unai attended a concert by Silvio Rodríguez in the humble neighborhood of La Lisa. In a small clearing between self-built houses with concrete blocks and zinc sheets, mud-covered by the hurricane and tropical storms, the indispensable invisible ones, as Silvio called them, had set up a platform with a sound and lighting system. About two hundred people had gathered to listen to the legendary singer-songwriter, a standard-bearer of revolutionary poetry and existential reflections as cryptic as they were beautiful, which Thanda had sung since adolescence. On the dozen neighboring houses, Cuban men with bare torsos, grandfathers with weather-beaten faces and tired eyes, grandmothers with curlers and homemade robes, women proudly displaying their voluptuous curves, and children running around the buildings and squares or climbing the tall laurels that had resisted Irma's fury were perched. The concert began. Silvio appeared with his guitar, his wife Niurka with her flute, and other musicians accompanying with bass, percussion, and the Cuban tres. Thanda was moved to hear the first song, "Rabo de nube" (Tail of a Cloud), so symbolic after the desolation of the hurricane.

"… let it take away the ugly, and leave us the cherub… a sweeper of sorrows, a downpour in vengeance, so that when it subsides… it may seem like… our hope…"

The audience sang emotionally the songs they knew, many of them for over forty years. Unai looked at Thanda with tenderness as she sang with emotion those anthems that accompanied the struggles for freedom against Franco's regime in Spain. Silvio's songs inspired the brave and dignified peoples of Latin America to revolt against imperialism and its worst weapon, cruel capitalism. They spoke of love without Catholic shame and without the codes of propriety that so stifled free and unfiltered love in Europe. Her favorite song came on, and she couldn't hold back her tears. She shouted, singing, moved, with strength, and in chorus surrounded by so many humble people with shining eyes, for the pain of Mother Earth:

"… the era is giving birth to a heart… it can't take it anymore, it's dying of pain… and we must hurry because the future is collapsing… in any jungle in the world. in any street…"

Those verses made her turn even more determinedly, slowly, but firmly and clearly, "back towards nature." Just like twenty years before, she felt that other verses of that beautiful anthem encouraged her to go to Africa, escaping consumption and seeking within herself the courage to give herself to others:

"… I must leave the house and the armchair… mother lives until the sun dies… and we must burn the sky if necessary… to live… for any man in the world… for any home…”

# Understanding with the heart. Havana, December 2017

Three months had passed since Thanda and Unai arrived in Havana to enter an exciting phase of their lives. Thanda waited in the depatures launge of José Martí Airport to board a flight to Madrid to reunite with her parents and spend Christmas with them. His father was very weak, and he felt such devotion to him that his skin glowed with the desire to embrace him.

He remembered how, after Hurricane Irma and overcoming the Zika virus infection, he continued to explore the magical life in Havana.

He finished editing his eight-hundred-page book with four hundred graphics and maps on the "ethics of equity," which was printed by a Franco-German university press. Thanda intended to put it online and interactive and avoid the business of traditional publishing. The representative of the Pan American Health Organization, a bold progressive economist named Christian from Chile, learned of his presence on the island and invited him to give a lecture at the Latin American School of Medicine on the ethics of equity. There, he reunited with Buhleve, who, after his mission in Sierra Leone, was happy alternating between community diagnosis classes and low-resource medical practices, recalling their shared experiences in Ukuzwana. At the Latin American School of Medicine, he met its rector, Tony, a portly "*palestino*" - as they called those from the eastern part of the island - with a gaze that struggled to convey tenderness, overcoming drooping eyelids from the fatigue of time. Tony showed him the School, which Thanda called the "dream factory." That city of azure-colored buildings facing the Caribbean, west of Havana, hosted about three thousand students from nearly a hundred countries. There, those young people from around the world lived and studied, with the sole requirement of not having had access in their home countries to study their medical vocation. Before giving his lecture, a young Colombian ex-combatant of the FARC and a young tenor from humble origins in Soweto, South Africa, sang in his honor with such beauty that Thanda could not hide his emotion.

After giving his lecture on the ethics of equity, there was a debate in which Thanda felt a deep affinity with the ideas of a country that, with all its contradictions, respected the right to health on its island and in the world as the most sacred right. He couldn't imagine a more beautiful place in spirit than the Latin American School of Medicine to speak passionately about the ethics of equity. The vice-rector in charge of training programs, a middle-aged woman with a sparkling gaze named Rosita, suggested that she become a guest professor at the school in a subject on "principles, ethics, and metrics of equity." He accepted it as the highest honor.

Afterwards, he went with Buhleve and Christian to another city of dreamers, south of Havana: the coordination center of Cuban medical cooperation. There they were received by the director of the center, a man who was approaching seventy, short in stature but brimming with enthusiasm. His name was Jorge, and he had coordinated Cuban cooperation against the Ebola epidemic in West Africa, in which Buhleve and Lisy, who had returned to Eila, participated. He showed them the facilities where about fifteen thousand doctors and nurses were prepared each year for missions lasting four years to serve, far from their families, in the remotest places where no one else, not even the professionals from those countries, were willing to go.

Shortly after, he traveled to Colombia for the regional meeting of EU cooperation chiefs in Latin America and the Caribbean. He met with colleagues working on similar tasks across the continent. He traveled alongside the European ambassador to Cuba, Alberto, a kind and generous man with vast experience in European politics, his soul in his work as director of the humanitarian agency, and his heart in his large family. Thanda felt that a shadow often abducted Alberto and avoided eye contact. In a luxury hotel and with the usual conference speakers from the World Bank, the United Nations - ECLAC - and the OECD, discussing their economic theories and the pursuit of more growth, more trade, and more urban models of consumption and supposed well-being, Thanda was invited to give a lecture on equity in the 2030 Agenda. He shared the panel with the high representative for peace in Colombia, a country that had never truly known the full meaning of that word since the Spanish colonization five centuries before. He once again questioned the hoarding beyond necessity, causing shortages for others and depleting nature for future generations.

Back in Havana, the hurricane season was waning, and Thanda returned to her routine of swimming at dawn. He began to get to know families through Pedro, Buhleve, and the neighbors in the neighborhood. He had heartfelt meetings on her porch and began to indulge in playing the guitar.

Unai got to know boys from "the scholarship," almost all his classmates at the university. They lived in a humble and dilapidated building in the town of Alamar, east of Havana. He felt a lot of tenderness seeing their enthusiasm for studying amid so many shortcomings. In the afternoons, he went with a ball to a vacant lot near the house where two dilapidated goals invited the passion he felt for football. He saw it as a powerful symbol of teamwork and overcoming. He met boys from the neighborhood there, and soon they began to come to the house and share stories and adventures.

Thanda felt noble values in them, efforts in their studies, and great affection for their families. One day, tired from a trip with the United Nations team to share workshops with agricultural cooperatives in Cienfuegos, as he entered the house, he heard young people singing to the chords of guitars, very talented. Unai introduced them to Thanda as his father, which moved him deeply, and asked him to sing them a song. Thanda thought of the most appropriate one and emulated Silvio with his monologue:

"... please don't bother... because I'll be leaving soon… /… I saw light in the windows and youth singing... and without realizing it, I was... dreaming…",

He then continued with his favorite, the song that accompanied him so much during his times of family loneliness in Ukuzwana: "La Belleza," by Aute. He felt great emotion in sharing with those young people and remembering his young years of revolutionary ideas in the Spanish transition, and seeing Unai so happy, discovering knowledge and values ​​with humble and idealistic young people, and sharing as father and son that adventure of their lives.

Shortly after, he received a call from Hubert, a filmmaker he had met through Nayra in Mexico City, who had moved to Havana to film a documentary. They met at a bustling bar in front of Parque Cristo. Hubert was a contemporary Austrian of Thanda's with clear eyes that almost constantly observed the landscape with surprise and the people with inquisitive tenderness. He dressed plainly, and his appearance was charmingly unkempt. He came from a family of hoteliers in Tyrol, during whose childhood he recounted having seen sinister characters staying at the idyllic hotel his parents had in the Tyrolean mountains. Among them, he remembered seeing former Nazi officers and American soldiers who had come from bombing civilians in the Middle East since his childhood. Hubert discovered through those characters a world he could not understand and wanted to capture in films that would explain, or perhaps question, that strange universe to which he had been mysteriously invited. He emigrated to Paris, where he studied filming. He had made so far three movies, one every five years, intensely experiencing what he filmed: the Hutu massacres in Zaire in his "Diaries of Kisangani"; the dirty business of Lake Victoria - European and Russian arms for invasive tilapia fish - in his "Darwin's Nightmare," and the neo-colonization of southern Sudan in "We Come as Friends." Hubert invited Thanda to his attic where he had established his home from which to live the documentary he would make in Havana. Because Hubert made his films by living them. For his previous film in southern Sudan, Hubert built a small ultralight on his farm in central France and, like Joseph, made small stops, including an arrest in Gaddafi's Libya, until he reached southern Sudan, where he filmed those villages that no one had filmed. He revealed through his stories how peoples from all corners were being manipulated by religious, commercial, and political missionaries eager for the wealth of Africa's largest oil reserves. There, people lived in the deepest misery and wars since Europeans drew absurd lines of African countries for their colonial interests.

Thanta and Hubert climbed a building on Cristo Street through a narrow staircase full of cats, dampness, and imperfections to the door of an attic where Hubert prepared to establish his "cockpit" for the flight that was already flying in his mind with the documentary "Epicenter." Through stories from those he met in that bustling and humble neighborhood, he sought brave souls who would defy American imperialism in cahoots with Hollywood and its caricature of a world of good Americans, bad, usually communists, and victims, poor people to rescue from the cruel clutches of evil and thus earn heaven. Anthropocentrism, disguised racism, wild capitalism, murderous imperialism, proselytizing messianism, manipulation by the "false reality" of cinema, all woven into a perverse network that hypnotized half the world with the "American Dream."

Hunert told Thanda about Menal, a beautiful and cheerful woman, small in stature and great in bravery. Hubert excitedly told Thanda how he met her at his stop at the end of "We Come as Friends" in Khartoum when she had escaped from the Eritrean army and its ten-year military service, in perpetual border war with Ethiopia. After an initial contact of tenderness, Hubert continued his way to his farm in France, and some time later Menal decided to cross the Sahel to Libya and cross the Mediterranean on the rafts from which so many people drowned every day, dreaming of a world without hunger and without wars in Europe. She spent some time as a refugee in Italy and later reunited in France with Hubert, whose heart fell for such brave beauty. The American dream had deeply influenced Menal, and she was determined to find routes to go to the United States, enter illegally, and seek asylum and refuge from the border prison. Thanda observed this mysterious paradox absorbedly. While Hubert was one of the filmmakers who most harshly described the cruelty and hypocrisy of American imperialism, his beloved surrendered to the monster. He was trying to help her get to Cuba with the hope that she would experience the freshness, joy, carefreeness, humility, and solidarity of the Cuban people, and thus, seasoned with his love, she would give up such a suicidal adventure.

Nayra came for a week, in part to collaborate with Hubert on his documentary. Thanda dedicated a song to his timid feelings about the reunion:

"... when space and time bring us together again... what will it be like?... / ... there's also some unease... will we have changed, the both of us? / you know that all my atoms... from the last time... are not here..."

The reunion was emotional and passionate. She was his long-awaited companion, perhaps for a lifetime. Thanda painfully realized that the initial plan for her to join him in Cuba was fading into a distant future. He longed for expressions of commitment to come home together to Cuba, but they did not arrive. He felt happy by his side, cooking, singing, walking, and sharing ideas in deep complicity. Nayra was very attentive to her children in Berkeley, and Thanda was very sensitive to the little time they shared. It seemed that constantly, six years after coming together, the dream of living a love in fullness, without pending suitcases, in a home, or even still, becoming a parent one last time, was, again, slipping away.

Thanda began to investigate what she could not understand from the dozens of documents she read daily about Cuba's economic and political reports prepared by academics, politicians, specialists, and officials from their offices in Brussels, Washington, London, Paris, or Madrid. They were distributed with subtle arrogance by the European diplomatic service, so far from reality. Almost all diplomats met among themselves and other "expatriates," ate imported food from containers from Europe, traveled in their SUVs, watched European television channels or Netflix via internet communication by "illegal" satellites, and criticized the communist system as inefficient, authoritarian, if not disastrous and murderous.

Thanda, in line with the original ideas of Marxism on collective ownership of the means of production, the value of work oriented towards the common good, and universal and equal access to health, education, and justice, defended the progress of social justice and life expectancy in Cuba. During a meeting with diplomats, he had a tense exchange with one of them from whom Thanda had never heard an expression of affection or appreciation for Cuba:

* This system is a dictatorship that keeps most of the population in a prison of poverty!
* Well, if the Cuban socialist model is so terrible, why is it that the most comparable country, the Dominican Republic, with the same population, ecology, genetics, culture, and history up to six decades ago, on the capitalist path, has almost ten years less life expectancy?
* Those are false statistics from the Cuban government. They don't provide real data on their economy or demographics. Cuban data is garbage!

In this, his colleague was somewhat right: Inalvis and Jam had warned her that, after so many years of external attacks, they were careful to "show their books." They had even refused, from the National Institute of Nutrition, to share with Thanda the results of a study funded by the European Union. But in the discussion he was having, the evidence was clear about Cuban longevity.

* The high life expectancy is recognized by the United Nations, the World Bank, and all the Public Health Institutes in the world. No other country in the Americas, although Costa Rica comes close, offers free and universal medical services. The provocative American filmmaker Michael Moore has portrayed it in his documentary 'Sicko,' I recommend you watch it.

The skepticism of someone who lived in his mansion with air conditioning and European meals, traveled in his air-conditioned car, worked in an air-conditioned office, read documents from people far from reality, and criticized from his ivory tower, was almost impervious to any logic and argument.

Thanda decided to take the opposite path: to immerse himself in Cuban life to try to understand it. Something like the "community diagnoses" they did in Ukuzwana, but regarding the economy. He shared with neighbors in the neighborhood, with gatherings followed by guitar and some rum, which Thanda preferred not to drink, but which for Cubans was almost the fuel of the fire of speech. He met with the leaders of the CDR - Committee for the Defense of the Revolution - the shoemaker at his kiosk, the punch vendor in his little chair, the baker in his little house, Frank in his breakfast shop, other neighbors, and the families of Unai's friends, people on the street.

He attended the People's Power Assembly to observe the debates of the local elections, which hetruly enjoyed, although there were certain tacit limits not to question the hierarchy of power. It was beautiful to see the walls of the humble local pharmacy with sheets pinned up of the life stories of candidates for the elections: they were put up by other neighbors, there were no parties, no money, no propaganda, and no ties. One of the stories said:

"Comrade Yuri was born in Marianao in 1961 - Thanda noticed, being the same age as him. His father was a guerrilla fighter with Camilo in Yaguajay and later an active member in the literacy campaign, the sugar harvest brigade, president of the CDR, and an internationalist in Angola. His mother taught at the daycare center and is the leader of the community cell of the Federation of Cuban Women. Yuri stood out as a pioneer by winning the contest of Marti poems in his school, being part of the Marianao baseball team, and serving in the military as a sapper in Holguin. He studied engineering and started working at BioCubaFarma developing medical diagnostic models. He has collaborated with the sister nation of Venezuela in maintaining its electrical system and helps with the CDR of Cubanacán district 4 in cleaning tasks, community gardens, and assistance at the senior center."

That was how the stories of the candidates spoke of their efforts to contribute to the community and solidarity beyond the neighborhood, and even beyond the country. But it was imperative to follow the "guidelines of the Communist Party" as if it were a liturgy, the leaders of the government were unquestionable, Fidel and now Raul, the seven "Commanders of the Revolution" who were still alive were untouchable and sacred, and the figure of Marti, called "the Apostle," was even more so than the figure of Jesus Christ in Europe. Thanda was bothered by hierarchies and myths, and both permeated all feelings and expression, at least the accepted ones, in Cuba. Nevertheless, Thanda's deep admiration for ideas of equality, courage against American imperialism and its numerous subject countries, and the avoidance, sometimes heroic, of falling into the clutches of the market weighed more on his thpoughts. He engaged in intimate gatherings with friends "from the vanguard," like Pedro and Susy, committed since their childhood years as pioneers with the revolution, as well as with critics and even renegades of the system, who saw power hierarchies as unjust and felt frustrated by the absence of many basic goods. Or not so basic.

He described the daily economy: almost all Cubans who applied to study or work had that right, although often studies and aspirations did not correspond with jobs and responsibilities. Public salaries ranged from three hundred to fifteen hundred Cuban pesos per month and were published in the statistical yearbook. The difference between the highest and lowest salaries was only three to four times, whether one was a minister or president, or a janitor or street sweeper, a sign of absent justice in market economies that Thanda appreciated. But salary was less relevant than in Europe because everyone benefited from subsidies for basic products and public services.

Each Cuban received through their "ration book," at symbolic prices, five pounds of rice, one pound of spaghetti, half a pound of black beans, half a pound of peas, half a pound of salt, a chicken thigh and drumstick - what Americans discarded from the breasts of their genetically modified and hormone-injected chickens - fifteen eggs, and half a liter of soybean oil. Additionally, they received local products like seven pounds of sugar, one pound of coffee, and in the past, up to five packs of "Popular" cigarettes and two cigars. They also received three bars of soap for personal hygiene, one for laundry, and a tube of toothpaste. Children under seven received two pounds of milk per month and diapers. Women of reproductive age received sanitary pads. They also provided some viands for diabetic patients, those with AIDS, cancer, or kidney problems.

All these basic food products were subsidized. A complete food basket cost barely thirty pesos, about one euro and a half. Hygiene items cost about twenty, and coffee and sugar only five pesos each. There were ways to increase the quantity by paying a little more and with certain limits. Furthermore, many Cubans used additional ration books from relatives abroad, including internationalists, and even from deceased individuals not declared as such. All this involved an army of "messengers" who were commissioned, for an agreed cost, to go with the ration books to collect their rations. This nutrition lacked fresh products, the healthiest nutrition, vegetables, fruits, and tubercles, which had to be purchased in the "agros" provided by peasant cooperatives. Buying mangoes, guavas, and bananas according to the seasons, sweet potatoes, cassava or taro, and tomatoes, spinach, beans, parsley, celery, garlic, and onions, and slightly increasing the meager dose of beans or peas from the ration book, amounted to about a hundred pesos more, at least, per person. And the indispensable bulk rum, at ten pesos a bottle. What were already true luxuries were potatoes, pork, and nearly impossible beef. It was possible to eat, although with that narrow spectrum, limited to little more than twenty different foods, and counting on the ration book subsidy, for less than two hundred pesos per person per month. In fact, according to UNICEF, Cuba, dominated by the United States and not a friend of speaking well of the island, was the only country on the continent without malnutrition. Or rather, without calorie malnutrition, as there was indeed a lot of "bad" nutrition due to excess calories. This was due to a not very healthy nutritional culture, with copious meals - especially rice, double that of an average Chinese person - lots of sugar and little fiber and vegetable protein. Thanda hinted to her neighbors and Cuban work counterparts how healthy a vegan diet was and its non-violent relationship with animals, but they looked at her like she was an alien.

Electricity, water, gas canisters, and landline telephone services were also subsidized, with bills averaging about three euros per month for an average household. Public services were also very cheap. A bus ride cost barely two cents of a Euro. For two pesos, you could go to the movies, and for six, to ballet or concerts of the highest level. But the most valuable thing was the free healthcare and education. Despite so many state subsidies, for an average salary of five hundred pesos, and pensions of four hundred pesos, food expenses accounted for half, leaving little margin.

During the years of prosperity due to Soviet support, they also regularly sold highly subsidized washing machines and fans Aurika, the Minkh fridge, Panda televisions, Forever bicycles, and the “Reina” (queen) pot. The revolution redistributed housing for everyone. One of the most egalitarian symbols of the revolution was that thousands of mansions in the once-rich bourgeois Havana neighborhoods of Vedado, Miramar, and Siboney were granted to humble families. For two decades now, the sale of houses between resident Cubans in the country had been liberalized. "Permutas," or house swaps, were also common, sometimes with money supplementing the differences in value. Families grew, and often very precarious works of division and "barbacoas," or lofts in high-ceilinged apartments, were made. All these processes, together with demographic growth, had left many people homeless, especially young couples who wanted to live independently and needed to pay rent.

The most difficult thing was to exchange Cuban pesos for convertible pesos (at an official rate of 25 to 1) and with them buy imported goods in "capitalist stores", or eat in private restaurants, called "paladares", exotic meals. Diapers for an incontinent elderly person were worth more than a doctor's salary for a month, as much as inviting a friend to eat at a paladar or taking a half-hour ride in a tourist “*almendron*”. A pair of shoes cost about two median salaries per month, a mobile phone or an air conditioning unit cost a year's salary, a trip to Spain or an electric scooter four years, and a Lada car thirty years old, about eighty years. It wasn't feasible.

That's why those who could move away from local consumption of rationed goods, agro, buses, cinemas, health centers, and schools could do so if they received "remittances" from abroad through Western Union or Los Cubanitos, who delivered them to their doorstep. That's why it was said that Cubans "survived on faith": family abroad.

And so, in the country of the equality revolution, Cubans "without faith" consumed the few local products and suffered frequent shortages of electricity, water, lack of food even from their short list, repair parts, cement, or even a nail, or failures in transportation and even in some medicines. There were also lines for everything: for the ration book, for chicken, for eggs, to collect gas, pay electricity, to withdraw money from the bank, or for any spectacle. And thus, another job had flourished, that of "colero", who held a place in line and traded it for twenty to a hundred pesos, queues that could last all night and all day. But they survived, and with a lot of creativity, philosophy, and humor.

Outside the market in "official CUPs" for food and basic products, an informal market had been created for the most used verb in Cuba: "*resolver*" (figure out). It consisted of obtaining, often "on the sly", that is, illegally or alegally, almost anything, of course, risking fines and prices in the "faith CUPs".

This was fueled by the permission that Raúl began to give Cubans to leave and enter the island. The main problem was the visas of the countries they visited. But Panama was an exception: with a round-trip ticket, Panama issued a visa to go shopping in its warehouses full of Chinese products distributed throughout the continent. Up to a hundred thousand Cubans traveled to that country every year to buy, "on faith", all kinds of products that they brought on planes or sent by boat. Each Cuban had a maximum of purchases allowed and supposedly for "personal use". Huge lines formed in front of the Panamanian embassy, ​​for which they waited for a turn all night in the adjoining park where giant Indian laurels shaded a statue of Emiliano Zapata. Opposite, another grand twin park honored Gandhi. What would Zapata and Gandhi, revolutionaries by arms and non-violence, say about such power of the global market? What would be the way to fight it?

Most purchases in Panama entered the second-hand market "on the sly" and in CUCs. Thanda saw week by week how the fiercest capitalism, the hunger for consumption, the cruelest law of supply and demand, and its consequences in inequality infiltrated the island of equality. He used to say to Jam and other friends:

* The left side ('on the sly') market will end up leading us 'to the right...'"

For those who had little or no "faith", there was always the illegal Miami lottery, the "charade", which could, perhaps once in half a lifetime, translate one peso into up to seven hundred.

Although the means of production were state-owned and the market was centralized, a good part of the properties were not public. Housing was private and sold and bought before notaries who recorded fictitious prices, while real operations, "on the sly", were much higher and in "miami-fied" CUCs. About sixty thousand large American cars from the "50s dream", Chevrolets, Chryslers, Buicks, and Fords, circulated in Batista's time. When the revolution triumphed, they remained in the hands of family members. About thirty thousand remained, called "almendrones", almost all dedicated to the private taxi business, the vanguard of the Cuban private sector, very symbolic that they were behind the wheel of large cars from the "imperialist enemy". They were joined by another equal number of Ladas or Moskvitches by incentives, with aesthetics and an antagonistic sense to the almendrones, and others more modern belonging to companies or foreign missions. In total, there were no more than a hundred thousand cars in Cuba, one per hundred Cubans, ten times less than the rate in the world and a hundred times less than in the United States. Also, up to a third of the land remained in private hands although only houses could be sold on them, not the land, which had to remain with the original families, in cooperative regimes contributing to the state's "procurement".

When Fidel, already weak, handed over power in 2008 to Raúl, he began to open up the economy a bit and allowed an embryo of a private sector for what in Cuba were called "self-employed": drivers, bakers, confectioners, hairdressers, artisans, gardeners, guards, mechanics, computer scientists, tailors, bricklayers, reinforcement teachers, carpenters, blacksmiths, and plumbers, among a limited list of "non-essential" activities. In addition, small private businesses such as craft and textile stores, restaurants called "paladares" and the rental of rooms or apartments began to be allowed, which soon began to be used by the Californian franchise of AirBnB and reached fifty thousand rental listings in Cuba on that global network. Thanda thought about the absurdity of paying young billionaires in San Francisco to connect people around the world and facilitate renting and proposed a C-AirBnB for domestic Cuban tourism and a C-Uber for a more passenger-friendly transportation system. Cuba was the only country in the world where when the passenger got into the taxi or almendrón, it was he who asked the driver where he was going, and not the other way around! The private economy, still restricted and without access to credits or wholesale stores, was not well regulated, no invoices were issued, and tax evasion was tolerated. All those factors increased inequalities, especially in activities of the "CUC world" and related to tourism: a driver could earn in two hours what a neurosurgeon earned in a whole month.

With Raúl, internet communications also began, initially limited to public parks. As smartphones arrived, families started communicating with distant relatives through cameras using Etecsa cards at one CUC - one dollar - per hour. Thanda watched in amazement as parks filled with people sitting on benches, curbs, or even in trees, staring at screens, as if what was happening around them was just a backdrop to what was happening on the screen. Thus, a cancer began to infiltrate, that of the abuse of media and internet browsing, abstracting from reality. Cuban youth compulsively added more "friends" to their Facebook or Instagram accounts and surfed absorbed in YouTube videos and memes through their chat networks. At least it was only in public parks, and the cost limited usage to barely twenty percent of Cubans, and less than half an hour a day; compared to one hundred percent in Europe and the United States and at least six hours a day, already in the process of being co-opted by the controlled artificial intelligence system that was controlling every dimension of life, as Jonay had told Thanda in his debates with the world of Singularity.

Thanda wondered how the government could, in addition to controlling the production and prices of the fifty or so subsidized Cuban products in the CUP market, and paying seventy percent of workers with the same currency, which worked for the State, import food, medicines, energy, and machinery that it could not produce locally. Cuba imported rice from Vietnam, powdered milk from New Zealand, feed from Canada for its chickens and pigs from state farms, and chickens from Brazil and the United States. When she learned that a good portion of the chickens that Cubans almost religiously ate came from Kentucky, Thanda felt sadness and deep disappointment. They were toxic chickens grown with genetically modified feeds and hormones, and raised in mass with unimaginable suffering for humans, who preferred not to look at the origin of what they ate. To such an extent global consciousness denial reached. But, from the United States! From the country that humiliated, defamed, and insulted them every day!

Thanda couldn't understand how dignity succumbed to the desire "to eat chicken" and to do it as cheaply as possible. It was so essential in the diet that the expression to mention something "important" was: "the chicken from the rice with chicken." Was cultural inertia regarding food so strong that not only did it not consider animal suffering but also not its origin, from the country that attacked them daily? Neither was the milk healthy after weaning, nor was rice necessary, given so many other provisions. And much less sugar, toxic at any age. But no one questioned it. When Thanda mentioned it, he sensed animosity. The ration book and what the state almost "gave away" were considered rights of the revolution, untouchable, even less so by a foreigner. Just questioning it could be interpreted as "counter revolutionary." Thanda thought that food imports, of more than two billion dollars a year, were largely unnecessary and perpetuated a contempt for what was local, natural, and healthy.

The same happened with energy, sadly based on fossil fuels, and even negotiating with them for friendly connection with Venezuela. Fidel's famous speech at the Rio Conference in 1992 had not reflected in distancing from oil. Cuba extracted half the oil it needed for its thermal power plants and transportation annually, and imported the rest, mainly from Venezuela, and in exchange for its medical services in the "Barrio Adentro" program. It refined and consumed subsidized oil from Venezuela, and still had surpluses to export to third countries and receive foreign currency for it. With the collapse of the Venezuelan economy, also blocked by the United States, the oil source in Maracaibo was dwindling. Cuba sought crude supplies in former partners such as Angola, where three thousand Cubans left their lives fighting for its independence, in its former godfather, Russia; or in the first country where medical brigades were sent, Algeria. But the market dictated, and Cuba found it difficult to ensure its supplies, which the United States also tried to suffocate with fines to shipping companies and insurers trading with Cuba. Thanda thought : just as with food, a lot of energy was being wasted in the country, also contaminating, because at such subsidized prices there was no awareness of spending and humble people turned on air conditioning day and night, if they had it, even wrapping themselves in blankets in the middle of the tropical climate, or didn't bother to turn off gas or lights.

Even more erratic and insecure were medicine imports, although Cuba locally manufactured almost half of its needs, more than any other country on the continent, through its biotechnology industries. Additionally, Cuba needed imports of basic products it did not produce such as paper, machinery, and equipment, and parts to maintain its obsolete infrastructure, which made its inhabitants' ingenuity sharpen in ways few places on the planet did. In no other country were so many thousands of cars over sixty years old proudly circulating on its streets, and this happened with all sorts of contraptions. The ingenuity and resilience of a people faithful to socialism where capitalism infiltrated through the cracks, especially through the mesmerizing screens of mobile phones.

Thanda consulted with Moyes how the Cuban economy could work: Cuba imported a total of more than eight billion dollars and only exported about two billion, mainly tobacco, rum, and nickel. Where did it get the foreign currency to be able to pay the rest? From tourism taxes. Fidel had already reached agreements with the construction company Buigues, which built hotels with more than fifty thousand hotel places throughout the island, and with large Spanish hotel chains to commercialize them through tour operators and manage them. They received a share of the profits for it, as well as stimulating tourist consumption in foreign currency, timely exchanged for CUCs. Thanda calculated that the four million tourists a year could contribute about two billion in foreign currency. That mitigated part of it. Another part came from remittance flows, also mostly exchanged for CUCs. And lastly, the medical services of about forty thousand internationalists in more than eighty countries, whose local salaries were partly retained by the Cuban government for the payment of medicines in health services. Thanda estimated that these services could represent about one billion a year. Even so, the deficit was very fragile, and often Cuba took months and even years to pay its creditors.

So Thanda tried to understand an economy of CUPs and CUCs. A system with more value at the official exchange rate for remittances than for public salaries, giving, against the Marxist principle, more value to the chance of having relatives in Miami than to the effort for public work. The progressive imbalance between national production of a few foods and manufactures on one side and imports of a constant flow of products in an informal market that already surpassed the public one, led the State to real control of less than half of the economy. The other obeyed the wildest laws of supply and demand. Two Cubas.

Thanda identified five external dependencies that limited true sovereignty, the most claimed value by Fidel and Che, but which did not translate into the economy. Two dependencies on imports for everyday life, those of unhealthy food and polluting fossil fuels. Two to mitigate the trade deficit due to imports four times lower than exports: the work of selfless internationalist doctors like Elias and that of mass tourism, contaminating not only with carbon emissions but also surrendered to multinational corporations. And a third enjoyed by only one in three Cubans: that of family remittances, many of them criticizing Cuba on social media and in the news. Such dependence was also very fragile because it depended on factors beyond the government's control, and even less on ordinary Cubans, such as the American embargo or global economic or ecological crises. True sovereignty, especially eco-sovereignty, was mortgaged by dependencies on certain consumptions, despite having resisted the market economy for six decades.

Thanda concluded, after his first few months in the Cuban adventure, that the island was on a long journey from Eila, crossing an Atlantic with strong geopolitical, cultural, and even existential storms. He could not understand how noble values ​​such as those of the socialist revolution that led a million young educators throughout the country to literacy, that exchanged mercenaries from the Bay of Pigs for fruit purees for children, that sent almost a million doctors for sixty years to the most isolated corners of the world, and that spoke with dignity and courage against North American imperialism to which almost the rest of the world paid homage, could eat from the enemy's chicken, negotiate with black gold, roll out the red carpet for corporations like Buigues, including its arms deals, like Nestlé and its illegal and lethal marketing of "mothering" milks against which Thanda fought so hard, the Canadian mining company Cherrit and its murky activities that Thanda already knew about in Mexico, and the hotel chains and tour operators of wealthy Spanish families.

Meanwhile, the influx from China via Panama filled Cuba with superfluous consumption and informal markets, through large corporate deals, coupled with an economy based on fossil fuels, stained, Thanda thought, the noble ideas and lives of many Cubans dedicated with selflessness and commitment to simple and solidarity-filled lives. Even with all its contradictions, as she saw differently in Mexico, and certainly in Europe, Cuba exuded beauty and even, Thanda felt, there were glimpses of utopia to inspire towards Eila's ethics of equity and harmony with nature.

With these ideas in mind, he composed her first song for Cuba and presented it at the first "peña de la ternura" he convened with friends from the neighborhood, work, and the extensive network of friends that Pedro introduced her to. Among its verses, she said:

"They say that Cuba defies reason, that it can only be understood if the heart opens, listening to a troubadour, watering the Malecón, with verses by Martí, speeches by Fidel, that’s revolution."

That night he went to bed missing Nayra. The gatherings couldn't fill his heart without his partner by his side, with whom he had already spent a year of love from a distance, as it was before their time together in Mexico. Was it his Amama's repeated fate? At dawn, he still felt Nayra's absence and composed her third song:

"...the rooster crows and so do I, the day breaks the shell... how much the distance hurts... not to embrace you when waking up... we'll have to have faith... that you will arrive soon..."

As he experienced it in just three months, he thought, with Unai by her side, in the waiting room of José Martí airport when they were called to board the flight to Madrid, where she already longed to arrive to embrace her parents. He felt an undeniable vertigo thinking about his father's weakness.

# I let you leave me. Majadahonda, February 2018

Thanda spent a heartfelt Christmas time with his parents and his daughters. Ángeles came from Normandy with his partner Alain, and Daniela from Frosakull, in southwest Sweden, with Laarsen. Thanda had been seeing them only once a year for over ten years, although they felt a profound bond and love over the distance and immense emotion in their reunions. They always talked about spending time together in Havana and living in an eco-village when Thanda finished his time fighting from within the European Union.

They shared moments in the family home in Las Rozas, in the mountain house in Robledo, and in their sisters' homes, brave and dedicated to their families. His father was very weak, but he never stopped trying to please with his tender gaze. Thanda noticed that his strength barely allowed him to take a short walk around the neighborhood. He often needed to breathe with the help of the oxygen flow from a machine provided by the Spanish health system.

After celebrating the New Year's Eve at his younger sister's house and playing "the movies" together, coming up with mimes and surrounded by laughter, the news of the death of one of their beloved aunts arrived. At the wake in northern Madrid, Thanda walked with his father, already so frail, and felt the desire to talk to him "about the end." But whether it was his passion for living, especially for wanting to see so much more of his children's and grandchildren's lives and adventures, or out of fear of what awaited, or rather, Thanda thought, "not to bother," he perceived subtle signs of not wanting to talk about his illness, his weakness, or what might come. Thanda could not recall ever hearing his father complain about anything personal, whether it was illness, work problems, or longing for his parents or other loved ones who had already passed away. When Thanda called him and asked how he was, he always replied:

* Very well, my child! How joyful I am to hear you!

Even if it was with a weak voice.

In fact, despite his few strengths, when he asked his parents if they would like to escape the cold of the Madrid winter and spend some time with them in Havana, his father enthusiastically said he would love to, and his mother nodded in agreement.

As they returned to Havana, they bid farewell to their parents, as they always did, at the Las Rozas train station. And, as they always did, Thanda took a photo of them with their hands waving in the icy cold of northern Madrid and wished them, once again, strength and light in their adventures far from them in the distance, but always united in their hearts. Also, as he usually did, Thanda looked at that photo repeatedly during the journey that took him away from those he loved so much, this time in the company of Unai.

Once in Havana and fully back to work, Thanda thought about how both Nayra and their children, as well as their daughters Ángeles and Daniela, as well as their parents, as well as Adam and his now partner Cassie, as well as Nour, had expressed the desire to spend time with Thanda and Unai in Havana. There would be too many for the two small rooms and Unai's attic in the Cubanacán house. Although many larger families lived in much less space. Thanda often thought about how much he would like to return to a much humbler life than the diplomatic environment conditioned him. He reckoned that if the entire family that had expressed their willingness to come did, they could have up to ten more people at home. As a colleague from the delegation, who was retiring, was leaving, he requested to move to his larger house. Furthermore, it was close to the delegation and "a block" away from the sea. Unai and Thanda made the move with the help of Papito and the guards with the pickup truck.

They had just settled into the lovely house on Third Avenue 2205 when Adam and Cassie arrived. The embrace with his children, including Cassie, as he felt him, was emotional. They spent a few days sharing dinners and conversations on the porch, swimming routes in the sea, walks through the decrepit beauty of the Vedado streets, and heartfelt gatherings dreaming from Hubert's attic in Old Havana. Nayra was going to arrive in Havana to continue collaborating with Hubert, and Thanda dreamed of expanding the family.

He felt the courage to bare his soul more and more, and at the first "peña de la ternura" they organized in the new house, "Ternura en Tercera," he sang a song about the beating and flowing of his soul:

"...my soul wants to be ... stealthy from my skin ... a migrant without papers ... melted into your being... isn't that love?... an act of fusion? ... I don't want to be ... a prisoner of my skin anymore..."

A few days after Adam and Cassie's arrival, Thanda received a call from his sister Lorena telling him that their father had worsened, and they were taking him to the hospital. Thanda feared the end. The sunset of life as he had understood it until then: with his father, near or far, always guiding him and showing him the values that gave meaning to his life. He bought a plane ticket and flew urgently to Madrid. Unai and Nayra told him they would join him as soon as they could.

As he flew to Madrid, he recalled almost sixty years of life under the light of such a beautiful being.

He remembered how, as a child, he knelt by his side to paint the little cars he bought him, and they fixed them meticulously together. Thanda had kept them in a metal box that he had been searching for around Las Rozas and Robledo since his return from Africa without luck. It was perhaps, he thought, the treasure of life, which he had tried to keep, and which did not belong to us, as everything truly valuable helped Thanda not to cling to material things and to seek harmony with life in his soul.

He remembered when his father told him how, when the Spanish Civil War ended, he went to England with three gifts from his uncle Falé, who, without children of his own, held him in great affection: a small square suitcase, a watch, and the ship ticket. Thanda proudly and zealously kept the first two. That's how he left at just sixteen to seek his fortune in England, where he ended up receiving a scholarship to play football for the school team and then for the city of Ipswich. When he returned with his perfect English, he became a broadcaster for the Radio Nacional de España foreign broadcast, in English, reading news carefully filtered by censorship. They used to sing "Señora azul" by Solera together, remembering those times. That helped Thanda to dream of a world without borders.

He remembered how his father told him that at the English school they looked at him with coldness and even rejection as a Spaniard because Franco was a passive ally of Hitler, who bombed England with brutality and extreme cruelty. And he told Thanda how he showed them that he loved everyone equally and, from his Christian faith, spoke to them about how we were all brothers. From that time, he gave him his diaries written in a meticulous and tiny handwriting, as if trying to save every millimeter of paper.

He remembered how, as his mother told him, when Thanda was born, she put up a huge sign on the door of their house on Doctor Esquerdo Street that said, "we're already three at home." That's how Thanda learned to overcome his shyness, fueled by school bullying when everyone shouted "chino" at him, and to speak without fear and with pride about what he found beautiful in life.

He remembered during the flight back home, how, when Thanda was eight years old, his father enrolled the family as members of a tennis club in the northern part of the city, and encouraged Thanda to find his strength in that English game he had learned in England but never got to play for lack of a racket. He gave him a Dunlop Maxply racket for his "first communion," and Thanda set out, as in so many other things, to make his father proud and become a great tennis player. He spent hours hitting a ball against the fronton wall. And he dreamed that one day he would be a great champion like the then-famous Orantes and Nastasse they watched on black and white television and from their fame would tell the world to end borders and rich and poor, hunger and wars. Somehow, his childhood dream persisted, although it had been transformed by the winds of time. Broken bits scattered at the bottom of his soul.

He remembered how his father never asked for or bought anything for himself, and his mother had to insist for him to even accept new socks. Meanwhile, he was generous with others, especially with the family. Thanda learned from him to be austere, to think twice if he thought he needed something.

He remembered how they would wake up before dawn on Sundays and wash their faces with very cold water, reminding themselves they were the "early risers," and they would go out together to cross Madrid and queue up to book a court so Thanda could play with his father what he had learned during his "perseverance against the fronton (pediment)". For that was life, Thanda thought as he flew over the Atlantic, perseverance against the fronton. That Sunday ceremony, then going to church in front of the Retiro park and buying chocolate and “churros” for his mother and sisters, was the happiest moment of the week for Thanda, and the memory of it constantly returned to his mind with emotion. That memory accompanied Thanda his whole life and guided him to always try to strive to be a good father. To Ángeles and Daniela, to Adam, Nour, and Unai, and to all the children of the world who crossed his path in life.

He remembered when they spent summers in Llanes and Thanda would swim with his father farther than anyone else, to the "punta del Gruño," from where, leaving the bay of El Sablón beach, they could feel the cold currents of the Cantabrian Sea and see the immensity of the ocean, towards the English north of his youth, and he would say:

* Juan, my son, never be afraid of anything if it's on the way to your dreams.

He remembered their time as immigrants in Holland, and how one day, faced with Thanda's insolence in his incipient adolescence, his father slapped him. The only one in his whole life. His father went out sadly to walk along Scheveningen beach in The Hague. Thanda realized his selfish behavior and went out to look for him. He was twelve years old. It was nighttime. It was cold. They had just arrived in a strange country. He found him walking along the shore. He ran towards him. They hugged. And his father said:

* I felt very confused and desperate, son: I don't want you to be an arrogant or insolent person in life. But I'll never forgive myself for hitting you. And I'll never do it again in my life. I felt the greatest pain possible because of it. I love you more than anything in this world, son.

And from then on, he knew he should never think that his ideas were superior to anyone else's and to learn humility every day from his father: his discreet intelligence, his anonymous generosity, his soft and low voice, his respectful gaze, his being... light among the light. His being of light.

He remembered how his rebellious adolescence progressed and his father was always there to understand his times of long hair and backpack, his times as a conscientious objector to pacifism, his times of uncertain loves and heartbreaks, his times of vacillation between being a professional tennis player or a doctor for the world... and his father always guided him without words or demands, but with love and with example. So much patience and generosity guided Thanda to try to be a better person every day.

He remembered how he progressed in his studies, completed his degree, passed his medical residency exam, and married Cristina, and went to Africa. And how his father felt deep pride in all of this, and that was the greatest reward and strength for Thanda. And when he returned to Spain and faced the heartbreaking divorce, trials, and moments that seemed to sink him into the darkest abysses. And how, at every step and at every moment, his father, with his mother, was always there to encourage him to be noble and generous and thus never lose hope.

He remembered, as the plane approached dawn on the Portuguese coast, how when he had almost given up his fight for a fairer world through politics, for his hard-won position as a bureaucrat in Brussels, and his father fell seriously ill with cancer, he said, "you have to fight" and his father replied "I'll fight if you fight," and everything changed. Because that's how Thanda learned to fight for noble causes, never to give up, to tell the truth, and not to be afraid to be himself.

And they were landing when he remembered how his father, despite the distance and the time that, for twenty years, a third of his life, had physically separated him from him, perhaps when he needed him most; encouraged him to follow his dreams and struggles. First to "fight for noble politics" in Brussels, and then, "go west, young man" towards Mexico and towards Cuba. And how, he still remembered, in the recent Christmas and already with only a thread of strength left, he said to him: "Stay strong, son, for the world, I am proud of you." And that's how Thanda learned the deepest lesson of love: to wish for the other's happiness without expecting anything in return, without even, if that were to be, their presence. It was hard for him to accept, but he was integrating it into his solitary being far from his partner and his children.

He remembered his favorite phrases: "this is the first day of the rest of your life," his prayer of gratitude to God and humility, his complicity in speaking of "her majesty" before the strong character of his mother, like the song by Humet, and his secret code of "it hasn't..." as the wise Sancho Panza said.

There were so many thousands of memories, images, gazes, music, the morning push-ups together, the prayers at mealtime, the walks together, his German sailor cap, their adventures together through Madrid, through Asturias, through Holland, through England, through Scandinavia, through the Canary Islands, through Brussels, and through so many places in the world where, proud with his mother, Enrique followed Thanda's footsteps, even though it could no longer be as they had dreamed not long ago, to Cuba.

Enrique left behind a wonderful legacy of three thousand drawings, two hundred oil paintings, and fifty prints, which captured what his soul's window saw fascinated with the world, in landscapes, village scenes, and abstract motifs that inspired Thanda with gentle tenderness, deep sensitivity, and subtle beauty. Thanda landed in Madrid with these emotional thoughts and, following the example of his father's austerity, instead of looking for a taxi, he took combinations of trains and buses to the Puerta de Hierro Hospital in Majadahonda where his father was admitted. He arrived at the room where they had just transferred him from the casualty hall. Room 102, in the oncology service.

He later learned from his mother that, although he was already very weak and walked slowly with little breath, he wanted to accompany her and three widowed friends to their weekly movie session. It was the cold month of January in Madrid, and the wind was icy. But he wanted to go. Perhaps he knew it was his last adventure. To escort, like a guardian knight, his beloved and three other beautiful, widowed ladies, to their cherished weekly art date. He could barely walk, but he refused to use a cane or lean on the ladies who offered him help. Perhaps his pride in walking upright and as Thanda told him, «Shoulders back and eyes ahead," made him strive in this last gesture of a gentleman. The cold seeped into his body, and he began to cough and breathe with difficulty. He couldn't eat or take his medicine, so they took him to the emergency room.

While Thanda flew from Havana to Madrid, his father struggled all night in the emergency room to breathe and, confused, removed his oxygen mask. When Thanda arrived in the room, her father was sitting in a chair, disheveled with a three-day beard, eyes closed, breathing heavily, and barely had the strength to turn his gaze and respond when Thanda greeted him and hugged him. He barely recognized him. His sisters told him he had hardly eaten in three days. They hugged affectionately. They feared it could be the end. Thanda laid him down on the hospital bed. He set out to bring out the best in himself as a doctor for the moment of his life when he felt the greatest desire to heal and alleviate. He found that he was confused, disoriented, breathing rapidly, and with cold, pale, and slightly cyanotic fingers and lips.

They came to take his vital signs: a slight fever, very low blood pressure, as he always had, and a rapid pulse. He asked the nurse, very kindly, for the stethoscope to listen to his heart and lungs and found that the right side was poorly ventilated, and his heartbeat rhythmically but weakly.

* Dad, today we must be 'early risers' again: wash our faces very fresh. Then I want you to eat something. And then I'm going to shave and comb you so that when mom, 'her majesty,' comes this afternoon, she sees you princely and knows the gentleman you are, even in this battle.

His father, with barely any strength, nodded with a tender smile. He helped him slowly eat some soup and fruit puree, and he became somewhat more attentive and oriented. Then he washed, combed, and shaved him, put a little of his favorite cologne, Old Spice, encouraging him that his mother, the love of his life, would see him elegant and handsome, as always.

Thanda's mother came in the afternoon.

* Enrique, but how elegant you look!

Thanda's father winked conspiratorially at his son. Almost his last strength in that slight gesture. The afternoon passed cheerfully, attentively, with few words but coherent, and he even joked with the nurses. They spoke on the phone with Thanda's sisters, who were moved to know that he had improved and could speak to them. Thanda's mother returned home to sleep more peacefully. Thanda stayed to accompany him. He began to fall asleep after eating part of his dinner. Thanda settled on the sofa near the bed.

Around midnight, his father woke up, and the simple effort to sit up better exhausted him. He began to breathe with difficulty and to struggle to remove the oxygen mask. Thanda called the nurse, and she called the doctor on duty. How many nights on duty had Thanda treated patients in such situations? His probable diagnosis of lung cancer, from the damn tobacco in his younger years, along with his age and extreme weakness, advised not prolonging inevitable suffering. Thanda told the on-duty colleague that he had improved a lot, that he was very eager to live, and that with antibiotics, he was convinced he would improve little by little. He thought to himself that he still had much art to give to the world and much tenderness to pour out.

Selfishly, he thought how much he needed his encouragement, his winks, the luminous example of his humility and generosity.

The doctor on duty agreed to administer the intravenous antibiotic and see how he evolved, yet also advised adding a sedative to the treatment, to alleviate his sensation of suffocation. During the longest and saddest night of his life, without letting go of his father's hand, his firmest grip on life since childhood, Thanda saw how his father repeated up to four times the extreme and acute feeling breathless. Each time they saw his oxygen saturation drop, so they increased the oxygen flow and the dose of sedative.

In the last crisis, he experienced a strong chest pain and underwent an electrocardiogram which showed that his heart remained strong and rhythmic. Amidst the anguish of his sensation of fatigue and confusion, he began to count, as he always did to overcome efforts or difficult trials:

* Sixty-four, sixty-three...

He counted backwards... The number sixty-four stuck with Thanda. When he regained a bit of breath, he grasped Thanda's hand tightly and said:

* About this, son, not a word to your mother and your sisters.

That's when Thanda understood better than ever the greatness of his father's soul. The reason for not talking about himself, not even about the end, was... not to bother... Thanda never knew a more generous soul.

The doctor advised increasing the dosage of the painkiller and maintaining an intravenous drip of the same, to prevent further episodes of fatigue.

He called his sisters:

* Come as soon as you can tomorrow, Dad has worsened.

In the morning, his sisters and his mother arrived. The four of them knew the seriousness of the situation and embraced each other with heartfelt affection.

During the day, Unai and Nayra arrived from Havana, and his two brothers from Madrid; the rest affectionately called from Valladolid. Thanda stayed two days and two nights with his two sisters, never leaving his father's side, connected by a thread of life that grew thinner and more fragile with each passing moment. From his countdown and his message of "do not disturb," he never opened his eyes again. He could only weakly squeeze their hands.

Thanda felt his heart breaking. It wasn't pain he felt, but a transformation into another form of existence that he didn't know and didn't care to know. As a child, he often dreamed that his father "left," and in anguishing nightmares, he felt lost and without reason to live. He would wake up with tremendous relief, knowing it was just a dream, and rush to his parents' bed to embrace him. Now, this dream seemed not to fade, and he had nowhere to go. He embraced him devoutly in his hospital bed, thanking him for everything, for all the light, and asked him to continue guiding him.

Thirty years earlier, they fought together against nephritis that crippled his kidneys, and even as a student, Thanda offered a kidney for transplant to his father. It wasn't necessary as he recovered. Ten years later came his code of honor, "I fight if you fight," and curiously, a decade later, they told Thanda that he only had one kidney; the other had shrunk to the size of a calcified lentil. Now, he would have given his heart without a second thought to allow keep shining that beautiful light that had given him so much.

On the second night, his breathing became irregular, and at dawn, it faded until his last breath, in which Thanda felt a part of himself leaving with his father to some mysterious place. Thus ended the story in the dimension he knew of a wonderful, intelligent, generous, artistic soul, and above all, of tremendous and unbreakable humility.

Nayra arrived at his side, accompanying him in silence, a language understood only by love.

Thanda asked his mother if they could place a handful of his ashes in a corner of the Robledo house where they would plant a cypress and place eleven stones, for his beloved, his three children, and his seven grandchildren, around it. Thanda went with that sample of ashes to plant the tree and meditate, seeking his father within himself. When he mixed the symbolic remains of his father with the earth and planted the tree that would grow with such a beautiful essence, a wind with rain rose, and part of the ashes bathed Thanda's face. He wiped it off with his hands and wanted to drink it. He wanted his father to remain in him forever. To guide him in how to reinvent physical life without him. Part of him had already gone, to some mysterious place, with his dear morning companion.

He composed a song that he sang in front of the cypress, with the questions he hadn't had the chance to ask his father, whom he felt closer to than ever:

Father, since you left, I don't understand, everything seems without light…

my soul searches for you suffering, I cannot with this Cross…

I don't understand eternity, nor that there is an end,

because this darkness, this mental border

I don't understand infinity, nor a limit in space,

Although sometimes I allow myself to think about it slowly

I don't understand matter, its role in astronomy,

everything seems like a fair with energy wheels,

I don't understand time like this, this sequence of instants,

Everything seems like a story without clear after or before,

I don't understand energy like this,

the magic that gives us life,

that escapes in rebellion and is diluted in everything,

I don't understand the universe like this,

nor if there was a Big Bang

or if it expands or contracts like an endless heartbeat

I don't understand the galaxies nor their spiral dances,

nor does it amuse me, even if they're rituals,

I don't understand the stars, immense balls of fire,

nor the fusion within them, what is this game about?

I don't understand the planets, these mineral masses,

Nor what their sidereal journeys' goals are

I don't understand the moon, how it caresses the night,

I don't know if it's luck, greed, or justice,

I don't understand the mountains nor their sibling valleys,

nor the fire in their bellies nor their thousands of details

I don't understand the sunrise, nor the chirp that announces it

nor the sunset nor how the day resigns,

I don't understand water like this, the clouds, rains, and seas,

nor the broth that brews life in various forms

I don't understand life like this, the molecular dance,

if a suicidal meteorite gave cellular destiny

I don't understand humans so defenseless at birth,

who profane nature and believe they deserve the throne,

I don't understand eating and drinking,

 and thus having energy,

to be able to see ourselves move and continue in fellowship,

I don't understand creating so much, color, words, sounds,

painting, telling, and singing, and thus flooding the senses,

I don't understand thinking so much, and for petty loyalties,

allowing ourselves to alienate without challenging the truths,

I don't understand sleeping so much, what it means to dream,

to then resurface and command consciousness

I don't understand the power of love,

and transcending our skin

and thus, being able to alleviate the anguish of not understanding

I don't understand death at last, where did so much love go!!

I dream of seeing you again and banishing so much pain.

I don't understand not understanding, maybe there's no need to understand,

that there's nothing more in this adventure than surrendering only to be!

Thanda stayed with Unai for a few days, accompanying his mother in the family home, so empty of him yet so full of memories. One night, his mother, overwhelmed by so much pain from feeling, for the first time in sixty years, the absence of her knight errant, fell onto the low glass table they had in the living room, and hundreds of sharp pieces scattered around her without harming her miraculously. Thanda felt that his father had protected her from any harm. He was sure of it. And he was also sure that his father was asking Thanda to take care of her.

Returning to work in Havana was very tough. His parents were no longer there, as usual, waving their arms at the train station. His sisters would be very attentive to his mother, but Thanda felt that this trip back to Havana only brought back part of who he was ten days earlier.

When he arrived in Havana with Unai, Hubert, Adam and Cassie, were waiting for him; Nayra had already returned to Berkeley. They hugged each other affectionately. Thanda could barely speak. That night, he searched with all his strength for his father in his dreams. He was so sure that his father was with him in another way! Could he, like a mirror of his childhood, invert the nightmares without his father and the awakenings with him to this new and unbearable reality without him, but immerse himself every night in dreams with him? For several nights, that was the case, and he felt him so real that he even seemed to think while dreaming "that this wasn't a dream.

But the day became unbearable, the emptiness hurt like a burn, and his voice choked in a lump in his throat. Yet he knew that a life of love returned in a quantum way to its purest nature of timeless and spaceless energy, and that, somehow, it was selfish to hold onto him. Even in this, he had to learn from his father and be generous with his journey.

He called upon the circle of tenderness to honor the memory of his father. Friends and comrades came with much affection. He sang them a song dedicated to his father, whose opening verses said:

Life traps the energy, and it beats, like a ball of unraveling yarn, and it flies…

Sometimes we act, sometimes we observe, calmly and unknowingly,

life beats within our being...

And so, without more, I let you leave me,

And so, it will be, my soul is in yours

I have in me a nest in which you nest, your light in me, unites me to the endless universe…

Back in his bed, the anguish of searching for him in dreams gave way to feeling him, in the most unexpected moments, smiling beside him and holding his hand, which Thanda felt with gratitude, and as his soul departed, life whispered: *I let you leave me*...

# Dancing with the Sea. Miramar Coast. April 2018

Thanda continued his life in Cuba, trying to fill the sometimes-unbearable void left by his father's physical absence. Gradually, the anxiety of searching for him in his dreams subsided. He stopped avidly reading his journals or writings. Or trying to decipher the message behind each of the thousands of drawings he left behind, codes to decode the meaning of life. However, he did read them calmly and gratefully, wrote him a journal, and sent his family a poem along with a drawing of his father every day. He even spoke to him, especially when he walked alone; he could even envision him walking beside him, with his sweet smile.

His "I don't understand" continued to echo with each step, and he lived more than ever with a sense of not understanding life, but his last verse, "surrendering to just being," kept him passionate about life and grateful to it and his parents for inviting him to such a magical adventure. And in this, there was another reason to continue: to walk, without hurry, but without fear of death, towards the reunion with his father. He reminded himself of the absurdity of myths and how many people adored individuals they only knew through stories told by others. In this, Thanda felt a disconnect with the feelings of many people in Cuba and their almost religious adoration for certain leaders, who, deep down, assumed themselves to be somehow superior to others and maintained power for entire lifetimes. Indeed, Thanda thought, hierarchies were made of this, of some believing themselves superior to others and others meekly accepting that vertical relationship. In contrast, his father inspired him, even in his "other dimension," with values from which to express the most beautiful aspects of the soul: generosity, perseverance, creativity, and, most importantly, quiet humility, a virtue absent in dominant hierarchical systems.

The world kept spinning, and life continued almost the same at work, filled with bureaucratic procedures that seemed more absurd than ever, and the day-to-day routines where the soul seemed to have no space to express its deep beating. Unai, who had established a very deep connection with Thanda's father, his namesake and kindred spirit in many ways, navigated his grief in silence, perhaps emulating the discretion of who he considered his grandfather. He got a tattoo of one of his drawings and remembered him in his privacy. He began to treat young people from Miramar, some of the privileged elite studying in the international school, whose monthly fees, from even nursery years, equaled the salary of thirty Cuban doctors. Furthermore, Unai began to feel some disappointment with the education system in Cuba, which, like everything in society, exuded a single and vertical way of thinking with little room for debate and free thought. Thanda watched with deep concern as Unai's pure soul surrounded itself with privileged and indulged youth and distanced itself from his humble scholarship mates.

Adam progressed in his studies of neuroscience at the C-Neuro Institute in Havana. He researched how aggression circuits worked, in relation to empathy circuits. They observed behaviors, responses to certain stimuli, and even looked at the brain configuration through MRI images of Cuban female judo national team athletes. Although there were fascinating questions to understand, such as the prefrontal filters that modulated the connection of stimuli that the primitive survival instinct of the reptilian amygdala detected and transmitted to the consciousness of the hippocampus and prefrontal action; Adam felt a weariness of scientific coldness and skepticism about its dark interests. Adam felt much more passion for cinema and conveying feelings through it, touching that consciousness lost between the hippocampus and the human abstraction of his overflowing frontal lobe, and opening the channels of empathy for emotions. He began to collaborate on Hubert's documentary and conspired with the metaphor of the "Epicenter." He completed his research to, advised by Thanda, finish his studies, and turn the page with the satisfaction of having completed and learned from another stage of his life to then devote himself body and soul to his passion as an artist.

Cassie completed her studies at the Marine Research Center. Every day for three months, she went to their humble facilities in Miramar, three blocks from Thanda's house. She immersed herself in the Caribbean waters from an entry point on Twelfth Street, known as "la playita," from a rocky edge, and swam with her research colleagues to the coral reef, about two hundred meters from the coast. With a waterproof slate and marker, she wrote notes underwater. She marveled at that magical nature, absent from the noise and hurry that surrounded human life on land. At the same time, she felt sad to see how climate change and the organic and toxic waste from the city to the sea were affecting the fragile balance of marine flora and fauna, which would soon have more plastic in its depths than marine life.

Nour also arrived to share with her brothers and Thanda, who felt a certain distance from her world of imagery, fearing that such a beautiful soul would be trapped in a world where narcissism and banality reigned. But something much deeper, the spirit of Ukuzwana, united the siblings and them with Thanda, who felt a very deep connection with Adam, Nour, and Unai.

To celebrate the end of Adam and Cassie's studies, and Unai's first year at the University of Havana, they went on a tour in the pickup truck to Viñales. Hubert accompanied them. They arrived at a humble farm where they were provided with some horses. They rode through the meadows and hills of that magical landscape. They felt the magic of simple life in nature and the unity in their hearts.

A few months after moving to the Miramar house, his enthusiasm for filling it with family, warmth, color, and love began to fade. Unai had drifted away in his heart and had his mind more in Europe, perhaps thinking about Altea and maybe seeking other paths of knowledge with more space for free thought; Adam and Cassie shortened their stay and returned to Europe, with Cassie continuing her studies there and Adam pursuing his steps towards his calling as a filmmaker; his father had departed to another dimension; his mother was hesitant to move so far from her home in Las Rozas; his daughters Daniela and Ángeles were following their own paths, and he knew little about them, and Nayra was becoming more anchored in Berkeley life with her children.

Of all this, what he could least understand and therefore accept with peace was perpetuating a long-distance relationship. Despite several visits from Nayra, collaborating with Hubert on his documentary, Thanda came to understand that fulfilling the dream of a home together in Cuba would not be easy. Their bond to their now adolescent children was much stronger than their love for Thanda, and they were unable to find a balance and make room for love.

At night, the loneliness felt deeper. He even sought a sleeping position with one leg flexed toward his abdomen, and he surrounded his body with a pillow, as if to feel the embrace of, perhaps, his own solitude. He calculated that he had lived more than half of his life alone, and two-thirds of his last twenty years, but perhaps he had never intimately known his solitude. He sang to himself the song by Moustaki "*La solitude": "…ma derniere compaigne*." Those nights missing his heart children, his parents, and Nayra, seemed long, and the echo of the "I don't understand" was sometimes deafening. Before the rooster, Paco, announced the new day, Thanda was already awake, thinking about where he should direct his steps, that day, the months ahead, the life that awaited him.

One day, as he used to do in Cubanacán, before dawn, Thanda went to the sea, just a block away from his house, at the entrance to the Caribbean from 24th Street. He walked the two hundred meters that separated his house from the sea entrance dressed in shorts he had from his time in Zimbabwe. Nothing else. Just him and the night. He crossed the Third Avenue, which was already beginning to announce a crimson festival of the numerous flamboyant trees that adorned its sidewalks and approached parts of the street as if wanting to weave a magical tunnel. He walked down 24th Street between Third and First, a typical block of Miramar, one hundred meters on each side, with large houses, some brand new with cement and paint, likely from remittances or shipments from Miami. To the right, the largest plot was occupied by a complex of houses with peeling walls, uncared-for grass, and windows and doors askew from wood swollen by humidity and corroded by salt, where, as Thanda was told, a Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs lived. To the left, occupying almost half of the block, a tall wall crowned with a cumbersome roll of barbed wire hid a sinister house where American marines lived, their intentions unknown. Thanda was constantly amazed by Cuba's tolerance towards the country that never ceased to aggress and defame it. At the end of the street, on the corner with First Avenue, to his right, ground floors were being adapted to become small "paladares" in CUCs, for the wealthy class of Miramar, emulating Café Fortuna across the street, with its old and provocative objects for enjoying a beer or a mojito in a bohemian atmosphere, sitting on a toilet or on a mock tombstone that read "here lies a fool for not forwarding a threat-message to ten friends," ridiculing Facebook visionaries and prophets.

He observed everything as distant and alien while the horizon of the sea, still dark, called out to him ahead, under a sky that began to announce the arrival, one more day, punctual and faithful, of the sun. Thanda thought about that symbol that mankind struggled so hard to dismantle: the visit of the sun to the "Earth," when it was our rotation of day and night, and around the sun that returned us to its photon caresses emitted from its helium fusion, like the love of his elusive soul, expanding fusion. The thirty-meter entrance between the first avenue and the shoreline was covered in its first half by pothole-ridden asphalt, and towards the sea, by volcanic and thorny rocks that in Cuba were aptly called "dog's teeth." He sadly noticed that there was quite a bit of litter, with papers, plastic bottles from sugary sodas, glass bottles of rum, and even some condoms, from which Thanda imagined a beautiful and furtive union without fear under the stars. To his right, towards the east, a cement wall rose, where he thought how nice it would be to add a few strokes symbolizing his father painting the horizon that witnessed the tenderness of his gaze. For a moment, he felt the furtive idea, like his soul from his skin, of making a graffiti and making it, at least for himself, the small entrance to the sea in honor of his father, with a bench and a small dock to enter without sacrificing the soles of the feet to the sticky coastal rocks “diente-perro” (dog's teeth).

He approached from the left side, which on that north coast was the west, and reached the edge of the sea, which with gentle waves rhythmically bathed the rough “dienteperro”. He thought of the other verse of the song he sang alone to his father: "...*the waves reach the shore... and surrender... and it seems that upon dying... they are reborn*..." He looked to the east and saw that near the coast, the sky was illuminated in an intense red, like the blood that announces a birth, "the era is giving birth to a heart," like the life sprouting from the flamboyants. He let himself be captivated by the beauty, hypnotizing his mind, paralyzing his body, surrendering to life.

When there, alone, without anyone, without human noises, the first rays of the sun appeared, he entered the sea, which welcomed him with a warm embrace. How much he missed at that moment his journeys in the cold Cantabrian Sea with his father to the tip of El Gruño! Already in the sea, he stretched his weightless body and looked to the bottom with goggles he had brought from Spain. He was fascinated to see, still dark, a stage of rocks and algae among which small fish of multiple shapes and colors roamed. He felt as if he were entering a beautiful home that had always been waiting for him, where no one filled the space with coded sounds to constantly listen to, interpret, digest, and respond to. The world without the tangle of words. Where not even in the distance could he hear any motor-burning-fossil, which after words, was the noise that most bathed the urban human brains. Stillness and beauty. He was overcome with a profound sense of gratitude for being alive.

He continued swimming out to sea until the sunrise filled everything with light, including the sea floor, which began to show Thanda a magical dance of shadows that the light created with the rippled surface. When he was about three hundred meters from the coast, he saw, recalling Cassie's research, the limit of the coral reef and where the bottom disappeared.

He continued swimming eastward. He noticed that besides his enthusiasm and good health, the ocean current was helping him on his journey. Each stroke covered about four meters. He thought as he swam that perhaps it was because of the meteorite that fell in Yucatan that the two Americas gradually joined, one to the north separated from Eurasia and the other to the south separated from Africa. The water current that once circulated opposite to the planet's rotation, became, in the north of the Atlantic Ocean divorced from the Pacific, a circle of currents that advanced along the latitude of Cuba towards the east and the coasts of Africa and returned westward with the trade winds, to the south of the Caribbean. That circle of currents made possible the meeting of cultures half a millennium ago, with such cruel consequences for the natives of that island, almost exterminated by the sword and the cross. For a moment, he thought that if he let himself be carried away, he would arrive, after months rocked by the waves, to Eila, the island of utopia from which he drew so much inspiration for the New Humanity.

Amidst the rocky embrace of the ocean floor, he beheld dark-skinned denizens: dragonfish, trumpet fish, and stingrays, their graceful forms caressing the seabed. Among them lurked larger, unknown creatures, their gaze piercing his like wary sentinels, guarding their watery realm from his intrusion, a giant, awkward visitor trespassing without invitation. A solitary checkerboard, a diminutive shark, startled him with its sudden appearance. For what seemed an eternity, he traversed the azure depths, to his right, the southern horizon unveiled the coast of Miramar, adorned with weather-worn dwellings, forsaken gateways, and a looming edifice crowned by a concrete pier—a sanctuary for union brethren, he later discovered.

He arrived at a small esplanade, between 12th and 10th streets, known as "La Playita," where cement walks had been prepared over the “diente-perro” and even some steps towards the sea. Thanda paused in his journey to greet some elderly ladies who were about to enter the sea cautiously. After a few minutes of endearing conversation about life and the prices of things, which reminded him, although so different, of the confessions in the locker room of the Náutico in Mexico, he continued his journey towards the sun, now swimming close to the coast and enjoying the spectacle of thousands of smaller fish than his hand, in multiple shapes and bright colors. He thought about the beauty of these life forms that humans cruelly caught and which, within seconds, outside of their liquid oxygen, lost so much beauty in the clutches of the bipedal predatory eagerness tormenting the planet.

About a hundred meters away, he saw a smooth stone slab, about the size of a door, lying on the bottom, and he settled on it, just enough to protrude his head and shoulders. He felt immense peace upon that small altar under the sea. "*He looked with closed eyes*" towards the sun and let himself be bathed by its warm embrace, splashed by the salty sea, lulled by the gentle breeze, enchanted by the eternal horizon, marveling at so much color and life, so much silent beauty, such an immense gift of living. Without knowing how his being came to life, how the body that was wandering him through this adventure called life occupied consciousness, nor how it beat, breathed, and functioned, that wonderful transient molecular structure, nor where it mysteriously advanced. Although in that a certainty was taking shape, perhaps the only one: *he was advancing towards his father*.

The return was tougher, and it almost took him twice as long to return because he swam against the current that invited him back to dawn, to Eila. With the image of Eila as the new dawn for Humanity, he swam vigorously and counted, as his father always did, the strokes, more than a thousand, towards his secret "father's square." He did it again in an arched trajectory reaching the coral reef. In the middle of the journey and over the deepest part of the bottom, he had a moment of unease, thinking that if he had an attack from a Caribbean shark or a health problem, no one would hear him, and his life would end in the sea.

Sometimes he thought that the tension he suffered for so many years from the sad tearing of his divorce and from the tensions of political and power intrigues during his years in Brussels might have left a mark on his heart, and that in his sixth decade of life, the risk of a heart attack was greater. But he quickly shook off the fears, as Tito Fernández said in "*la madre del cordero*," "fear sent the devil," and he felt a full confidence in life, a mixture of gratitude and peace, "peaceitude," that didn't need to be assured, justified, or even understood.

With that feeling, he decided to close his eyes, to be alone with the sea embracing him, and to swim about a hundred strokes without seeing, surrendering to life, trusting in it. When he opened his eyes, he found himself surrounded by a school of silver fish the size of his arm, escorting him. He realized he had deviated even further north and away from the coast. He was already tired. But very happy. With the courage for any challenge of the day.

He reached "his harbor" and carefully exited to prevent the waves from throwing him against the relentless “diente-perro”. He felt profoundly happy about his baptism of dawn in the sea. He resolved to do it every day of the magical adventure that still awaited him for another four years on that magical island, the "epicenter" for Hubert, the hope of being an echo of Eila, being the echo-island that reinvented its revolution by returning to nature. The island of a new hope that was already sprouting all over the world animated by the lights of Courage and Tenderness, or perhaps Tenderness and Courage.

Thanda repeated his sea ceremony every dawn. A few days later, he put it into verses and chords to share at the next gathering:

"... every dawn I merge... in your magical humidity... you and I alone are a world in full complicity... your beauty thrills me, your taste of clean salt... I swim in your nature... devoid of all evil. The sun is rising... I'm coming to you... dawn has come... I'm in you..."

A few days later, when he arrived at his appointment before dawn, the sea was rough, and he thought it was dangerous to enter, especially to be thrown violently towards the dog's teeth. Thanda composed his second verse:

"... there are days when your soul... is stirred in a storm... and I approach silently... and decide not to enter... but even when I don't surrender... how beautiful it is to observe... the fierceness of your waves... and let myself be splashed..."

During those days, the distance had strained communication between Thanda and Nayra. He sent her those verses, and she thought it was an image of love between them, to which Thanda had to clarify:

"... with these verses I want... to tell you sincerely... that every day I still give thanks... for all that you give me... it may seem that this song is a metaphor for loving... may it not be a disappointment, it is ... my dance with the sea!..."

The sun is rising, I'm coming to you. Dawn arrived. I'm in you.

# Even Tar surrenders. Nagasaki, June 2018

Humanity progressed blindly and madly towards catastrophic warming. Aimsa participated in the United Nations International Panel on Climate Change, which warned that at the current rate of emissions, there were only ten years left to prevent global warming from skyrocketing to uncontrollable levels. Three years had passed since the Paris meeting in which Aimsa and Fernando participated, and only then were commitments starting to be approved. Then came the verifications, the exceptions, and surely, the breaches. The world reacted slowly, late, and with a mixture of anthropocentric arrogance, complacency with harming other forms of life, and almost unconsciousness of its self-destruction.

Aimsa calculated that the new global meeting in Katowice, Poland, "the work program to implement the Paris Agreement," would cause a hundred thousand tons of CO2 emissions. It was like watching a patient bleed out, barely deciding to put a band-aid on after long discussions and still waiting several days to put it on. Moreover, global warming itself was already calling for more emissions: China, the country with the highest net emissions - although one-fifth in emissions per person and in cumulative emissions compared to the United States - had increased its emissions by continuing to fuel its factories and growing middle class with coal because droughts from climate change had reduced hydroelectric power production.

Thanda sent Aimsa a calculation of the excess deaths if the emission rate continued. He published it on an internet think tank under the title "*Climate Change: A War Without Weapons*." In his mathematical models, he estimated over two hundred million excess deaths during the century, especially in those born after 1990, when they would be over 60 years old, and in less polluting countries. But even with all the evidence of imminent disaster, sufficient commitments could not be reached. The solution was sought in new energy sources technology, but without reducing consumption. There was also a search for an exit through "carbon credits" by paying the ridiculous sum of one dollar per ton in excess, and again, as twenty-five years earlier, the World Bank began to do, "putting a price on human life," very different depending on where each person was born.

Meanwhile, waves of migration from Central America to the United States crossing Mexico, and from Africa and the Middle East to Europe crossing the Sahara and the Mediterranean, continued to increase. They were fueled by the effects of climate change from polluting countries, speculating with the world's wealth, and building higher and higher walls to protect their privileges. The United Nations adopted the "Global Compact for Migration" and the "Global Compact on Refugees" but again, non-binding, full of declarations of good intentions and without any commitment to permeate the absurd borders that maintained, like staunch dams, wealth in some countries and the exploitation of natural resources and their people in others.

Hundreds of thousands of Mexican and Central American migrants hypnotized by the "American dream" crossed in all imaginable ways between Tijuana and San Diego. Among them had furtively crossed the border Menal, Hubert's Eritrean partner, and had been, as she wished, arrested in a North American immigration prison. Trump had been building a five-meter wall that would be seen, like the Great Wall of China, a thousand years later, from the Moon. In addition, he had increased border guards who pursued migrants jumping the wall, encouraged by his president's hate speech. While serving her sentence and her asylum request as a fleeing from Eritrea and a communist government and an enemy of the "Uncle Sam" was being processed, Menal witnessed how thousands of Central American children were separated from their migrant parents and locked in cages.

After his debates with Joseph at the singularity conference, Jonay continued his journey by bike towards the southern border of California. He met scientists who were developing quantum computing, with speeds up to a thousand times faster than binary, and that would accelerate the "takeover" of artificial intelligence. Thanda thought that the difference between humans and machines was the conscious desire for common good through empathy. The problem was not the increase in capacity, and therefore control, of globally interconnected artificial intelligence, but the atrophy of human empathy and consciousness, focused on individuality, half the world to thrive, the other to survive. He thought how eco-villages were gradually becoming "reserves of empathy and consciousness," more necessary than ever.

The eco-village network now had almost fifteen million eco-villagers in over fifty thousand communities in almost every country in the world. In the previous year, more than ten eco-villages had been founded every day. When they reached a "maturity" level where more than half of their adult eco-villagers were born in the village, they offered to sponsor at least one more each year. The elders of the "mother" eco-village lived for a while with the founders of the emerging one. Eco-villages were joining in eco-islands like Eila and in eco-regions in many places. Eila remained a reference for many, with its life without properties or hierarchies, and had already achieved independence from the Canary Islands and Spain.

Aimsa concluded her journey through Siberia by train, crossed the eastern part of China where she delved into the thoughts of Confucius, who sought peace and harmony but structured in hierarchy and obedience. The eco-villages in China were persecuted for challenging the hierarchy, despite expressing, with the essence of Eila, the purest sense of Marxism in its essence of sharing. She could better understand how the mixture of Confucius and Marx had engendered a rigid system of hierarchy and submission and generated a fierce capitalism almost as an existential sense. China had become the world's factory and thus lifted five hundred million Chinese out of extreme poverty in just three decades. Without China's progress, the world's life expectancy would be five years less. But such progress came at a high price: individual consciousness had practically been lost, along with its expression in the freedom to challenge hierarchies. The frenzied world factory competed as the largest polluter with the United States. To feed its people, genetically modified soybeans were imported from crops invading Brazil and Argentina. With them, billions of chickens were fed, whose lives provided energy, who knows with what pain, to around three hundred million Chinese workers in factories fueled by Arabian black gold. Those factories not only exported their products worldwide but also began to respond to a growing domestic consumption demand. The eagerness to consume had become a religion in China, replacing Confucius's harmony of simplicity. Aimsa calculated that if China progressed to the level of consumption of the United States, it would need the entirety of the world's oil and would accelerate warming to irreversible levels in ten years, incompatible with life before the end of the century. What could stop this alienated consumption that, along with the burning of fossils, spread throughout the world, including Confucius's country?

She met an old Berkeley classmate, Shannon, who was promoting an eco-city project in Huangbaiyu with Bill McDonough. Bill was an architect who, along with a German chemist named Michael, had become known for his concept of "cradle to cradle," creating a continuous cycle between creating and reusing to recreate, societies without waste. Aimsa remembered how among her Ndebele friends, no one needed to invent what nature and communities in simple harmony with it had been doing for millennia. They had identified up to thirty thousand human consumption products that could be constantly recycled. They tried to apply the concept in a village in the Beinxi province by building houses with adobe and compacted earth and giving each housing and consumption product a "circular economy" cycle.

Aimsa thought that these concepts were still anchored in hoarding, consumption, urbanization, and the market, without communal empathy, without direct harmony with nature.

Shanon was paid by the Intel computer corporation, which at the time was making chips for the Pentagon, and Bill worked with Ford, one of the biggest polluters due to combustion cars, and Nike, unperturbed by accusations of child labor. They did not question the hoarding of a few. Aimsa thought they merely painted this hoarding cancer green, perhaps even emission-free, but without the empathy and love for nature bathed in it.

She arrived in Japan, where twenty years earlier she hugged a tree in Kyoto when saddened and powerless, she first attended as a representative of the eco-village network the world's first attempt to curb its greed to suffocate the planet. Twenty years had passed, and the world continued its suicidal race towards a harakiri without honor or conscience. Only Europe seemed to have flattened its emissions curve, but still at levels much higher than the ethical threshold Thanda had calculated in his mathematical models. And seventy years had passed since the Americans dropped their atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Aimsa pilgrimaged through Shinto shrines to immerse herself in the feeling of Japanese culture. She felt peace knowing that in that way of living there were no sacred texts, hierarchies, commandments, or sermons. It encouraged "inner dance" in front of nature, awestruck by it and its millions of "kamis," and in gratitude for being part of it. Everything surrounding people, trees, stones, sounds, rain... were kamis that had a spirit, tama. For two weeks, she pilgrimaged through Shinto shrines, located in beautiful places of nature, in which a rectangle surrounded by pebbles inspired connection with the beauty of nature and its good spirits. She felt some unease with the polarity that many Shintoists gave to "kamis," good and bad. She felt that there was a foundation of goodness and fullness in everything, and a connection to universal energy, as in Buddhism that inspired her from childhood, but now in Myanmar was cruelly persecuting the Rohingya Muslims.

It seemed that everything humanity touched turned it into hierarchy, doctrine, power of some and submission of others, polarities of good and bad, smart, and wise, champions and failures...

After her pilgrimage through Shintoism, Aimsa convened a meeting of the nearly two thousand eco-villages that had been created on that magical island of extreme contrasts between the ancestral and the modern. A ninety-year-old woman, a victim of the bombing in Nagasaki with visible scars on her face, took the floor:

* Dear brothers and sisters in harmony,
* Eighty years ago today, an invention of destruction fell from the sky and burned my home, my family, my community, my city... and my life. My parents and my husband, who were at their workplaces, died from the blast. Their bodies could never be identified among the mountains of thousands of charred corpses. My young son, whom I was breastfeeding, died in my arms with horrific burns. His screams of terror during hours of agony echoed in my soul for the rest of my life. Only my eldest daughter, who was three years old at the time, and I survived. At the age of three, my daughter developed acute leukemia from the effects of radiation and died within a few months. I couldn't understand why there was so much hatred, so much pain, such early deaths, and, above all, why fate or whoever directed it with its strings, wanted me to keep on living. My face was disfigured, I lost almost all of my vision, my throat narrowed and prevented me from swallowing anything other than liquids for the rest of my life, and my body was covered in scars, and no one has seen it since then because of my pain and shame. But, above all, for many years I had no desire to live. Every night I wished to sleep and be taken to a dream that would reunite me with my family. That was my "ikigai," my reason for living: to wait to no longer live. But the sun rose again, and with it, my nightmare of a life of pain, sadness, deep disappointment in humanity, and an unbearable void of my family's absence, punctuated by my son's screams. Japan signed peace humiliated by those who burned our lives and surrendered to technology and commerce, filling the country with cars, computers, and machines and exporting them to the rest of the world, and rebuilding cities with skyscrapers from its ruins where people sleep in capsules, live in small rooms, commute crowded in the subway, and work tirelessly in factories to export machines and thereby import Arab oil, Russian minerals, and American wheat, and thus continue to feed machines and people in their frantic race to live to produce. Only in some rest during the week did some seek a moment to practice tai chi in a park. That is the path of our humanity that once had wars between nations and now has them between people, competing to have, titles, properties, and relationships, forgetting to be. To be.
* Twenty years ago, an old sage visited our city. On a poster in the rice shop announcing a conference, I saw his image. His gaze was serene and shy, and full of light and intelligence. I hardly ever looked into the eyes of any person. Perhaps because I had lost faith in human beings. But this time I felt a strange full confidence and went to listen to him. Masanobu Fukuoka was eighty-five years old, and had a serene rhythm, but deeply aware of everything around him. He explained the philosophy of Wu Wei, not forcing things, and how in that sense of surrendering to the natural cycle of life he developed a very different agriculture from what he was taught as a scientist. He had been observing natural cycles for seventy years and adapting his planting and feeding to them. He cared about feeding the soil, or rather, letting it feed itself, especially with the diversity of bacteria and plants. He didn't plow, or use fertilizers or manure, or remove "weeds" or use any kind of "pesticide," or prune. He planted vegetables to eat or trees to reforest with clay balls, wild herbs, and manure, which he called "Nendo dango," and covered the ground with the remains of the plants cultivated in the previous harvest that dried.
* After his lecture, I approached him and told him that it was the first time since the atomic bomb cut my life short that I felt emotion. He invited me to visit the family farm on Shukoku Island. I went for a week and stayed ten years learning from each of his steps, his knowledge, and, above all, his wise and serene surrender to the beauty of natural cycles. In autumn, we planted rice and white clover and winter grain, covered with rice straw. It was magical to see rye, barley, and clover sprout immediately. Then we harvested the rye and barley, dried their stalks, threshed them, and spread the straw over the fields, which received the July monsoon rains and sprouted the rice. So, we didn't have to flood the fields, and the rice had more grains. Then the Japanese government came to buy our patent, and we refused. Knowledge, like everything in life, must flow and fertilize itself. Alongside Pierre Rabhi's methods in Algeria, we helped Somali villages reforest their mountains and green their dry meadows. Working in the field doesn't require hoe blows hurting the earth, or yokes of oxen sinking the plow into their bowels. It is not necessary to produce or eat so much. Never more than necessary. And so, the work was not heavy or burdensome. We delighted in the smells, the flowers, the animals frolicking, the flavors, the sounds, life... I learned from Masanobu, who refused to be called neither master nor wise man, only an "attentive observer" of nature, to work in community with nature, not "against it." To see ourselves as allies of plants and animals.
* When Masanobu passed away, surrounded by love, with a beautiful smile and covered in his crops, I returned to my neighborhood in Nagasaki. I had to bring that light to the city that still mourned the wounds of the fire that killed more than a hundred thousand people in one day and more slowly another hundred thousand due to the horrific radiation, including my entire family. Since then, it was my *ikigai*, my reason for life. I gathered my community, told them about my life after the bomb, and the rebirth in Shukoky. I first encouraged the neighbors and then the mayor to plan to cultivate in their gardens and in the parks with the wise rhythm of nature. When more and more people began to organize to take care of the land and feed themselves from its generous fruit, we began to chip away at the asphalt to free the streets from the suffocating layer upon which cars burned fossils. But the work was hard, heavy, noisy... it couldn't be the Wei or Zen path to harmony. It was then that a young biology student named Akira suggested that we try to dilute the asphalt with some bacteria used to digest oil spills in the sea. We combined hot water and a mixture of bacteria that slowly diluted the asphalt into a natural fertilizer, which we mixed with clay and horse manure that began to replace cars. Thus, this eco-neighborhood was born.

She closed her eyes and a poem folwed from her tender soul :

Thus, my raison d'être is resurrected,

My ikigai, my purpose, revived anew.

With it, my smile blossoms unfurled,

For within me, my kin dwell, imbued.

In nature's embrace, they gracefully roam,

Mingling with the universal energy's flow.

Their luminance, a beacon guiding me home,

Even those who caused hurt, their ignorance I know.

They failed to grasp nature's sublime dance,

Life's harmonies, free from hierarchical stance.

Yet, I hold faith that light will find its chance,

In the end, we'll all dissolve into brilliance, perchance.

Gratitude swells within me for each fleeting breath,

As I slowly dissolve into life's tapestry, serene in depth.

Every moment cherished, a testament to life's finesse,

Embracing its beauty with reverence, until my last breath.

An elderly man approached and embraced her emotionally.

Aimsa felt a profound force of hope.

# We are all that we love. Ukuzwana, Bulililamangwe, september 2018

It was dawn at the Ukuzwana mission. Everything seemed to herald another day. The roosters began their crowing, dutifully fulfilling their responsibility. The dry savannah reflected the reddish dawn, the acacias began to unveil their elongated shadows, the bustle stirred from the workers' houses, from Thandiwe and Marco's parish-home, from the teachers' homes, and from Patxi and NoLwasi's home.

Patxi was already seventy-nine years old. He had spent almost fifty years at that mission where he had poured out his soul and found life's most beautiful sense and magic. So many years under the Kalahari sun had caused incipient cataracts. The sun had wreaked havoc on his fair skin, leaving precancerous spots on his face and back, which Thandiwe treated with herbal dressings. His body had begun to stoop, and he walked with an "induna" (tribal head) cane carved for him by his grandson Félix from a polished mopane branch. He always wore his brother's beret.

Patxi left his house at dawn, as he did every morning, heading towards the "Nour jacaranda," which was now over twenty meters tall and shaded the parish where she was born. There lay the remains of his brother Haka, which he saw transformed into its sturdy trunk, its adventurous branches reaching into the air, and its purple flowers already beginning to bloom that September, the southern spring. He meditated on those who had poured so much love into his life: his parents, in their own way, his uncle Patxi, who inspired him on the path of love, his brothers Agustín on the family farm, Beatriz from her brave love and Haka in his fight for noble causes, Anwele, who guided them in the fight against AIDS and prejudices, John, with whom he shared so much from afar for a harmonious humanity, and thousands of people who asked him to accompany them in their final hours in that way of life.

Since the day he was hypnotized by his uncle's prayer at just seven years old, through his time in the seminary, his walks in a cassock speaking of peace to the Basque "gudaris" (soldiers), like Haka was, his arrival at the mission, his defense against Jeremy's fifth brigade, his struggles against the impositions of the bishop and the dogmas of the Vatican... and, above all, the noble and serene hand of NoLwasi... he transformed his faith in a God and a prophet into a peaceful feeling of a magical universe where love flowed, bathing everything, and taking us from its wake to other dimensions still unknown... The greatest generosity was to dissolve into everything, wanting nothing for oneself, not even individual existence.

He remembered and could almost see and hear, those who were central to that great family, and who were far away. Beatriz and Meimuna still lived in the family farmhouse, which was also the communal home of a beautiful eco-village in Navarre. Jonay continued to study the future at the frontiers of knowledge in California. Joseph had stayed in Silicon Valley to work with Musk and Kurzweil on "global public goods." Nothando had joined him, playing the violin in hospitals and prisons while Nayra did yoga and breathing exercises to release the pain of those souls shored by capitalism. Félix went to Cuba to study medicine with Buhleve at the Latin American School of Medicine. Nour combined film work and social causes in America with caring for the Mustang reserve at White Lake. Adam, along with Cassie, traveled through Europe making fascinating nature videos with a drone that Joseph engineered. Unai continued his nutrition studies in Cuba with Thanda, who encouraged, in complicity with Buhleve and Elias, the transformation of communist Marxism towards Eila's vision, in communities of human and natural harmony.

Patxi felt it was an immense gift how his almost eighty years of life had bathed among so many wonderful human beings. In all people, even in Jeremy and those who expressed hatred and violence, he saw a gaze of tenderness through which spoke a soul thirsty for love. He saw it in animals, in trees, and even in the kopjes.

He was lost in his thoughts when NoLwasi approached.

* Livukile Baba. (We have awakened to the day, Father)
* Do you know what I think, NoLwasi?
* Tell me.
* That "there is nothing that I do not want to love."

They returned together to the porch of their house where they had breakfast together. At that moment, a young woman approached them with some distress, asking if Patxi could accompany her elderly grandfather in his final moments, as was his express wish. That family lived in Mayobodo, about fifteen kilometers away. The mission had been without fuel for the pickup truck for several weeks, as the country, with extreme inflation and "billions-of-dollars" bills of little value, could hardly import oil. Faced with this situation, the young woman said that a donkey-drawn cart from a relative would come to meet them. Patxi wanted to start the journey to meet the cart, and NoLwasi accompanied him. They walked the entire route, almost four hours. They later learnt that a cart wheel went flat due to a huge acacia thorn. The scorching sun of the Kalahari together with the unplanned hike without water left Patxi exhausted. Despite the fatigue, upon arriving at the kraal, he gave all the affection and tenderness of his soul to the old man on his deathbed, and to his entire family in their grief. Just his presence and his gentle gaze and soft voice alleviated the families and dispelled doubts that souls transitioned into the energy that submersed everything. On the way back, in the already repaired cart and under a rain that blessed the dry fields where the sorghum was beginning to sprout, Patxi felt dizzy and weak. He leaned back into NoLwasi's lap, his faithful companion.

Upon arriving home, NoLwasi asked for Thandiwe and Marco's help to carry Patxi in their arms to bed, as he could barely move. Thandiwe noticed he was dehydrated, showed signs of hypoglycemia, and measured a very low blood pressure. She administered an intravenous drip and stayed by his beloved father's side, along with NoLwasi.

Patxi began losing consciousness, barely opening his eyes at midnight to look at his life partner and his daughter Thandiwe, who remembered how Patxi had accompanied his mother in her final embrace of life. The two embraced him with profound love. They could not imagine that such a constant source of goodness could ever fade away. Patxi, with his last thread of energy, looked at them with the deepest tenderness and said:

* Ngiyalithanda mama wami, umntwana wami... (in Ndebele: I thank you, my mother, my child...)

NoLwasi lay down beside him and hugged him from behind. Her face rested on his silver hair and bare chest at his back, matching each breath as her arms covered his chest with warmth and peace. Patxi's breathing faded away as NoLwasi felt for a moment the profound desire to go with him, with his parents, with Masora, with Anwele, to be carried away by the magical spiritual world that lived within her.

* I will always be in you; you will always be in me... my soulmate...
* Jangoiko Naivadu (in Basque: God willing...)

Those were the last words of that wonderful human being who irradiated a corner of the world with so much love for over half a century. Around him and his vision of love, beyond the borders of religions and other supposed truths, of hierarchies and other made-up borders, grew a family of brave souls around the world.

NoLwasi asked to stay embraced to her beloved until the sun set and to wash him, giving him the final sesame oil massage, telling him everything she felt for him, perhaps even some feelings she hadn't shared before, even if he no longer responded...

In addition to Thandiwe and Marco, Helen and Félix arrived from Bulawayo. Hundreds of people from nearby kraals began to appear. They sang with deep Zulu "mmmmm" melodies and the song that Nothando composed from Jonay's verses about his father's death. As the sun set, people came from all over Buliliamangwe and other areas of Matabeleland and the Sibithanda network. Women and children entered the "house of every-one," as Patxi called the old church, while the men stayed outside, singing their profound feelings. Messages arrived from the extended family around the world.

Beatriz, now over ninety years old, said from the family farmhouse in Navarre that her "Anaya" (brother) was the one who inspired her to emerge from the darkness.

Jonay, from California, wrote that since he joined Patxi in Ukuzwana over thirty years ago, he never stopped feeling his light, and he knew it would always be so.

Joseph wrote saying that his mother went to a world of tenderness that Patxi showed her, the same one she always knew in him as her father and guide.

Nothando sent a melody with her violin, which she would play for the rest of her life, connecting with the beautiful soul that welcomed her mother with Jonay and NoLwasi and then her as a daughter.

Thandiwe said she couldn't understand how her father's departure didn't make her feel sad or orphaned, but rather full of gratitude and light.

Adam wrote expressing that his father Patxi would always be in the depths of his heart, and he already felt him in the entire universe surrounding him.

Unai, however, felt a profound sadness at not being able to see him physically again and said he would search for him in his memories and dreams because he still needed his hand.

Aimsa shared with everyone that, on behalf of the network of spiritual eco-villages, spirituality was inspired by that being of light, who now shone from the stars... although, as Jonay said... there would be not enough stars to evoke so much love.

And Thanda, from Cuba, wrote to them saying that shortly after his biological father died, Patxi, his spiritual father, left, and he would never forget his constant tenderness, perhaps the greatest force for bravely flowing love, Tenderness, and Courage.

They buried him next to his brother, embracing the extensive roots of the jacaranda tree of Nour's birth. Many people left written words of remembrance and gratitude for Patxi, on stones that were left around the "house of everyone."

NoLwasi said a few words:

* Our Sindisabantu (the one who saves people) has gone to the world of spirits, from where he will continue to send us his light,
* Jonay, ulibona, said to his father as he left, "there will not be enough stars" to understand and remember so much love that he gave,
* Thandabantu, ulilapa, sang to him that his light unites him with the universe,
* Today I want to evoke the life of this good man who sought to give his heart to those who needed it, every single day of his life. Patxi was born in a Basque farmhouse, a kraal in the mountains of a distant country called Spain, where nature surrounded a simple life. His uncle was a priest, a type of healer, and he inspired him to seek in Jesus' life the keys to life with love. So, he followed in his footsteps and entered the Jesuit seminary, a school of healers who read a lot, where he studied philosophy, trying to understand life, and theology, trying to understand Mkulumkulu. He was sent to the Empandeni mission to teach the life of Jesus, and shortly thereafter, he requested joining this mission, which had been in ruins since a fire ten years earlier. That happened forty years ago, halfway through his life. Patxi found allies in the dream of building a place where everyone could find shelter for their sorrows, relief for their ailments, and companionship in their loneliness; where everyone could collaborate in solidarity for just causes. I met him a few years later, and our souls were intertwined forever. The place where we were born, the color of our skin, spirituality and culture, food, language... were all very different, and love dissolved all these differences, the complicity of our souls that vibrated together in joys and sorrows, in dreams and fears. We felt that next to each other we gave full meaning to existence, and together we felt strong against any challenge. We built in community thirty kilometers of poles and cables to have electricity. The health center and the school were built, and then the church where the community could gather to feel and live love among everyone. Patxi defended the community from the fifth brigade, from unfair hassles of the government or the bishopric, as he was creating a place of love without hierarchies. He didn't like overseeing anything but loved serving everyone. He came to celebrate life and accompany death wherever he was asked. In the most remote kraals or in the middle of fields and forests. He learned to implore Mkulumkulu and our ancestors for rains and plagues. With Jonay, he turned the center into a hospital and the warehouse into an operating room. With Anwele, we all fought against AIDS, and with Thanda, we began to give hope for life. His brother Haka fought against the networks of evil that abused the orphaned children of AIDS. Our sons Adam and Unai were born, who joined our adopted children Joseph, Thandiwe, and Nothando, who like so many thousands in our land lost their parents, and so many hundreds more who always had their home in the mission... Jonay and Thanda were followed by Buhleve and Elias, and now Thandiwe and Marco... Life with Patxi flowed in love. He opposed hierarchies and absolute truths like those the bishop and the Vatican wanted to impose. And with John, he inspired thousands of eco-villages around the world in spirituality in harmony with nature, which every day reveals to us the miracle and beauty of living. Since we embraced each other under a fierce storm thirty-five years ago, we had not parted for a single day. Yesterday, embraced by his lifeless body, I felt a deep desire to travel with him to the universe of the spirits... But I also felt that he was asking me to keep the flame of our mission's love alive.
* Obaba, omama, obudi, odade, onmntwana wami... (fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, children...), many of you felt Patxi's tenderness accompanying you in the most difficult moments, in the darkest doubts, in the coldest fears, and you celebrated with him moments of joy and hope. Today is a day of sadness for not having him with his smile and the warmth of his embrace, but it is also a day of joy and gratitude for having had his light for so long, and for continuing to feel it forever. Patxi taught me that "*we are everything we love, and so there is no end..*.". That's how I feel him in me, and I am in him, united in the universe, without end.

She intoned, with the "mmmmm" that always moved Patxi so much, the anthem of Jonay and Nothando...

"... there will not be enough stars... to see in them all the memories… that we sowed together... that left a mark... on our paths..."

When NoLwasi returned to her empty home without Patxi, she felt a deep and icy hollowness in her heart. Something made her see herself soon reunited with Patxi, but at the same time, she was overwhelmed by a vertigo... like when Masora felt her calling to go with Mandhla. She needed to pass on her knowledge... her mission...

# Cruel Humankind. New York, December 2018

Humanity was advancing in its knowledge from hydrogen fusion accelerators trying to mimic the sun, nanotechnology with crystals studying and modifying molecules, gene silencing and editing techniques, Chinese space probes to the dark side of the moon and American ones to Mars, a meteorite, and even interstellar space, the detection of gravitational waves from neutrinos emanating from black hole mergers from which wormholes possibly connected to multiverses...

The ability of humans to imagine and depict their reality in frontal abstraction was fascinating. As was their perversion in bringing that knowledge into a hierarchical world of fears and powers.

A tumultuous year ended with Trump threatening the world every day from his arrogant tweets and the arrival to power of a "Trump-of-the-South," Bolsonaro, in Brazil. The suffering of the war in Syria continued, a battlefield between great powers for control of oil. Europe tore itself apart with Brexit and the unsupportive disUnion in the face of migration of those fleeing climate disaster and bombs, largely caused by those closing their borders. In China and Russia, Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin clinged to power as presidents-for-life. The United Nations discussed climate disaster, the need for nuclear disarmament, and the defense of human rights, with hardly any influence on a humanity that continued to march firmly towards its suicide and causing the unjust biocide of much of the life in the planet.

Joseph and Nothando set out on their return to their beloved Ukuzwana with the feeling of emptiness from Patxi's departure and the deep desire for reunion with NoLwasi, who was left almost alone, along with Thandiwe, to continue maintaining the beautiful light of the mission. Joseph sold his solar monoplane prototype to SpaceX and used the proceeds to build a four-seater solar plane to embark on his long journey, stopping in eco-villages and bringing eco-villagers together to meet and share, like the pollination of bees and the migratory movements of birds that they observed with fascination.

Jonay and Aimsa, after their trips to California and Japan, met in Portland and began a five-thousand-kilometer return journey in a hundred days by bike, sleeping in eco-villages and proposing a "tax objection" strategy by which they declared themselves non-contributors to the industry and military structure of the country. They meticulously studied the direct and indirect taxes that contributed to the imperial war machine and avoided payments of taxes except for those related to local taxes to finance health, social protection, and education. They devised the strategy with Noam Chomsky, whom they visited at his new position at the University of Tucson, Arizona, and with whom they felt a genuine connection. There were already more than a million eco-villagers in almost three thousand eco-villages across the country. The impact would be symbolic, but it could resonate in cities and even states across the country to stop contributing to walls, weapons, and deaths worldwide.

Nour awaited them in the wild horse reserve in White Lake. Ten years had passed since she told her parents that she did not want to continue drowning her heart and imprisoning her mind in the Brooklyn school. With her parents and wonderful people she discovered around the world, and above all through her own observation, imagination, and even dreams, she had learned to build her own home, prepare a permaculture garden, build a sailboat, identify more than five hundred plant species, use more than a hundred of them as medicines, know more than two hundred types of animals and learn to communicate with about fifty of them, she learned about the intrigue of world power and spirituality with her mother Aimsa, about the human body and health harmony with Jonay, Buhleve, and Thandiwe, about connection with ancestors with NoLwasi, about religion with Patxi, about harmony with nature with John and Umbela, about how the brain works and how to edit beautiful videos with Adam, about climbing and nutrition with Unai, about engineering with limited means with Joseph, about music with Nothando, about economics with Moyes, about equity and justice with Thanda, about life in the oceans with Cassie, about history from the stories left by Haka and many more ideas from many people she met while sailing the Atlantic, riding through America and Europe, walking and observing in hundreds of eco-villages and even in the bustling cities of New York, Paris, London, Los Angeles, Tokyo, Amsterdam... where they photographed their beauty and she could convey messages of harmony, denounce perversion, and fight against it, as in the "Black Lives Matter" movement with which she passionately allied herself. What would have become of such a wealth of strength and light if it had been confined to the narrow channels of the Brooklyn school?

She created a sanctuary for horses on about three thousand hectares of protected mountainous area in West Virginia. They brought injured, old, sick horses and those rescued from being euthanized, in addition to lost wild Mustangs. There were already more than ten thousand horses living in the reserve, a thousand of them born there, in freedom. Nour built herself a cabin where she lived part of the year and rode her favorite mare, Rasta, among the herds that followed them freely. She had met some young people, like a Frenchman Paul, with whom she lived for a short time, but she soon felt that her freedom was more sacred than feeling accompanied. Her free and brave soul did not accept any reins or spurs, as she liked to ride, just holding onto the mane, letting the horse set the direction and rhythm, and adapting to its magical and powerful rhythm. And so she lived, fearlessly surrendered to life, feeling it without barriers, trusting the adventures that arose, and feeling passionately the passage of time, the wind when riding. Nour's soul would never be imprisoned in any hierarchy, nor labeled by any supposed "truth."

She felt that no country in the world or any United Nations treaty protected animals from human harm. She allied with an organization in Virginia, near the wild horse reserve, called People for Ethical Treatment for Animals, to investigate the cruel treatment of companies blindly purchased by the alienated consumption society. They managed to trespass one of the IAMS laboratories, a company acquired in 1999 by Procter & Gamble, and took photos of the horrors to which the "experimental animals" were subjected. They then discovered how Nestlé Purina Petcare, a giant in the global "dog food" business, which also ground up the bodies of other animals, blindness, or hypocrisy of the supposed "love for animals" in the consumer society, experimented in a complex located in Saint Louis, Missouri, near the headquarters of Monsanto, with more than a thousand dogs and cats with gruesome tortures. To profit from the growing business of dog food with renal insufficiency, from too much nitrogen from ingesting remains of other sacrificed animals, they induced renal failure in dogs to later experiment with its cure with a low-protein diet that they commercialized with photos of love for pets. They promoted boycotts against the consumption of products from those companies and industries of horror, with little follow-up from society, ignorant of the pain behind what they blindly bought and even moved by photos of affection to white retriever puppies.

As the second article of Umbela's decalogue, a reference for eco-villages and adapted in the constitution of Eila, said:

"Every life, human, animal, and plant, is unique and sacred, containing all the magic and beauty of the universe, and in each of them, we all live. We are born, we grow, we feel, we suffer, we rejoice, we die, all in each one of us. Therefore, we profess veneration for the life that the Earth mother engenders and nurtures, and we dedicate ourselves to the harmony among all living beings, respecting all lives equally, which we call harmony."

However, twenty-three years after the decalogue was written, outside of eco-villages, animal life was mistreated, humiliated, and murdered without any sensitivity to animal pain. Nour calculated that more than one hundred and fifty billion animal lives were sacrificed for human whim each year, about twenty per year per person, some as large as a cow, others, two-thirds, fish caught in the sea. Each human ate an average of more than fifteen hundred animals throughout their life. Living beings were sacrificed for nutrition every second, in what Nour called "the triple perversion": without necessity, without consciousness, and without compassion.

It was unnecessary: ten percent of humans were vegetarian, and their life expectancy was not lower. The more than twenty million people living in eco-villages demonstrated natural and social harmony, with well-being and mortality rates lower than non-ecological surrounding communities, at all ages. With her younger brother Unai, Nour had researched the effects of meat and its derivatives, including dairy, on the human body: it caused chronic diseases, heart exhaustion from hypertension, kidney exhaustion from urea overload, and intestinal inflammation from lactase. There were enough arable hectares in the world, more than ten billion. With just one billion, a tenth of them, the entire humanity could eat healthily if at least ten percent of the population devoted themselves to caring for the land diligently, without machines that injured the soil or chemicals that poisoned it. With Thanda and his passion for numbers inherited from his father, they had calculated and rounded that, with ten percent of the land, looked after by ten percent of humanity, life expectancy could be increased by ten percent. Other ten percent of the land could serve as residential areas. The rest of the forests, savannas, mountains, swamps, and mangroves for free flora and fauna would be “human-free” enabling their constant flow in biodiversity, with cross-fertilization by birds, insects, bees, and microorganisms and avoid cloning and industrial crop chemicals which were turning lands into biodiversity deserts, a mirror of the soils they ravaged.

It was not conscious: less than ten percent, again a constant number, of human beings and their "killer" eagerness for other forms of life, had looked, not even once, into the eyes of the beings that others killed for them. They only saw the package with images of alive and even happy animals and the meat on their plates. The almost total absence of awareness of the animal food they were eating made most humans, carnivores, non-free beings, as they committed the cruelest act, ending other lives, without knowledge of the pain caused. As non-free beings, they followed inertia of customs they called "cultures" with anthropocentric and ethnocentric arrogance. They were manipulated by the power of the livestock industry and its link to powerful financial capital and its tentacles in all governments around the world. In fact, with her mother Aimsa, Nour reflected on another effect that not only nullified but also reversed consciousness: when animals sensed their cruel death, they released cortisol and adrenaline due to their sense of terror. As they agonized, pain invaded their bodies with other substances not yet known and contracted into molecular forms that were ingested by the "passive killer." Those who consumed them did not see the pain of their demand for such massive daily horror caused by humans. Aimsa was convinced that such constant "pain" intake made people more aggressive and more insensitive to the suffering of others. With Thanda, they analyzed data, graphs, and maps showing that the most carnivorous societies in history had been the most aggressive and imperialistic.

It was not compassionate: the majority was unconscious of the immense pain for not seeing it or, cowardly, not wanting to see it. They felt no compassion for not seeing, hearing, or feeling the screams and looks of terror of what would later be a tasty food on their plate. It was also so capricious, human insensitive blindness that according to cultures felt tenderness for some animals and total insensitivity to others. Nour was intrigued by how less than one percent of humans, who were in daily contact with animal death through fishing, slaughterhouses, hunting, or even the "entertainment" of animal death such as bullfighting, could be so cruel. She spoke with fishermen, butchers, hunters, and bullfighters. None of them thought that the animals they killed suffered. Their exposure to animal death was so intense, fishermen with more than a hundred lives drowned in air per day, butchers with about fifty bled to death, that their threshold of sensitivity had become drenched, and they did not see, or their conscious or unconscious sought all kinds of justifications or evasion mechanisms, in their work, no responsibility or effect of suffering. It was the extreme end of unconsciousness.

She sought out people who had left that activity because they had felt the animal's pain, and found chilling testimonies of animal suffering on their way to the slaughterhouse: the anguish of fish seeking water to breathe as they suffocated outside of it, the cries of cows as they were separated from their calves, the ominous machines that slaughtered chickens, turkeys, and rabbits, or even detected male chicks that were useless for egg laying and were ground up. That was the suffering of death, perhaps only a part of the suffering of the enslaved life of animals fattening for their cruel destiny or producing milk or eggs, crowded, and fed with GMOs and hormones to produce at a rate a hundred times higher than natural until, no longer useful, they were, like the others, sacrificed. How could humans be deaf to such immense and unnecessary animal suffering?

With filmmakers and photographers who understood the power of their gaze, Nour prepared a campaign against the sacrifice of twenty million turkeys on the American Thanksgiving holiday and a month later for Christmas time, once again, and in the name of "the religion of love," paradoxically the most carnivorous, to alert to the sacrifice of hundreds of millions of lambs, pigs, fish, shellfish, and so many lives that "festooned" the tables of the "celebration of love."

One day, while waiting to speak with butchers at a slaughterhouse on the outskirts of New York, she was able to look through the cracks of one of the wooden trailers that brought in livestock fattened for their cruel fate, into the eyes of a cow. She composed a beautiful song that Jonay and Nothando accompanied on the violin from afar:

I looked into her pupil; her pupil looked at me

She begged anxiously; her soul pierced mine...

With its shine it exuded, a profound emotion.

Its fragile tremble pleaded, begged for compassion...

From the jet-black outwards, I saw a beautiful field of honey.

It spoke to me sincerely; it told me its cruel fate...

Surrounding the velvet, a field of salt reigned

And the sky reflected, in crystal tears...

I felt that deep lament, of her tormented soul.

A sigh tore through the wind, pierced me like a sword...

Thus, I could feel, from that criminal wagon a plea to all humanity:

I too know what it is to love, to see my children grow, to feel accompanied, to see another sunrise...

Nour's campaign, those of many others, and the example of spiritual eco-villages, despite the manipulative and defamatory campaigns of the billion-dollar animal food industry and the threatening phone calls she suspected came from "*Total Intelligence*" increased the proportion of people who became vegetarian and vegan and felt tenderness for the many beautiful forms of life on the planet clamoring for harmony.

# The return to the Middle Ages. San Francisco, April 2019

Nayra had already spent two and a half years in Berkeley, far from Thanda. Their encounters during the first year in Cuba were frequent but brief, taking advantage of her business trips collaborating on Hubert's documentary, "Epicentro." In the second year, saddened by Thanda's father's departure, their meetings became less frequent, and by the third year, they had hardly been able to see each other. The distance hurt, especially Thanda, who was left alone in the beautiful house in Miramar. But love prevailed. And an illusion with no clear horizon painted a distant home amidst mists that destiny insisted on clouding.

She had changed jobs and houses several times to be able to give her children a humble home surrounded by an affluent neighborhood of Berkeley, where they could be close to their parents and where her children could often see their father and attend public schools without drugs or violence.

Paradoxically, the almost only free public service in the country, education, was the big machete that tore through the social fabric with scars of deep inequalities. Wealthy neighborhoods had schools with parents who donated for complementary investments, organized trips, and activities, and attracted teachers with solid curricula well indoctrinated to indoctrinate well (educate: "fatten up the livestock") in the philosophy of the American dream: compete to be a billionaire; the capitalist translation of the "pursuit of happiness" from the constitution "We the People...".

The network of schoolmates from elite schools and universities (the first division: Ivy League) was more important for climbing the social pyramid than knowledge or effort, and of course much more than values of solidarity and common good, which subtracted points for climbing the cruel social ladder.

In contrast, poor neighborhoods had schools with many dysfunctional families and single mothers who could not even buy books or send their children with healthy food, let aloneorganize or even join trips or sports competitions. There, violence, and drugs thrived, attracting teachers with no opportunities in well-off schools, and except for a few heroes like Potoer´s "rebellion in the classrooms," they surrendered to a system of violence, exclusion, and academic failure. The "pursuit of happiness" was in those environments a "big mac" watching a football game or a reality show alternating with sermons from sects, deceptive advertising, or manipulative political speeches. Lives passed by to fatten up, become hypertensive, diabetic, medicated, lose self-esteem, sleep poorly, take hypnotics and antidepressants, and at some point, have a medical emergency. If they stuck their heads out of unemployment and lacked Medicaid, they would receive medical bills that they could only pay by giving up the mortgage on their homes. Many were left at the mercy of the streets of the homeless and the Christian alms, the "charities" and the foundations of billionaires who evaded taxes to perpetuate the pyramid of injustice.

Nayra took the Bart and observed most of the gazes fixed on mobile phones and some staring blankly into space, without looking. She couldn't meet any strange gaze. Upon reaching the Mission station, she saw young people wandering, dragging their steps, looking at the ground, without even the strength to wander aimlessly. Only driven towards the next dose.

She worked in a local crafts factory and when she didn't finish too late, she went to Mint Plaza where her sister Dorothy sold flowers in a small kiosk, like Mary Poppins, amidst the skyscrapers of the world's digital giants, Google, Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, Airbnb, Amazon, and Uber, among others. Among multimillion-dollar fortunes and theaters and museums, in the Tenderloin neighborhood, young people spilled out onto the cold, gray sidewalks as they placated the fury of their opioid withdrawal syndromes that had taken control of their lives.

Other streets of San Francisco and all cities in the country were filling up with tents made of fine nylon from China. They housed thousands of homeless people whom the system spat out of its mad race to spend. The ten percent, earning almost a thousand dollars a day in the world digital manipulation business, inflated an inaccessible real estate market for those still working with the sweat of their brows.

Nayra walked through those sad streets of pain and marginalization while dealers on every corner offered her "girl" (cocaine) or "boy" (heroin), to smoke in rocks or inject into veins. The road to hell had begun for many of those souls years ago in some medical consultation where treatments with opioids began to be promoted for traumas, surgeries, or ailments of any kind. After a few weeks, a few stopped taking them. But often the ailments became chronic while dependence on those drugs took over their bodies. Unable to access more prescriptions, patients sought to perpetuate the effect and avoid the "withdrawal" of abstinence by buying pills on the black market. Eventually, they alleviated withdrawal with heroin, which came illegally from the poppy fields of Afghanistan or increasingly, due to American harassment of the Taliban, from the mountains of the State of Guerrero in Mexico. It arrived through Mexican drug cartels that disputed their power with the Colombians, dividing up the markets for cocaine and heroin from the giant of the north. Legal drugs led to illegal ones. Often heroin was replaced by fentanyl, an anesthetic that began to invade the streets. Up to a million addicts inhaled or injected it in their homes, offices, parties, or more and more on the streets and under bridges. Every year between two hundred and three hundred young people died from overdoses on the streets of San Francisco, almost one every day. Nayra carried syringes from the "needle exchange program" in her bag, and a nasal spray of naloxone to revive young people who stopped breathing due to overdoses.

Two hundred dollars a day for the chemical oxygen that became their reason for existence. Some bought it with their salaries, others with what they managed to steal, even from their own families, their consciences blinded by the constant anxiety of not stopping consumption. Many of the addicted men became dealers of the same drug that consumed them, and many of the women turned to prostitution. The state prosecutor, Kamala Harris, daughter of Caribbean and Tamil immigrants, ruthlessly toughened penalties for those crimes of necessity. Some of them ended up on death row awaiting the execution of their death sentences. Almost a thousand sentenced to die, mostly Chicanos or Blacks, waited for more than ten years without knowing if they would be taken to the horrible electric chair the next day.

Two years earlier, Judge Courtney argued extreme cruelty in such a long wait and sentenced the abolition of the death penalty in California. Nayra took part in demonstrations and, through change.org, in petitions to support such abolition. Two days before the deadline to make the abolition effective, Prosecutor Kamala Harris appealed the sentence, and the hope of those thousand people to remain alive vanished. They returned to the cruellest of waits. Alongside the most fascinating advances in knowledge, medieval cruel practices prevailed. Since the beginning of the century, overdoses had killed more than four hundred thousand young people in the country, mostly middle-class whites who started consuming oxycodone pills or similar. The American government fought against drug cartels and cocaine plantations in Colombia and poppy in Guerrero but tolerated legal drugs from big pharmaceutical corporations.

Nayra began to unravel the thread of that horror. Almost all the big pharmaceutical corporations that Jonay had investigated, with whom she had mapped out the legal opium business, sold opioids. They paid doctors bribes in cash or in the form of trips and luxury hotels during medical congresses sold to the business of life, to encourage more and more opioid prescriptions for any cause and degree of pain. The previous year they had managed to sell fourteen billion pills in the country, while getting richer and rising on Wall Street. One of them, Purdue Pharma, was owned by the multimillionaire Sackler family. Nayra had already participated in the fight against advertising that induced consumption and death from tobacco, which led to lawsuits for which the big tobacco companies had to pay over a hundred billion. But in those cases, less than 3% of the fines went to help the victims and their families or to fight against consumption. Most of it went to plug fiscal holes, lawyer expenses, and compensations that returned to the owners of the capital that was transforming into other forms of toxic consumption, such as food or drugs. In this case, she had to change the rules of the game. They talked to networks that fought against Welcome in AIDS and Gilead in hepatitis C and designed a strategy: to turn private companies of public harm into public companies of common good.

Allied with Jonay, Aimsa, and Thanda, and with networks of activists and lawyers throughout the country, Nayra listed up to two thousand affected groups around communities, cities, patient associations, and charities. They filed a joint lawsuit against Purdue Pharma. The company's lawyers offered a settlement of twelve billion, which still left the Sackler family, with about a hundred thousand deaths induced by their legal opium business, with a fortune of several billion, with a clause of not being able to be accused again, and without setting foot in jail. Again, it was easier to go to jail for stealing to eat than for killing to get rich. In addition, the prisons for the poor and addicts spat out by the system, already private, were also owned by capital that maintained the pyramid with increasingly steep and slippery slopes down which more and more fell from the middle class of the mythical American dream to the mad whirl of work and debts, and eventually to ruin and despair. At least the settlement served Nayra and her network to establish a mechanism to reverse compensation for fines to victims and a mechanism of common good: the company became a "public benefit corporation" under the control of three trustees.

They continued with the all-powerful Johnson & Johnson, whose CEO, Alex Gorsky, earned more than twenty million a year, almost three hundred times the average salary, and through its distributor McKesson, whose president John Hammergan had earned over eight hundred million since the turn of the century with the business that had killed almost half a million people. With Thanda's help and his equity formulas, Nayra imposed fiscal sanctions in the lawsuits according to salary differences, so that the funds would be reversed into public biotechnology companies for the common good, and with salary differences of a maximum of seven times more than the least, as Thanda's ethical equity models pointed out. The measure did not set a precedent as Trump, who earned about five thousand times a day more than the average of his employees, blocked it in the Supreme Court, which was at his orders and those of big capital, the true hidden president of that decadent nation.

The next day, in the factory, while reviewing some accounts, a man entered and took advantage of a distraction to take her wallet, with her documents and the week's salary. Nayra noticed it and chased him through the streets of the mission. Her body, athletic from running every morning and elastic from yoga very sunrise, approached the young man who ran with the loot. She didn't feel afraid to chase him through alleys frequented by young addicts dedicated to crime to survive. She tried to catch up with him, but he disappeared between the alleys. She returned with clenched fists of anger and a clouded gaze of pain from feeling such an unjust world. Her fragile salary balance to support her children, with some help from Thanda whom she could barely see to live her profound love, was taken away by another victim of the drug network in which some enriched themselves and others sank. A few hours later, a young man who looked like he slept on the streets entered the store and returned her wallet and said:

* We don't harm our sister.

That day, on the way back to Berkeley on the Bart, he stopped at the central station in Oakland and walked the five kilometers to Berkeley. He saw stores of homeless people under bridges, road intersections, street medians, and parks, all the way to People's Park. Hundreds of stores of individuals and families without homes, thirty years after Aimsa met Sally and in whose memory, he donated a bench in the famous park that read: "In your memory Sally, if there's a better world, you deserve to enter first."

She continued walking through the streets of downtown Berkeley, with stores here and there, some young people with vacant stares asking for money, others with cunning attitudes offering "boy or girl." Amidst such misery, luxurious cars passed by, bought at expensive stores, heading to million-dollar homes, only to return the next day to work where buisness and computer freakswould continue weaving the digital web of consumption, communication, and news, all well-designed hooks by the powerful.

Nayra had been reading Umberto Eco those days and felt that the darkness of the Middle Ages was returning, reincarnating lepers as addicts, feudal lords as financial speculators, plagues as overdoses and AIDS, and the inquisition as the blind religion of consumption, except that whoever was a heretic of this time would not be burned at the stake but in the fire in their veins lying in an alley of Tenderloin or in some well-managed prison by the fiefdoms of the 21st century.That day, on the way back to Berkeley on the Bart, she stopped at the central station in Oakland and walked the five kilometers to Berkeley. She saw tents of homeless people under bridges, road intersections, street medians, and parks, all the way to People’s Park. Hundreds of tents of individuals and families without homes, thirty years after Aimsa met Sally and in whose memory, she donated a bench in the famous park that read: "In your memory Sally, if there's a better world, you deserve to enter first."

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# Vanities’ Bonfires. Havana, June 2019

Since his ftaher’s departure, Thanda had been left alone in the large house provided to him by the government due to his rank as a "counselor minister." Neither his parents arrived, nor Nayra and the kids, nor Adam and Cassie stayed to live with him. Meanwhile, Unai, marked by the death of his father, had been associating himself with the group of privileged, and often spoiled, young people from the nearby international school. Thanda watched with concern as those vain networks among expatriates and Cuban elites entangled the noble heart and brave roots of Unai. He felt saddened as this world distanced Unai from paternal love and the beautiful complicity with which they began their adventure in Cuba.

Thanda's mother, his sister Lorena, and his niece and goddaughter Celeste traveled to Havana in December 2018. It was the first Christmas with the echo of his father's absence, and the reunion was very emotional. Thanda's parents had always supported him in every stage of his life, especially during the saddest moments of his divorce. However, for almost five years in Mexico, they did not dare to visit him because his mother feared a "final farewell" to her sister in Ciudad Juárez. Now they were warmly welcomed into his home in Miramar, where Nayra also arrived. He felt that the home he had hoped for, had, during a few days, the family warmth. After the New Year's Eve celebrations, they went, according to tradition, to throw flowers into the sea from the Malecón, remembering his father with deep affection.

In the following months, Unai's distance, who often was absent from the house for several days and was losing enthusiasm for studying and living with Thanda, became more painful. On Father's Day in Cuba, Thanda was invited to Pedro's house, who was celebrating with his son José, who had arrived from Holland, a complicity that Thanda felt was unraveling with Unai. Upon his return, late at night at the house, he saw that several cars and a truck had arrived. The garden was full of people, and they had set up a mobile camera track for filming. Many people were talking loudly on the porch, there were bottles of rum, and several people were gathered around a computer arguing heatedly. Everyone seemed to ignore his presence. It was as if they had taken over the house. Unai came out to meet him, saying:

* It got out of hand, dad.

That's how he called him, and Thanda felt the deepest paternal affection, which was now boiling in anger.

* Don't worry, son, I'm going to get you out of this web that's eating away at your soul.

Upon entering the house, he saw clothes scattered all over the house and more bottles of rum. He went out to the porch again and shouted:

* Who is responsible for this invasion without respect?

A middle-aged woman stood up and said to him:

* I am, Thanda, thank you for letting us use the house.

She was the Canadian mother of a boy from the group who, Thanda feared, was ensnaring Unai in aimless lives. She had mobilized her friends and a professional film crew to shoot, in Thanda and Unai's beautiful garden, a violent rap music video with which she hoped her son would get thousands of likes on social media and follow in the footsteps of a famous Canadian teenager and millionaire named Justin Bieber, an example of the bonfires of vanities that swathed the virtual and empty life devoid of commitment to justice and solidarity that a world devoted to alienating consumption so desperately needed.

At that moment, Thanda saw that the filming lights were focused on a girl who was semi-naked and tied to a branch of the flamboyant tree with fake blood stains.

He felt, as the song by Silvio said: "on my white sheet, they poured soot, they threw garbage, in my green garden."

He shouted to the woman and everyone:

* Stop the filming right now, erase everything you've recorded, and get out of this house, or I'll call the police!

He turned to the mother and the boy who were leading that "invasion" and said to them, with Unai entering the house, looking embarrassed and afraid of Thanda's furious reaction:

* Enter the house. I want to ask you some questions.

Once in the living room, while the rest of the large group that had invaded his lonely home began to pack up and leave, Thanda said to them:

* Unai told me that maybe they would record some music with a friend. That's different from invading a house with trucks, a professional film crew, and a hundred people without any respect for this home.

The mother tried to explain:

* We hired the film crew as a birthday gift for my son, but they weren't doing a good job.
* It's not about whether you like what you were doing while you were invading our home without scruple or respect. But I'm also going to ask you one question: did you use weapons, real or imitation, in this filming?

The boy, looking at the floor, nodded.

* Bring it here right now.

The boy brought a plastic gun. Thanda could imagine the video they were shooting with scenes of violence and eroticism, machismo, and vanity. They permeated millions of music videos and video games on social media. True to its name, they truly entangled the minds and lives of billions of young people worldwide.

Thanda looked the boy in the eyes, ignoring his mother's explanations:

* Get rid of that symbol of cowardice, pain, and death. Tell me, have you ever been in a war?
* No.
* Have you seen people being murdered?
* No, neither.
* Have you seen someone die of hunger?
* No...
* Do you know how much harm you are causing and experiencing by playing with images of death, by making music with sexist and violent messages, without knowing anything about it? A good portion of the youth, lacking noble aims in their lives to direct their freedom towards the well-being of others, are sinking into obscene and violent languages, hedonism of images and "likes," craving for fame and wealth in a world where half cannot even have the right to a minimal healthy life upon which to build their dreams of happiness.
* Thank you for your words, Thanda.

Said the mother.

* I want you to clean everything up and leave. My advice is for you to get out of that web of absurd and empty vanities. You still possess the gift of time. Your journey through life stretches before you, offering endless opportunities to infuse it with the beautiful dreams that emanate from the deepest recesses of your soul. These are the dreams that awaken consciousness and inspire you to channel all your strength and courage, with gentleness, towards assisting those in need. They are not the dreams that seek to flatter the self-proclaimed superior, nor do they strive to replicate their fleeting illusions of success and pleasure, which are as unjust as they are transient.What the world truly yearns for is an army of young minds armed not with weapons, but with noble ideas aimed at liberating us from the grip of consumption and the devastation of nature. It calls for the courage to embark on a journey towards a realm of harmony, reminiscent of the sanctity found in spiritual eco-communities.

Thanda gave them his last copy of "Courage and Tenderness.When everyone left, he said to Unai:

* I'm going to bed, son. Clean everything up. We'll talk tomorrow.

Thanda couldn't sleep. He thought he did what was right, but at the same time, he felt that perhaps he was too vehement, almost arrogant with his ideas. He demanded an echo of them in those around him without listening to other ways of seeing and living life. Perhaps that's why he had been left alone? He felt a huge desire to embrace Unai, locked in his room, his daughters who communicated very little with him from their conventional lives in Madrid, Adam and Nour, Nayra, his mother... and, above all, even further away, his father, to whom he sang his "I don't understand" with tears of loneliness.

A few days later, Unai decided to continue his studies in Barcelona, where he managed to have his previous two years of studies in Havana validated. He argued, not without reason, that the studies he had pursued in Cuba were oriented towards the food industry, relating food to the economy rather than health. Furthermore, the system of "unified thinking," Marxist-revolutionary, despite its undeniable values ​​of justice, did not leave him room for free thought and debate.

Thanda knew that, deep down, Unai needed his own space to be himself, to make mistakes, if necessary, to explore unknown worlds, and to seek his own path. He feared that his radical and militant attitude towards ideas of social justice made him intolerant and sunk in the loneliness of his pride, still pregnant with ethical thought and social commitment.

Pride? Perhaps he accused others of burning their souls in vanities, but what he saw was his own vanity mirror, believing his ideas to be just in a world where he only saw darkness. Or was it once again the trap of his Catholic upbringing in guilt that plunged him into self-doubt?

A few days later, Thanda went to another of Silvio Rodriguez's neighborhood concerts. A very petite young woman greeted him and asked about Unai. She had met him in the first few months when Thanda and Unai lived simply and deeply bonded in the little house at El Náutico. She said she never heard from him again. Thanda replied that "he's traveling." He thought to himself that it was "a journey in search of his soul." Silvio played his "Ojalá" almost as a final anthem, and, like everyone in the neighborhood gathered there, Thanda and Unai's friend sang "... I hope something happens that erases you suddenly... so I don't see you so much... so I don't see you always... in every place... in every corner...". Both were moved to tears by a shared mourning from different dimensions. Thanda’s love for Unai was immense, and the vertigo of his distance was already felt as a cold and deep void.

He bid farewell to Unai at Varadero airport after visiting Unai's best friend at the university, Marcos, who also felt his soul torn by his best friend's departure.

Unai bravely continued his journey.

# State of siege. Cuba, September 2019

Thanda returned from another summer accompanying his mother. He would have liked her to return with him to Cuba to avoid the cold winter in Spain or to move in with her sisters. But the frantic life of the big cities led to more and more loneliness, and she didn't want to move away from her surroundings. The return to the house in Havana was sad, now without the presence of Unai, although he had been very absent from home for some time before. His friend Marcos often came to see him, and together they shared the painful void left by his departure and their concern because he left with one of the privileged elite boys, with values very different from those that they knew beat in Unai's noble heart.

One Friday afternoon, while driving absorbed in his thoughts to a concert by his friend Tony Ávila, as he crossed Calzada with Avenida de los Presidentes, he didn't see how a motorcycle crossed in front of the car, and although at very low speed, the motorcycle ended up under the pick-up truck and the motorcyclist on the ground, nursing a leg. Thanda felt an indescribable guilt for having hurt someone. He had never hit anyone in his life, had been almost thirty years without eating meat, and even walked carefully to avoid stepping on ants on the streets, parks, or in the countryside. In a fraction of a second, while he stopped the engine and quickly got out to attend to the injured, he thought of the macabre destiny that, even with his scrupulous constant effort not to harm, a moment of distraction had caused an accident that could well have been fatal.

As he got out, he noticed that a crowd had already gathered around the car and the motorcycle. He received hundreds of inquisitive looks. The injured man was getting up from the ground and tending a leg. As Thanda approached to offer him help, the wounded made a gesture with his right arm as if he wanted to hit him. Thanda reacted very calmly, saying he was sorry, that he didn't see him, perhaps because of the blind spot of the front windshield corner, and that it had never happened to him before. He told him that he was a doctor and could examine him to assess if he had any severe injuries. The man began to calm down, and although he only seemed to have scratches on one leg and one arm, a taxi took him to the hospital to have X-rays taken.

A motorcycle policeman arrived a few minutes later and asked Thanda for his documentation. His diplomatic status complicated everything because special brigades had to be called. Since they couldn't move the car until the international accident investigators arrived, the motorcycle was still awkwardly wedged under the front bumper. More and more curious onlookers gathered around, and Thanda heard some asking:

* Did the yuma (foreigner) kill him?"

He noticed how the inquisitive looks turned accusatory. At that moment, two people from a nearby building that housed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs arrived and introduced themselves as colleagues of the man Thanda had accidentally hit. They knew about Thanda's commitment to Cuba and reassured him that everything would be sorted out. After a while, Carlos, the injured man, returned in a taxi and told Thanda that the X-rays were normal.

While they waited for the arrival of the international accident police and completed their part of the accident report, Thanda struck up an interesting conversation with the three Cuban officials:

* Carlos, I hope the pain doesn't last long, that we fix the motorcycle damage soon, and that you don't hold a grudge against me. This is the first time something like this has happened to me after almost forty years of driving in many countries. Truly, brother, I'm sorry from the bottom of my heart.
* Don't worry, Thanda, accidents happen, I know there's no malice in you, but pay more attention, okay?
* Agreed. You're right. I take responsibility for my mistake. I apologize to you.
* We know about you, Thanda. We know you're trying to help Cuba.
* Thank you for telling me. I love your country and admire the ideas of the revolution.
* I'll tell you, the first thing I thought when I saw the diplomatic plate was that you were an American agent because I follow our relations with the United States in the Ministry, and things are tense. Although then I thought that if they wanted to harm me, that would be the last and grotesque way to do it.
* And tell me, how are relations with them going? I suppose very difficult with Trump.
* That's right. The history is long. Since the beginning of the revolution, they haven't stopped harassing us. First by bombing and invading Playa Girón. Our nonviolent resistance has been such that at that time, we exchanged their mercenaries for fruit porridges for children.

Thanda thought about that noble gesture of not imprisoning those who had even tried to kill and subdue the Cuban people, and exchanged them for the most necessary thing, the nutrition of children. Fidel had announced, in the tense days leading up to Girón, "the socialist character" of the revolution, and shortly after, the literacy campaign began. Around that time, Thanda was born under a Spanish fascist regime, anchored in the Catholic hierarchy of guilt and taboo on sexuality, a puppet of the United States for the crumbs of the Marshall Plan, and where the hierarchies of the nobility and the powerful, who communed daily, kept an ignorant and manipulated people terrified of communist Russian atheists, and their Cuban friends.

* And tell me, how, after the Bay of Pigs, did they continue obsessively trying to harm you?
* That's right, Thanda, we've been under constant siege for almost sixty years. They started with CIA terrorist attacks in every imaginable form. They began with the 'Operation Peter Pan,' where they terrorized parents into sending their children to Miami. That's how more than ten thousand children left, most of whom would never see their parents again. Then, they not only shot down our athletes' plane in Barbados or tried to assassinate Fidel hundreds of times, but they also introduced plagues into crops and diseases into livestock. In total, we now know with the declassification of documents by the American government, more than three thousand deaths have been documented in over six hundred terrorist actions. And not a single person has been detained for all that damage. The killers strut around proudly in Little Havana in Miami.
* And how did they try to suffocate your economy?
* After the CIA, in the 1980s, the aggression against Cuba was centralized by the State Department, often through its 'humanitarian arm,' USAID. They began psychological warfare through Foundations like Ford and Rockefeller, NGOs like Freedom House and the National Endowment for Democracy, religious organizations, alleged academics, professional and youth groups, infiltrating Cuba even as leftist and even communist groups. They haven't stopped their attacks through conferences, scholarships, awards, literature, music, movies, press, comics, television programs broadcast from Miami, and radio stations like the reincarnation of Radio Europe for the subversion of Eastern Europe, later turned into Radio America and others like La Cubanísima, Fabulosa, Mambí, Caimán, and radio and TV Martí. Year after year, day after day, the incessant defamation and insult never cease, Thanda.
* Now I understand that when you see us as foreigners, you look at us with suspicion in case we are part of that complex network determined to end the revolution. And that the name 'NGO,' or even 'cooperation,' arouses caution in you when not rejection.
* That's right, brother. Until we discovered that there are good people like you, committed to treating us with respect, to collaborating for the common good, mutual, and of the world.
* That's why I'm here, Carlos. But tell me, how is the economic blockade organized?
* It's also a long story. Since 1917, the 'Trading with the Enemy Act' has prevented economic exchanges with countries considered enemies in the United States. Cuba has remained one since 1961, after the triumph of the revolution and the victory at the Bay of Pigs. Not even during the eight years of Obama, who declared the need to 'normalize' relations the most. In 1996, during Clinton's Democratic government, the Helms-Burton Act was passed, which not only prevents Americans from having commercial relations with Cuba and allows them to claim properties confiscated from American citizens after the revolution's triumph but also fines companies from other countries that trade with Cuba or have a relationship with the list of expropriated properties.
* That's right, Carlos. Although the European Union threatens retaliation by confiscating properties of American companies if European companies or banks are fined for these reasons, several have suffered such fines. As they have large businesses with the American market, they agree, or rather, are blackmailed, and pay settlement high sums, as the French BNP bank did recently, a billion dollars.
* The United States continues to dominate international trade and finance, Thanda. Despite having an immense debt of almost ten trillion dollars, forty thousand dollars per American, much of it in Treasury Bonds bought by China, it still dominates the world economy, controls banking and financial operations. And when it doesn't succeed through its speculative power, it uses military power.
* And now Trump is tightening all those measures.
* That's right: he looks for all kinds of excuses, even inventing 'sonic attacks' on his embassy and Canada's, which no one understands and no one else has experienced, hiding their data, everything seems like another setup to defame us. With that, and his constant criticism of our socialist system of social justice over the enrichment of a few, as is his way of thinking, he is restricting travel, sending remittances, blocking shipping companies and insurers of tankers bringing energy and even medicines and humanitarian aid.
* Every year, the European Union, and the whole world except Israel, at the mercy of the United States, vote against the blockade, Carlos.
* Yes, but what's the use? The United States doesn't trade with Cuba, which limits many necessary and cheaper products because they are closer. But the rest of the world exercises a passive financial blockade because for fear of reprisals, their companies do not come, their banks do not lend, and the few investment agreements often do not materialize.

They had already been in animated debate and growing harmony for two hours, and other colleagues from the nearby Ministry of Foreign Affairs and "enlightened" passersby joined them. Even Thanda called Pedro to tell him what had happened, and knowing the officials involved, Pedro told them about Thanda's commitment to Cuba. The delay of the accident investigation teams kept Thanda's pick-up truck in the middle of Avenida de los Presidentes at its intersection with Calzada, with the motorcycle under the front wheels. Like a shark caught red-handed (clawed) devouring a small fish. The crowd that surrounded the incident at the beginning had slowly dispersed. The officials asked Thanda about his life, his endeavors for Cuba, and his opinion. A beautiful complicity was established despite arising from an unfortunate accident. How beautiful the power to turn the negative into positive, Thanda thought.

About six hours later, the investigative teams arrived with their cameras, measuring tapes, and forms for those involved. They were able to lift "the crime scene." Thanda parked the pick-up, holding the lights and front bumper with some wires, dislodged by the impact. He accompanied Carlos with the unusable motorcycle to the nearby parking lot of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Thanda invited them all to dinner one day at his house to continue the pleasant conversation.

In the following days, he called Carlos and his wife every day to inquire about the progress of the wounds, which were improving. He took care of the insurance procedures to have the motorcycle repaired. He would face one of the many contradictions of the system in Cuba: Thanda paid the mandatory insurance in euros converted to CUCs to the Cuban insurance monopoly, whose adjuster took a month to inspect the motorcycle and another month to settle the repair estimate, with a small detail: while the estimate was made in CUCs, the payment was made in CUPs, twenty times lower in value and useless for buying any imported parts, which were mostly necessary in automotive repair. This symbolic price received by the institutions at the exchange rate, from which they also benefited in imports, maintained a fictitious and subsidized economy that was on the verge of collapse, Thanda thought. As the insurance action didn't help much, Thanda had to pay for the repairs out of his pocket and even get parts that he brought on his subsequent trip to Europe.

A month later, with Carlos fully recovered from his injuries, Thanda invited the group of Foreign Affairs officials he had met because of the accident and their wives to dinner at his house. He also invited Pedro and Susy, who knew them. Pedro, a very good cook, prepared a vegetarian lasagna, and Thanda made a fruit dessert, as well as offered a bottle of Rioja wine, brought from his last trip to Spaon, along with the bike’s spare parts, to celebrate Carlos's full recovery. The Cubans felt like they were in a magical reunion because they knew each other from their time studying at the INRI (National Institute of International Relations), whose residence for scholarship holders was the house assigned to Thanda in Miramar.

The conversation led them to continue analyzing the situation in Cuba and the opportunities for the future. After two years in Cuba, Thanda had begun to feel contradictions that he wanted, very diplomatically, to bring to the table.

* Colleagues, thank you for coming. Carlos, I apologize again for my irresponsibility, which resulted in causing you harm and hindering your life and work. I have tried to help you and will continue to do so. I'm truly sorry.
* Don't worry, Thanda.

Carlos joked.

* With a dinner like this every Friday, I'll forget what happened in a year!
* You will always be welcome in this house, which is more yours than mine, and which has been lent to me while I work to cooperate with Cuba. I wanted to ask you some questions about the challenges Cuba faces, with total sincerity and appreciation. Please forgive me if I'm misinformed about anything.
* Go ahead, Thanda, we know your good intentions. Which isn't the case for most diplomats. Be careful how you support us, Thanda, you might not last long.

Several people, including Pedro, had told him the same thing. Thanda spoke about what he thought without fear, including the hypocrisy of Europe and especially the United States in championing human rights. He defended the ideas of the revolution regarding social justice, sometimes in heated debates with diplomats who didn't step out of their expatriate bubble.

* I know. But I have always followed my ideas, expressed them with sincerity, but also with humility, and I have opposed any task that conflicts with my principles of a just world that respects universal rights and protects nature. I won't hesitate to leave my job tomorrow if they force me to ignore my principles.

Thanda said it from the heart. There were indeed moments when he felt an urgent need to stop belonging to such a rigid hierarchy. So submissive to superiority, lacking in space for free thought, arrogant in defending Europe as the model of development and freedom and democracy after having colonized with the sword and the cross. All this after having polluted the skies and maintained anachronistic privileges of the global political and financial system. Now they protected their borders from the privileges of an economy basically speculative with the raw materials of the poorest countries and their factories in poorer countries with cheap labour and higher profits.

But just as capitalism lacked global ethics, the system in Cuba had flaws that he couldn't help but expose.

* Colleagues, you know that I recognize the social, economic, and ecological flaws of the capitalist system, and in that recognition, I approach Cuba, with humility, to learn from each other. Let me start with the foundation of society: the social contract. I believe, like Rousseau, in the inherent goodness of man. I say this without theological predilection, more by Darwinian logic of gregarious instinct for survival and thought of quantum energy that releases energy in the form of love. Although the relationship between energy and love may not sound like 'serious physics.

Thanda had talked a lot with Aimsa about that relationship between quantum physics and love, which was better understood from Buddhism than from anthropocentric Christianity.

* It's a good assumption, Thanda, although it's not proven. Please continue.

Said another participant.

* The social contract consists of each person, freely, contributing to society and receiving from it in return. Here I feel a great resonance with the just social contract defended by Marx, in equity, "contributing according to their ability and receiving according to their needs."
* That's right. This principle is reinforced in the new Constitution in Cuba, which recognizes its Marxist foundation.
* However, with all due respect, I have my doubts about Marxist theories in the current moment.

Thanda dared to say, crossing an inconfessable “red” line in Cuba.

He immediately noticed that criticism of Marxism was not well received in many circles in Cuba. Just as criticism of Christianity or free markets wasn't well received in Europe. For decades, criticisms of Marxism came from imperialist capitalism. Thanda tried to explain it with human logic and distancing himself from any suspicion of capitalist apologism:

* While Marx's analysis of capital was very true in his time, his proposal then was the revolution of the proletariat to acquire the means of production and socialize wealth. All of this is impeccable in the logic of distributive ethics, but it fails on a fundamental basis, in my opinion.
* What is it, Thanda?
* All those concepts are anchored in a model of society that is as if engraved in our mental framework, perhaps even conditioned by our epigenetics: the nation-state.
* Well, without sufficient social size, it is not possible to maintain industrial activity, which is what has allowed life expectancy to double in two centuries, isn't it?
* I'm not sure about that. Certainly, from cars and roads, ships and airplanes and ports and airports, household appliances and computers, medical and surgical equipment, and even textiles and food, were produced on national scales. Workshops transformed into factories powered by coal and steam first, and craftsmen into universities. With this, the scale of production multiplied, and access to goods improved. Then came the extraction of oil and combustion engines, which led to supranational scales and an explosion of global trade. Nation-states anchored themselves in feudal concepts of seigniorial power, tempered by the libertarian ideas of the 18th century and the national production scales of the 19th century. In the 20th century, large international productions began to dominate national markets, colonies were gaining independence, and metropolises were languishing. The last attempts at national supremacy led to world wars and the foundation first of the League of Nations and then of the United Nations. The economy, increasingly globalized; and politics, supposedly based on universal rights, were questioning the concept of borders, but it remains firm in our minds. Furthermore, another empire closely linked to the global and dominant movement of capital emerged: that of the United States, which apparently inconsistently mixes exceptionalist nationalism, often messianic, with a worship of capital without barriers. Ultimately, borders do not protect values or languages or traditions, but rather the privilege of some over others.
* I don't think the capitalist and imperialist nation-state can be equated with the socialist-internationalist nation-state, also without natural borders, only limited by our coastal waters. It is essential that we understand history to understand where we are.
* Yes, they are different stories and different conceptions of the nation-state-market and the nation-state-socialist. But it was above all the expansionist ambition and the dominance of natural resources that led to a cold war between capitalism and communism and to being millimeters away from a third world war, this time nuclear and apocalyptic. Capitalism triumphed in markets over communism, and Russia maintained the iron Marxist hierarchy, but embraced capitalism in competitiveness and consumption. The Berlin Wall fell, and China took off. Its communism also embraced capitalism, but with an absolute market control system. While in Russia life expectancy, especially in men, fell ten years in the 90s, that of China rose almost in equal measure and at the same time. Russia prospered economically in part because of its oil, and China because of its huge population, productive structure and Confutian discipline that made it the world's factory. These great powers genuinely vie for cheap and stable natural resources to feed their consumption systems and the supposed well-being of their citizens. But it is truly the economic powers of transnationals and the financial system that control everything. We have entered the XXIst century with profound contradictions that make the nation-state an unsustainable concept.
* Why do you think so, Thanda?
* Excuse me, I'm talking too much. But I will summarize it in these four contradictions. One, nation-states for the social contract versus globalized consumption controlled by financial powers. Two, nation-states for the common good versus borders that fragment universal rights, in my opinion, incompatible with boundaries. Three, nation-states for models of democratic representation versus a minimal or absent degree of empathy that allows a degree of awareness and decision-making, and therefore freedom. And four, nation-states for production and consumption on a national, even supranational, scale, incompatible with harmony with nature and leading us to an apocalyptic global warming.
* But don't you think, Thanda, that it is precisely neoliberal capitalism that tries to blur borders to subjugate peoples, alienate them from their cultures and their connection to the land, and push people to forget the spirit of the common good?
* I understand you. It might be thought that nation-states, especially small ones like Cuba, are a barrier to the invasive and alienating speculative capital tsunami. But in practice, they are not, and I believe they cannot be. They are not because governments have been indebted to that capital power, and their decisions depend on paying tribute and interest to it. Furthermore, the power of supply and demand in the competitiveness of global trade undermines any effort of national sovereignty. And I don't think it can be because the national scale is, as I said, incompatible with the degree of empathy that releases the premise of human impulse towards the common good with which we began the discussion.
* But Cuba has indeed maintained its sovereignty and its socialist spirit.
* Yes. It is perhaps the greatest example of dignity and courage in the face of the imperialist power of capital. But its sovereignty is relative: it depends on its debt payments to the Paris Club, and it buys American chicken because it's cheaper, a clear symbol of subordinating dignity and sovereignty to the market. And regarding empathy in the representation of the people, I believe that, while it has resisted the literal prostitution of democracy by the market and capital, as in the West; at the national level, there isn't the necessary degree of empathy between citizens and leaders.

Carlos intervened somewhat perturbed. Thanda didn't know if it was because he was defending his ideas or warning him not to engage in such criticism of a system so besieged and defamed.

* If there weren't empathy with the leaders of the revolution, the square of the revolution wouldn't be filled every first of May, nor would there be so many votes in favor of the leaders. I don't think you understand Cuba well yet, Thanda.
* Admiration, even adulation, of someone we don't know is a manifestation of mythomania, Carlos. What we know through others is filtered by chroniclers and painted in the color decided by powers, mostly. It has been like this since agricultural settlements, in prophets and in pharaohs, in their Gods and in their coins, in the abstractions of borders and properties. Notice this curious spiral logic: powers become myths and defend abstractions of laws, borders, and currencies, which in turn require myths to maintain "unempathetic" communities cohesive.

Carlos didn't feel comfortable with those arguments.

* So, we can't believe in anything. Are you advocating for nihilism?
* Well, I don't mind Sartre, but I'm not a nihilist, no. I simply believe that it is through empathy and direct knowledge as the fundamental basis of our knowledge, that we can be aware and free, and thus direct our efforts towards the common good. Without empathy and through indirect knowledge, we are often unconscious or insensitive, or both. We are manipulated, by powers with myths or violence, cross or sword, and by the market with advertising, both of which already completely pervade the supposed "democracy" of the West. With my friends Jonay and Aimsa, I have been investigating the manipulative power of Cambridge Analytica and groups like Carlyle. Combine these great manipulative powers with hours in front of screens, whether television, computers, or mobile phones, and the intricacies of artificial intelligence, and I don't know what remains of true freedom in the human being.
* Well, Thanda, we must respect that most Cubans do love our homeland, that we recovered it from Spanish imperialism and then American with the blood of our ancestors, and we illuminated it with noble ideas in the face of harassment for six decades.
* And it is a great honor for me to be here learning and drawing from your courage, brothers. But tell me: what if there are people who do not desire that type of social contract? Who do not identify with the "homeland or death" in which almost all the speeches of the leaders end with? For them, their homeland is their hut, their gardens, their family, their community, and their valley. What they know with their eyes and touch with their hands. For example, they want to live in a community of empathy, without any relationship with a nation-state that they feel doesn't know them as individuals, nor will they ever know their distant leaders. How to respect that freedom?
* Are you suggesting the right to break a nation for the selfish desire of a minority?
* Perhaps yes. I wouldn't call it selfish. It could be in a supportive network of small autonomous communities like those of the spiritual eco-villages network. I am very connected to that movement and its natural reference in Eila and spiritual in Ukuzwana, in Zimbabwe.
* Yes, we have talked about it, and about Eila's communist spirit.
* Well, it's not really communist because it's not an "ism" of any kind. In fact, it tries to live without hierarchies, something very strict in current communist models, including the Cuban one. That's what I think, with all due respect.

Once again, Thanda noticed some discomfort in his dinner guests when he expressed that criticism of the system in Cuba, which was certainly organized around the Communist Party, the Council of State, and the Council of Ministers in a very hierarchical manner. Furthermore, it was organized at its grassroots from the National Assembly to the local level. And also, by the hierarchically structured mass movements such as those of women, students, farmers, and the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution. Breaking free from that powerful and dense network was practically impossible.

* Thanda, what you propose is an anarchy of the common good, which has never worked in the history of humanity. Societies need leaders and control systems so that the selfishness of a few does not harm the rights of others.
* Maybe you're right. What I see is that eco-villages are multiplying all over the world without borders, without religions, without hierarchies, without money.
* Well, John Harris was indeed the leader of Eila, with his systems of representatives and task organization. We shouldn't demonize any kind of organization: all living beings have it, especially the most fragile ones as individuals, like ants or bees.
* Again, you may be right. And please don't take my comments as anti-revolutionary. I love your country and its courage against the worst of myths and alienating powers, that of the unchecked market. Perhaps there's a rebellious spirit in me that takes the egalitarian concept to the anarchist extreme, and even narcissistic (without any cult to Narcissus!) in refusing to have anyone above. Nor below.

To break the ice, he sang them a song in which he dared to say, in Cuba, that he was not "communist":

Vitally egophilic, step by step a bit egological,

far from being an ego-sophist, I don't want to be selfish.

By feminophilic instinct, kiss by kiss feminological,

by no means feminosophist, I couldn't be feminist.

By Hispanophilic roots, by Hispanic culture I study,

Just a bit Hispanic sophist, by no means Hispanicist.

I don't want to be an "ist" of any “ism”.

I appreciate and want to know, just trying to be myself.

By communitarian ideas, in communitarian empathy I engage,

Just a bit communitarian-sophist, ...I couldn't be communist.

From power and capital, I don't even feel appreciation.

Be it a throne or an altar, anything with a price.

Maybe I'm a holophilic, what's the use of being holistic?

An anonymous philosopher, forgive me for insisting:

I don't want to be an "ist" of any “ism”

I appreciate and want to know, just trying to be myself.

Everyone laughed and repeated enthusiastically, perhaps because of the Rioja, when Thanda repeated the chorus.

* Maybe it's more authentic to be communitarian than communist, Thanda!
* I'm sorry if I criticize what I don't understand out of ignorance. I want you to know that my admiration for your courage against the invasion of the empire and the market, which often go hand in hand.
* Do you realize, Thanda, why we react with suspicion to any criticism? We live in a state of siege, we inherited it from our parents, who sacrificed themselves to defend these ideas, often enduring hardships and maintaining their work for the common good, for the revolution.
* I understand you, brothers. I appreciate your courage, I admire your committment.

He had composed a song against Trump, which he also wanted to share as the end of such a sincere gathering:

Everyone listens attentively to this Mr. Donald Trump

Who in his tweets and speeches threatens here and there.

The saddest part of this story that I want to tell you today.

Is that in the hands of this guy humanity is at risk.

From a spoiled childhood such vanity was engendered,

From speculative inheritance he amassed great capital.

With money and fear he managed to manipulate

Millions of people who wanted to vote for him.

Go home Trump!

Leave us alone!

Don't play with our humanity!

Everything was already corrupt when this yank came.

Some have no food while others swim in champagne.

Five countries with veto champion freedom

And govern by decree without respect for truth.

It was already late and insufficient as it was agreed.

to stop the disaster that could exterminate us.

Without conscience and without shame this Mr. Trump declared that he mocks science, that it's okay to pollute.

What can be done to avoid so much harm?

I suggest a blockade against the criminal empire.

Surely even the CIA is listening to me sing.

But in good company, it's good to dream.

He encouraged them to sing along with strength:

Go home Trump!

Leave us alone!

Don't play with our humanity!

# The tender gatherings. Havana. Noviember 2019

Thanda lived alone in hs intimacy. Most of his life. He felt nostalgia for his children, his partner, his mother. And he longed to live in community. The house on Tercera Street was always open to visitors, and often Cuban friends or guests from Europe and America would stay, with whom he would engage in beautiful adventures and camaraderie.

Among them, for one week, came Joan, his dear friend, a Catalan pediatrician from their time in the cooperantes association; Giorgio, the charming Italian bohemian with whom he shared ideas as a courageous colleague and as a single father in Brussels; and José Manuel, his loyal Mexican friend from the human rights field in Mexico. The four of them had very different personalities, but the mix and the debates under the moon brought warmth to Thanda's home. Rene also came, the postman from Berkeley who became a wise man of agroecology, with his lovely family, and David, his ally for equity, from Cambridge, Massachusetts. In all these friends, despite the distance and time, there prevailed a deep friendship and an increasingly clear complicity in the ethical need and firm commitment to move towards a simpler, more communal life, and one in greater harmony with nature. A community of kindred spirits who had been nomads in the international world and were seeking a shared home where they could act in local ethics and continue to transmit, now with the strength of coherence, a global message.

The prolonged absence without a home horizon of Nayra sometimes became very tough. He couldn't find a balance of time and commitment between his children and his partner, and the loneliness Thanda felt in his intimacy undermined his enthusiasm. But love and affection prevailed over distance every day.

Once again, he was assailed by ghosts of guilt and resignation, installed in his subconscious alongside his Catholic childhood. The vale of tears. How absurd. Life was a fascinating adventure, Thanda thought: thirty billion cells at his service, working day and night so that he could think and feel, understand, and love, marvel at an incomprehensible universe in its eternity and infinity, of which he was a unique part and at the same time diluted in the whole. As he sang to his father: "...*surrender only to be*..." In gratitude.

He was a fortunate man, with wonderful parents and family. Although his mother was far away and his father in another dimension, they provided guidance and meaning. His children, all of them, transmitted their love and gratitude from afar. His friends sprinkled him with complicity and affection at every turn. Despite the bureaucratic jungle, his work gave him opportunities to try to change policies. Through his studies, he shared equity proposals in networks and classes across many countries.

He even came to feel the gift of his own solitude, which he filled with a beautiful routine and courage to express tenderness; and tenderness to awaken the most authentic courage, that of loving without codes or fear.

He still rose before the rooster's crow. He chose one of his father's nearly four thousand drawings and wrote a poem evoking the beauty and message of his father. Often, in this act of devotion to his father with which he greeted the new day, he cried with emotion, sometimes with nostalgia, always with gratitude.

By around six-thirty rvrty morning, he put on an old pair of blue shorts from his time in Ukuzwana; and went out, with sandals to protect himself from the sticky rocks, and glasses to see his friends from the bottom of the sea, down Twenty-Fourth Street towards the sea entrance. He swam his route to his "altar under the sea," past Tenth Street, near the Karl Marx Theater where he gazed without looking at the sunrise in the east. He returned his journey, often against the current, and frequently accompanied by a school of mackerel, and then meditated swimming and without looking, surrendered in trust to nature, to life. He returned home tired and satisfied with the effort and courage to rid himself of all fear. "Fresh and healed, clear and happy," as Silvio said. There were pedestrians on the street already, and sometimes a group of women in uniform got off a bus, and Thanda felt a certain embarrassment for his bare torso on the streets, but the feeling of freedom was greater, of not even wearing the fabric uniform that covered him, but often, hid, every human.

Upon returning home and after washing, dressing, eating oatmeal, and greeting old Papito, who took care of the garden leisurely, he set off for work, a block away. He sent three voice messages on the way: to his mother, to Nayra, and to his children. He began the day by greeting, as from the first day, affectionately to the colleagues on the ground floor, from administration, reception, maintenance, cleaning; the humble ones, whom he appreciated so much, as in his time in Mexico. With his team upstairs and in his lovely office filled with plants, he wrote on the computer, answered calls, and attended meetings, trying to advance projects to support challenges in Cuba. In addition to supporting actions for greater local independence, or as he preferred to call it, sovereignty, in food and energy; and encouraging more efficient and transparent public fiscal, judicial, economic, and trade services; another area of cooperation gradually emerged, which was in magical harmony with the flowering of his soul's expression in Cuba: culture.

From the first gathering in the first home in El Náutico, with Unai's friends in the neighborhood, Pedro's family, and some of their friends, and some coworkers; he had been convening the "tenderness gathering" every first Thursday of the month, which attracted more and more people to share poetry and music, memories, and dreams. Or, as his dear John Denver said in the song that Jonay murmured the most in his solitary adolescence: "poems, prayers, and promises”.

The heart of the gathering was formed by people who expressed their souls with courage. They became a dear Cuban family to Thanda. Celia and her group of beautiful Afro-Cuban women, "Souvenir," with magical poems and beautiful melodies on the piano accompanied by the magical violin of little Saidel, a prodigy of improvisation and feeling. Karelia and her group of flamenco girl dancers from Old Havana came next, an epic story of overcoming how she had made dance her reason for living since her birth paralysis, and from that magic, the sailboat on which hundreds of girls from very poor families in Central Havana sailed towards their dreams. Camilo and his wonderful guitar and voice intertwined with that of his sister Gabi, so velvety, went with his beloved to Mexico, but his family continued to come, and his father, Humberto, sang songs of his friends, legendary Cuban troubadours, with passion and feeling. Elias, an afroCuban who drew from the music of the evangelical parish where his father preached and impregnated his entire being with music, taught himself to sing and play the piano with such depth that Thanda felt him as a Cuban Stevie Wonder who would dazzle the world. His "Drume negrita" and other interpretations of Bola de Nieve's songs moved the gathering. He also met Benny, the son of peasants from Holguín, who sang everything he heard from childhood and developed, also self-taught, a wonderful voice that rivaled Bocelli's or Josh Groban's, and when he sang "Flor pálida," he moved even the coldest hearts. Giordano, a humanist genius, poet, painter, and musician from the Isle of Youth, lost in the streets of Old Havana, composed heartbreaking songs about love and the universe. Edu, a brilliant psychologist who drew from music with his father, a composer of soundtracks, reminded Thanda of Jorge Drexler, and when he sang duets with his beautiful and brave partner Liz "salvaje" or his dreams for the three little children they hoped to have, something magical infused the gathering.

Renowned musicians also began to join the gathering, like Tony Ávila, who moved Thanda with his song about home and his mother; Bobby Carcases and his piano and guttural chants, somewhere between scatting and rapping, with an agility in impossible dances at eighty years old; Ray Fernández, the Quevedo minstrel, a provocative and spicy Sabina of rebellious Cuba within his rebellion; William Vivanco, a Caribbean pirate with his sword of eastern son; Enriquito Núñez, a singing poet of the founding group of the nueva trova, in his purple Lada that once belonged to his famous father, chronicler of everyday revolution; Raúl Torres with his dreadlocks, his rhythms, his deep poetry, and his famous "Candil de nieve" or Pedro, the percussionist of the fascinating a capella group Sampling, who came with his beautiful wife Chanel, a lawyer for just causes, and their daughter María del Mar, who at just six years old dazzled the gathering reciting verses by Martí.

They always hoped that one day Silvio would join, or even Pablo on one of his visits to the island, as family members of theirs did come to the gathering, and Thanda had had fleeting but beautiful encounters with them. Thanda even dreamed that he could unite those who were his idols, yes, even though he criticized them so much perhaps it was only human to have some idols in life, and they had not spoken for three decades. The rift between Silvio and Pablo was symbolic of other divides that pulsated in the country between the staunchest defenders and the harshest critics of the government, in their extremes "the vanguard," often privileged; and "the worms," who criticized from afar. Thanda felt that in all of them, there was a desire to live in harmony, some escaping the hierarchies of power, others the dictatorship of the market. He intended for the music that flowed from the beating of the soul to unite them all.

More artists, academics, and students, workers and directors, foreigners and Cubans, ambassadors, and peasants, from Fidel's family to young people tired of the revolution's frustrated promises, began to join the group. Physicists one day talked about the multiverse, filmmakers from the San Antonio de los Baños school, visual artists from the Higher Institute of Art, dancers from different companies, and actors also came. Thanda was encouraged to compose and sing his soul, among so much talent, even without knowing much about harmony and being almost incapable of keeping a rhythm, let alone dancing. But he expressed his heart, and that, he thought, was important.

The first week of the month, when the gathering took place, Thanda rehearsed a dozen songs in the mornings when he went swimming. The mask he wore allowed him to rehearse his chosen repertoire underwater, and on several occasions, he walked to the sea with a phrase or a melody and emerged from the sea with a song, which he hastily noted upon arrival and rehearsed with his Paracho guitar, from Michoacán, Mexico, a gift from Nayra in the last Christmas they shared in Mexico.

Months earlier, Thanda had met Tito at a conference. He was a small man in stature and in the timbre of his voice, shy in his way of speaking and even in his gestures, and with a tenderness that impressed Thanda. He was the most committed and longest-serving representative of the vegan diet in Cuba. From his humble little house in the remote neighborhood of La Víbora, he encouraged a group of young people, led by Abel, a computer genius eager to launch entrepreneurial initiatives. They had created an application for mobile phones that analyzed the nutritional and healing value of any restaurant or individual's dishes and diets, encouraging healthy nutrition for people and planets, something very deficient in Cuba. He ran the healthiest, most ecological, and sensitive restaurant - paladar - in Cuba, Thanda thought, called "El Romero," in one of the most magical places on the island: Las Terrazas, where the revolution turned five thousand hectares deforested during the colonial period into a nature reserve forest with as many millions of trees as Cubans on the entire island. Tito never missed a gathering and always brought vegetables and fruits from his garden and from El Romero's orchard. Also allied in food with soul and conscience was Yunalvis, a brave revolutionary connected to the spiritual world of the Mexican Huicholes and Cuban Taíno Indians, who inspired from her "sun path" another way of feeling the daily gift of food from nature.

And Marcos, Unai's best friend, also became a regular at the gatherings. From a hardworking family near Varadero, Marcos continued studying the degree that Unai had left to go to Barcelona, food sciences. Thanda told him about the kombucha he fermented with a base -scoby- that David shared with him when he visited Massachusetts. They got about eight large glass jars and fermented almost twenty liters for each gathering. Marcos studied with passion all the microbiological and chemical basis of fermentation, its medical properties, measured the pH and sugar, and observed its effect on health through the biodiversity it promoted in the intestinal biome. He was also an anti-capitalist symbol in a world almost subjected to buying and selling everything, and the faster the better: kombucha, by an ancient code of honor, was neither bought nor sold, it was shared. And he fermented with aromatic herbs the unhealthy sugar from the mills and the ration book, in a healing elixir of glucuronides, a balm for the troubled intestinal biome, a mirror of the decline in biodiversity due to man's impact on the planet. Very few things that could be touched in the world remained untouched by the alienating market. One day Marcos took Thanda to see his uncle Pulido, who at eighty-five years old and six feet tall remained upright like a broom and flexible like a bamboo. Pulido confessed to Thanda, with profound gratitude, that the kombucha Marcos gave him made him feel younger, more agile, and faster, and, above all, at his age, a sexual potency emerged in him that became legendary in the neighborhood where he lived, with not a few altercations with husbands of unsatisfied women who came to check Pulido's legend...

At the gatherings, they shared ideas, dreams, longings, and life with all its magic. They celebrated arrivals into the world, like Helenita, invited to life by Javi and Yuniet. They also felt together the loss of wonderful beings. Jerry González, the fascinating trumpeter, and inspirer of Latin jazz, already had his one-way boat ticket, with his beautiful wife and filmmaker Andrea and their daughter Julia, to go from Valencia to Havana and spend the last stage of his life submerged in the brave ideas and profound art of the beautiful island. A few weeks before the excited move to his longed-for Ithaca, a fire in the Lavapiés apartment where they lived burned his scores, his writings, and ended his life. Andrea came with his ashes, and everyone felt Jerry's magical soul invade the gathering and all of Cuba. Marlene distributed healing energy throughout Havana with her healing hands when she met and fell in love with Franco, an Italian actor passionate about letting his soul flow on stage. He was preparing a monologue for the gathering when a thief broke into their house and defending his family cost him his life. They felt his passionate monologues at the gatherings, closing their eyes and opening their hearts.

Cuba exuded magic and art on every corner, and at the gatherings, fascinating energies gathered that encouraged opening the heart. Thanda composed new songs for each gathering and, even without the talent or virtuosity of his Cuban family of artists, he emulated them in his heartfelt expression and connected with looks and even emotions and tears with those who listened to his "sung verses," a transformative experience for Thanda.

The gathering began by welcoming:

To this gathering of tenderness, every soul is welcome.

To come and tell their adventures.

Cubans and foreigners dissolve borders

With the magic of fleeting chords

No one has the right answer, truth has no owner.

Humility makes the heart flow.

Under this flamboyant tree, we bare our souls.

And let them travel to the beyond...

With songs and poems, we chase away demons.

And exhort the wisest theorems.

And if that weren't enough, there's plenty of kombucha.

To confess our craziest side...

It's the gathering of tenderness!

Come and tell your adventure!

Afterwards, under the stars, songs by Elias, Benny, Giordano, Edu, and many others who joined in. They remembered well-known songs in Cuba, almost anthems, which the gathered, often more than sixty people, sang in heartfelt choruses. Thanda usually sang "El marido de la peluquera" by Pedro Guerra, whom he met in a chance encounter in Madrid, and encouraged everyone to embrace each other randomly when the chorus said: "*hold me tight, so I can't breathe.*..". They interspersed them with new compositions, recited poems, and spontaneous stories. They remembered Jerry, Franco, Thanda's father, and so many loved ones who returned to everyone's energy and sang to them, closing their eyes and moved by their presence with the verses of "...*your light in me unites me with the universe... endlessly*...". They always ended with Aute's deep and meaningful song about beauty, the one that escaped the miseries of power: "...*now success is their goal... they didn't touch it for a moment... beaut*y...", a veiled nod to resurrecting the revolution of the humble "...as much as you have, so much you are worth... long live the revolution, from people as equals, from the soul of the well-meaning anarchy ".. .*I reclaim the mirage... of trying to be oneself.*.."- in which Thanda deeply believed. The final chorus "...beauty..." was so felt and shared that it extended... almost "dressing up" in the Zulu mmmmmms that Thanda remembered so much from Ukuzwana..., that a friend from the gathering, Juan Dávila, who animated with all his heart and almost without resources a wide network of meditation for peace, invited Thanda and the core group of the gathering to animate their meditation meetings in theaters in Havana.

So Thanda went with Elias, Benny, and sometimes Giordano and sometimes Edu, to give "gathering concerts" at the Trianón theater on Linea Street, becoming a cultural artery of Havana, at the famous and large Yara cinema, and at the Chaplin cinema where the Cuban New Trova originated. They also gave several concerts at the Bombilla Verde, a small and endearing center run by a Cubanized Basque, in honor of Silvio's monologue, the song with which Thanda addressed the friends that Unai, the genesis of the first gathering... "*I saw youth singing... and without wanting to, I was... dreaming*..." In each song, Thanda poured his soul and felt that those who listened knew it. He discovered when singing poems, a way to let his soul flow, as his song said, "*furtive from his skin*".

# Empires’ myths. Utah, January 2020

The 2020 EU regional cooperation meeting took place that year in Buenos Aires. Thanda arrived a few days early to explore and experience that great city. He stayed at the house of Ayleen, the lovely and brave daughter of Rene and Lili, his good agroecologist friends from Berkeley. He walked many kilometers through the streets of the great southern city, its majestic houses and buildings, and the Parisian cafes on every corner, where the spirit of Buenos Aires pulsated. He imagined gatherings of psychoanalysts discussing life and the world with the background of tangos. He hummed "Por una cabeza" while strolling, fascinated by that immense metropolis, like a piece of Europe stuck in the mouth of South America, with its lips toward the Mar del Plata. He then met with a friend of Pedro who loved Cuba, Mimi, with whose endearing family he sailed into the heart of the Paraná River to a house in El Tigre. From Córdoba, Ayleen and her mother Lili arrived at their student apartment, for whom Thanda felt great tenderness. Ayleen said she was studying medicine in large part because of what she felt when reading "Courage and Tenderness”. Some people wrote to Thanda telling him thrilled feelings while reading or after finishing his first novel. Nothing brought Thanda more peace than feeling that by emptying his soul, as he did through the novel, he connected with other souls so deeply. The novel "kidnapped" them for a few weeks in which they did reach the depths of their souls and felt understood. Thanda found it strange and at the same time sad that neither Nayra, nor his children, nor anyone in his family had read it. Only his father. Thanda nostalgically remembered the beautiful gatherings of feelings with his father, talking about his imaginary characters, who were really "more real than apparent reality."

He then swapped discussion sessions with his colleagues from countries across the region at a luxurious hotel where, as he always did, he preferred not to stay out of ethics, with long walks crossing the immense city. He came across the grand obelisk where memory was kept of "Juan de Garay, founder of Buenos Aires." He was intrigued by that story because his grandmother used to tell him that "one of their ancestors had been the founder of Buenos Aires." He searched for a biography of Juan de Garay in about twenty bookstores, but they all coldly replied that they had nothing. One of the shop assistants revealed to him with a challenging look the coldness of the responses: "We don't have anything here about genocidals." The Spanish colonization had been revealing itself with all its horrors and had been dissolving and sometimes hiding any epic dimension of the colony. Thanda did not give up and in one bookstore, they sent him to the back to talk to a man who organized hundreds of old books. He recommended looking for the Basque House and after several hours of asking, he found it. He knocked on the door, and a middle-aged woman with a vacant look opened it.

* My name is Juan de Garay.

He didn't need to say anything else; the woman asked him to accompany her to greet the president of the Argentine Basque association. She took him to an office where, in a cloud of tobacco smoke and surrounded by columns of stacked books, a stout man with a neglected appearance asked him to sit down. Thanda explained the reason for his visit. The man, a descendant of Basque immigrants, handed him a book titled "The Descendants of Juan de Garay," with a list of over ten thousand names. Of them, only about a hundred had Garay as their first surname, and only twenty-three had Juan as their first name. There were many more Garays in Argentina than in the Basque Country itself, but, that man assured him, they were not descendants of that mysterious colonizer. Thanda shared the comment he had received about the genocidal nature of colonization, to which the man reacted angrily:

* It's ignorance! Those were different times! Juan de Garay was a hero like no other in these lands. Martí, Bolívar, or San Martin would have wished to achieve his feats!

Thanda felt somewhat uncomfortable talking about heroes for some and villains for others. And about surnames of some and others brandished like pedigrees, as if they had anything to do with the worth of people. He bid farewell gratefully and headed back to Ayleen's apartment. He decided to search the internet for the history of that mysterious ancestor. So, he could read and compare several dozen accounts, both those that spoke of his feats and those that condemned his massacres. He even found in the archives of the Indies information about his birth, relatives, and journey to the Americas.

Thanda found out that the mother of Juan de Garay, the founder of Buenos Aires, was raped by a nobleman named Juan de Ochandiano, who rejected both her and the fruit of the rape despite being baptized with his name, Juan. The woman's brother had returned from the Indies with honors for his exploits in the Viceroyalty of Peru, including some expeditions through the Guaraní territory, and he denounced the nobleman, who at court agreed with money - things hadn't changed much- that the young woman would marry a Garay from the Basque Urdaibay, who would give the child his name. Without receiving any care from his biological father or affection from his putative father, in his adolescence he asked his uncle, who was returning to the Americas, to go with him. He crossed the ocean at just fourteen years old and before turning eighteen, he already had natives under his “encomiendas” (group of slaved natives) and participated in explorations crossing the Andes. Along the Amazon rivers, they took soldiers, settlers, priests, and horses and with sword and cross, they founded Santa Cruz de la Sierra, La Paz, and Santa Fe. They then moved south and Juan de Garay, as a captain with two hundred men and twenty horses, founded Buenos Aires, which fifty years earlier had unsuccessfully attempted to be founded by Pedro de Mendoza, whom legend said was eaten by the natives.

With the part of truth and the part of legend that those stories had, Thanda thought that the footprint of violence in Juan de Garay's origin might lead him to do the same with the virgin beauty of the magical lands and its people that he "discovered." He saw reflected in Juan de Garay’s acts - actually Juan de Ochandiano – the echo or revenge, conscious or subconscious, of the violation of his mother. So he didi by his subjugation of lands and peoples, by the larval slavery of the encomiendas and more explicitly by the rebellious natives subdued by steel, perhaps as was also sexism and its extreme expression in rape, considering as property and using at will. Furthermore, such abuse was blessed by the Church. Perhaps there was nothing immoral in the mind of the violent colonizer. Times and cultures defined what was acceptable and what was not. He was a hero and his epic conquests, for those of his time and culture. Even for many generations for those who were subjugated. Similarly, the modern world worshipped megalomaniac kings and presidents without sweat on their foreheads or calluses on their hands, or athletes and artists who accumulated fortunes while millions remained in hunger.

Thanda thought that all energy flows. That kindness spreads and multiplies, but sometimes so does evil.

Could kindness change the negative spiral of evil in the opposite direction?

Could fear and selfishness turn into trust and love?

And how long did the spirals of violence last?

How long would it take humanity to also consider immoral the treatment they now gave to animals, also accepted, and blessed without a shadow of ethical doubt?

After his time in Buenos Aires, Thanda spent another Christmas in Spain keeping his mother company and reuniting with Adam and Unai, with Ángeles and Daniela, and the rest of the family.

Ángeles was already twenty-eight years old, a beautiful woman. The distant lives in places and thoughts between her parents led her to take a certain distance from both. But she managed to maintain a strong affection and admiration for them. After living for a while with Moyes, María, Adam, and Unai in Robledo and then in the eco-village of the cooperants, while finishing her architecture studies, she went backpacking around the world. She became passionate about harmonious architecture with nature, inspired by Steiner's anthroposophy and the infinite forms she found in nature to integrate human shelter with the shapes of stones, grass, and trees without hardly disturbing it. She had met a French poet with whom she lived in Normandy, encouraging ecological construction in eco-villages in Europe and sailing the world every two or three years.

Daniela was twenty-three years old and since her magical union with Spirit in the forest of Tervuren, she had dedicated herself to fighting for animal rights, in deep alliance with Nour. She lived in an eco-village in southern Sweden, from where they promoted communication, empathy, and tenderness with all animals.

Unai had found a new home in Barcelona's Ciutat Vella. He had managed to have his studies from Cuba validated. He felt enthusiastic about delving into the knowledge of human nutrition, doing sports, starting to make music with a ukulele, and distancing himself from the groups that led him into a directionless life. Thanda went to Barcelona to give him a hug and wish him all the happiness, and between the two, they felt tremendous emotion at the reunion and an eternal bond.

Adam, already immersed in the magic of his videos of images, music, and magical poems, traveled with Cassie to Robledo where they all spent a few days of guitar and conversation by the fire. They were happy and had a clear horizon towards an eco-village.

Thanda spent long hours meditating in front of the tree that grew with his father's ashes. He always felt a distance from the consumerist atmosphere of Christmas in Europe, so contrary to Jesus' message of simplicity in life.

He shared some sung verses, but he felt they didn't resonate in a culture so saturated with consumption, which couldn't even comprehend life without it:

According to the Bible, Jesus was born in Bethlehem,

In the simplest way, escaping power.

His parents, Joseph and Mary, were persecuted,

By a cruel monarchy, they were not welcome there,

He grew up in Galilee, challenging the Pharisees,

And fearlessly denounced luxury and mausoleums.

He said: that wealth was unjust and immoral,

And firmly defended sharing equally.

Love was his legacy, living simply,

And he died crucified, accused of heresy.

If Jesus were alive today, he would be of this world,

A furtive immigrant, a rebel vagabond.

How can we celebrate his message of humility,

without the inertia of buying what is not necessary?

How can we pray to the God of Christians,

and at the same time let so many human beings drown?

Two thousand years have passed and many still suffer,

Remaining faithful to his legacy is living by sharing.

I want to break down borders, I want to open my home,

I want to sincerely commemorate everything.

The echo of the pure soul, Jesus' message,

Is courage and tenderness that inspire us with his light.

He returned to Havana leaving his elderly and fragile mother well taken care of by his sisters, who had their own epic struggles. He remembered how his sister Lorena, when he sent them his stories from Africa, wisely said: "don't forget about the little big things of life." His mother went to see him off at the train station as she always did. Once again, he felt his heart torn apart by leaving his mother, although she insisted, as his father always did, that he should follow his path and fight for his ideas.

Shortly after returning to work, Thanda was invited to attend the presentation of the documentary "Epicentro," by Hubert, at the Sundance Festival in Utah. He traveled from Havana and made a stop in Miami. He infiltrated a meeting in Little Havana where members of organizations opposing the Cuban government, who sought ways to overthrow the "regime" from exile, were participating. The meeting, organized by Radio América, was attended by members of various Cuban dissident organizations based in Miami and Madrid. Several Cuban doctors who had deserted from international missions spoke about the conditions they were forced to work under, that they only received a small part of the salary that the third country gave to the Cuban government, and that for deserting from that abusive situation, they couldn't return to Cuba for eight years. One of them said with emotional sadness, that his mother was ill in Cuba and he couldn't visit her. A representative from USAID announced a call for three million dollars for those who showed evidence of Cuba's abuse towards its internationalist doctors and even of their function as spies for the Cuban government. They were followed by speeches from Cuban Senator Marcos Rubio and Mauricio Clever, in charge of the Cuba-USA democracy agenda at the White House, who, in coordination with the Department of the Treasury, designed the engineering of the blockade and a myriad of constant actions against Cuba. He then presented reports from two UN human rights rapporteurs on "human trafficking" and "modern forms of slavery," who, based on a hundred interviews from one of the dissident organizations based in Madrid, had drafted their defamatory reports.

Thanda knew that he might already be under surveillance and that by speaking out, he would be identified and could suffer reprisals from the hierarchy in Brussels, who would surely receive protests from Washington. But the truth was what his father had taught him and what he would always defend, even at the risk of losing his job.

* Good morning. My name is Thanda Garay. I am a Spanish doctor. I have worked alongside many Cuban internationalist doctors in Africa. I would like to ask several questions to the high representatives of the United Nations.

There was a murmur in the room. Only people who conspired to overthrow the Cuban communist regime came to this place.

* First question: Do you believe that a report from a hundred dissatisfied cooperating doctors represents more than half a million Cuban internationalists over the past fifty years worldwide?
* Second question: I understand that salary retention ranges from zero to seventy percent depending on the salary received in the third country. Considering the relationship with the average salary in Cuba, the progressivity of fiscal equity is very similar to that of Denmark, allowing for the financing of universal social services, and nobody calls it "modern slavery."
* Third: I agree that the imposed norm of withdrawing the passport from those who do not fulfill their contract is excessive and can lead to painful personal and family situations, with which I sympathize. But I can assure you that the government is studying these cases. In any case, both conditions are known to internationalist doctors when they undertake their mission. Frankly, high representatives, with a world of such extreme inequalities, hundreds of millions of children forced into child labor, and labor conditions without social protection, like in this country the absence of maternity protection, don't you think paying so much attention to this issue is as exaggerated as your conclusions?

There was an uproar in the room. Shouts of "down with the dictatorship." Thanda felt hateful glares from hundreds of participants shouting, "Castro spy, get out!"

The high representatives murmured among themselves without knowing how to respond. Thanda saw how the USAID representative passed them a note. He thought that perhaps they had connections with the White House. They asked the internationalist doctor to give his testimony:

* I assure you, Dr. Garay, that what the report says is what happens to most Cuban internationalists. We do not know in detail the conditions we are going to, and during the years of working far away and under much worse working conditions than colleagues from those countries and certainly than other international cooperants, we decided to claim our rights. Our families don't even have enough to eat on the island; my mother doesn't have medications. Where is the money they withhold from me that they don't even give my mother pain medication?
* I really feel for your mother. I work in the European Union and I will insist to the Cuban government to be sensitive to cases like yours. Count on my support. I'll leave you my contact information here. But generalizing defamation to thousands of colleagues who give their time and even many their lives for humble and committed work, where no one else wants to go, is very unfair. I have met hundreds of Cuban internationalist doctors like you in the remotest corners of the world and I admire them greatly. The vast majority do it out of generosity and excitement for the service they provide to humanity. Nothing nobler. No country in the world comes close, not by a long shot, to the solidarity of more than half a million Cubans who, for sixty years, have left their families behind and gone to care for the most forgotten. Do you know how many doctors from the United States treated Ebola patients in Africa? Less than ten. How many Cubans, being a country thirty times smaller in population and two hundred times smaller in wealth? Almost three hundred. Do you think such noble valor, flaws aside, deserves this defamation campaign?

At that moment, two guards took him by the elbows and pushed him out of the room amidst disapproving shouts. Thanda looked back and saw that the Cuban doctor who gave his testimony was looking at him ashamed. On his way to the airport, he felt angry at how the noble Cuban internationalism was criticized by those on that panel who only walked on carpets, worked from computers, and would never come close, not by a long shot, to taking care of other people in the conditions of selflessness, commitment, and heartfelt enthusiasm of thousands of Cuban doctors around the world whom Thanda admired. But such defamatory action and the pressures from the White House on governments, well-designed by Clever, living up to his surname, were having their effect, but in a perverse way. Cuban cooperants were expelled from Brazil, from Ecuador, and were already being expelled by the coup government of Bolivia, surely put in place by the United States for its ambition to control its lithium reserves, key to future energy.

He headed with layovers to Salt Lake City Airport. He was traveling to the depths of North America. To the English colonists who three centuries ago moved westward with their Christian faith free from the Vatican and Henry VIII, in search of independence from norms and governments, with their own effort, in their caravans of hope. Others went with the ambition for gold or the fear of the indigenous people. Amalgams of love and light, of fear and darkness, as were all the peoples in the history of humanity.

He was particularly curious to discover the Mormon world whose "Vatican" stood grandly in Salt Lake City. When he studied in his adolescence in London, he visited a Mormon center out of curiosity where they showed him the story of John Smith through some showcases with mannequins representing scenes from his discovery of the revealing tablets to the famous who had embraced that faith. The greatest "endorsement" they proudly showed him was a famous, and surely millionaire, American football quarterback. Resonating myths. Innocently, he gave them his contact information and upon his return to Spain, a typical couple dressed in suits of young blonde Saxons repeatedly showed up at his parents' house to encourage them to "embrace the true faith."

After his journeys around the world, Thanda couldn't believe in one religion. It would be like *looking at just one star* or listening only to the morning song of a bird. Life was infinite in indescribable magic and ineffable beauty. Anyone who wanted to confine it to unique precepts was insulting other ways of understanding it, arrogantly claiming the monopoly of truth, and even more absurd, selfish, and perverse, linking it to the cruel final judgment of "*paradise for some and hell for others*." It wasn't easy to strip away those teachings from catechism since his tender childhood, nor so many other codes brutally or subtly imposed during his "education" and "socialization." He jotted down some verses and murmured them with a few chords.

Upon arriving at Salt Lake City Airport, he waited for an hour for Nayra and Adam to pick him up. Meanwhile, he observed how pairs of preachers arrived at the airport arrivals gate, all of them almost identical: tall, blond, with short-cropped hair, dressed in their black suits and ties, and wearing a name tag on their lapel with their name and the identification of their church, Latter Day Saints. They were greeted like heroes by large family groups in which Thanda could sense polygamy, allowed within the Mormon religion, reflected in the state laws and tolerated by the federal government. He imagined the return also of tens of thousands of American soldiers stationed in bases and wars around the world and their arrival at their "yellow ribbons" as defenders of the homeland. Some defending and preaching a religion, others a homeland, both intimately related in a worldview as "chosen ones." Superior and convinced of deserving the privileges of the earth in the known life and heaven in the unknown. He couldn't understand such a surrender of reason on the backs of such arrogance. He felt both sadness for the harm that such proselytism could do to many innocent people from corners of the world, where the simple and pure desire to love was imprisoned in the precepts and prejudices of those and many other prophets of so many forms and interests.

He was excited to reunite with Adam, his eldest son in his heart, and with Nayra, his soul companion in the distance. They headed towards the mountain town and base for ski resorts where the Sundance Film Festival was held every year. Founded by actor Robert Redford, it aimed to be the intellectual and social alternative to the simplistic and commercial Hollywood cinema, which, according to Hubert, with its triad of the good (Yankee) - the bad (communist) - and the victim (poor in need of physical and spiritual salvation), had been the perfect ally of XXth-century imperialism. This modern imperialism extended its dying gasps into the XXIst century through financial speculation, nuclear threats, and the absurd dramatization of its pathetic arrogance by Donald Trump.

Upon arriving at the luxurious wooden house surrounded by two meters of snow that the organization provided to Hubert, as one of the distinguished guests at the festival, he reunited with him and with Menal, who after her odyssey through migrant caravans from Oaxaca to Tijuana, crossed another border, like years ago the Mediterranean on a raft, was detained by brutal American border patrols and endured almost half a year in prison until she obtained, as a victim of an enemy government, the Eritrean communist, refugee status. Menal was radiant in her American dream, working in a Los Angeles airport cafe, living with a middle-class lady whom she attended to, and saving up for the "formula of happiness": her own house and car, and a job with which to pay mortgages, medical insurance, and her secret dream and the one Hubert's free soul, sailing on his adventures around the world, could not offer her. Menal longed for a family in which to raise children in the Christian faith, take them to university, which they would hopefully pay for after paying off the mortgage, and thus reach a pension from which to receive her children and grandchildren on Thanksgiving Day and give thanks to God for all of it. And yet, the love between the rebellious Hubert, who, like a hybrid of Lumière and Freud, put humanity on the couch with his documentaries revealing the fallacy of the system, alienating from all freedom; and Menal, from her epic courage to follow the lure of that system her beloved denounced; was pure and profound. They laughed like children amidst hugs and gestures of the most tender affection. Perhaps one and the other, the system and its denunciation, were just disguises of the soul that love unveiled pure and naked to merge without judgments or prejudices.

What filled his soul the most was seeing his son-in-spirit, Adam, presenting himself to recognized filmmakers as Hubert's documentary assistant and trying to find a space for the flow of art that he felt beating in his heart and burning his fingers with desires to show it to the world. Thanda felt for Adam the deepest tenderness and an inexplicable sense of trust in the human being.

Nayra was very busy and focused on accompanying and assisting Hubert as a co-producer of Epicentro, and Thanda and Nayra's reunion was sprinkled with isolated moments of tenderness and fusion. Thanda felt the vertigo of finding himself a few days under the rhythm of the festival's agenda and without the necessary intimacy with the "tempo-piano" to feel their souls troubled by three years of feeling love erode with distance and the increasingly cloudy horizon of a shared home that never arrived.

Epicentro showed the world its story. Thanda remembered the first outlines of ideas and people, places and events that Hubert showed him on his rooftop of Robinson Crusoe in Old Havana. He saw on the big screen the many adventures he had accompanied them on or that Adam and Nayra told him about, filming scenes of life in Havana and giving the protagonists, the lovely preadolescents Leoneli and Annielis, a voice to the world. The message of resisting the harassment of decadent capitalism, with its embargo and economic asphyxiation, with its narrative of savior empire and with its bombardment of luxury tourists, resonated fresh and spontaneous, as the anthem of the tenderness gstherings said, "they didn't even touch the beauty for a moment."

Thanda composed a song about the message he felt from Epicentro, which he shared with the group:

No one knows where and when, or if it comes from dreams.

She is calling us and doesn't want us as masters.

Her dreamers proclaim, dangerous idealists.

naive agitators, rebellious nonconformists,

where life unfolds without hierarchies,

every soul is welcome, only harmony reigns.

There's an island in the world where traces still remain

and in its fertile womb, her embraces await us.

Perhaps for not knowing the joy of harmony,

perhaps also for fearing the loss of hegemony,

those thirsty for power wanted to subdue her,

and impose their ways on the island of love.

First by colonizing with the sword and the cross

subduing and baptizing, distributing slavery.

Then with more subtlety and selling freedom,

another royalty infiltrated, one that worships capital,

but that beautiful island, indomitable, resisted.

Tired of being a maiden, rose up in rebellion,

at the magical epicenter there are girls with dignity

calling for reunion with noble freedom

the one that never yields, the one that knows that someday,

this blind humanity will surrender to utopia.

He encouraged them to sing the chorus together:

Like the lighthouse is utopia as our ship advances

We do not arrive as yet, but it lightens our hope.

Thanda thought about how Thomas More's utopia had found its Atlantic Island in Eila and sailing towards that beacon, Cuba would protect itself from the clutches of capitalism and rid itself of the stiffness of hierarchies.

After attending several screenings of the documentary, press interviews, and debates in front of the public, Adam, Nayra, and Thanda spent a last day strolling in Salt Lake City. They visited the enormous and luxurious buildings of the headquarters of the ten million Mormons in the world. They were shown the history that Thanda was taught thirty years earlier when he was studying in London, but with large paintings in immense halls. The traditional way of dressing, like that of the Amish of Pennsylvania, contrasted with the sumptuous and modern buildings devoted to their dogmas. They were shown the largest and most modern conference hall in the world where their assembly of believers from around the world gathered in a much more communal way than the Vatican, but with a strong adherence to their principles and proselytizing mission. They saw hundreds of pairs of preachers who had surely walked through hundreds of countries, roads, and homes transmitting "their truth." That worship mixed their hope for eternity in exchange for fulfilling certain dogmas, with American patriotism that worshipped money, the reward for those who deserved it, defended by the monstrous killing apparatus of the country that possessed half the world's capacity for destruction, and of which Utah was one of its bastions.

How was it possible for Jesus's message to be so distorted that it deplored the sharing-all of communism in its essence? And how was it possible for pacifism against military and nuclear arsenals to be anathema to those who defended the religion of peace and love? Jesus faced an empire in his time and in his name two thousand years later the most powerful empire waved the flags of freedom-to-accumulate and of the greatness-of-invading.

Thanda felt a mixture of rejection towards the "*arrogance-of-truth*" and unconfessed envy for those who feel united as a community without cracks by a shared existential sense. In fact, from his studies on equity, he followed with interest the analyzes of the "blue spots," communities around the world with the highest healthy longevity, perhaps the best human well-being, and there was always a shared faith or vision among them. He wondered if his flight from creeds and dogmas, laws, and myths, was "against nature" to human essence, gregarious out of necessity and therein mythomanic and submissive. Would it be better to be submissive, accompanied, and happy than free, solitary, and eternally longing for shared affection in community? The eco-villages called him to seek the path of community in freedom, love without codes.

They then went to the headquarters of the most important genealogy center in the world, which under the name of "family search" offered the search for ancestors in its immense database. The reason for such Mormon effort to compile generational links to the past lay in their belief that they could also convert the deceased to the faith who did not have the opportunity to know the history of their prophet and his truth. They began by taking their deceased parents and grandparents to the temples so that, already deceased, they could be converted to the faith and thus save their souls and enjoy in paradise where the good and proselytizing Mormons awaited them. Then they continued researching previous generations until they traced back to the first settlers. Since many of them had relatives in Europe, they searched official archives and especially parish archives since the Council of Trent imposed the registration with the Christian name and surname of the father, of every baptized person, and thus saved from the hell of unbelievers. Those ancestrors related to monarchies had their earlier generations tracked. He could trace hos in law Mexican family as related to the kings of Portugal, Spain, France, Germany, and England. All was a web of power, interrelated. As Haka had untangled in the connections of speculative financial powers, money laundering, drug, arms, diamond and human trafficking, mercenaries, pharma monopolies and oil interests sprouting the world with suffering, destruction, and wars. The evil web remaimed, transformed.

Thanda traced back those family trees and the Mormon database linked them with the order of the holy grail, linked to Ben Mathat, uncle of Jesu’ mother Mary. The largest human family tree (rather, a massive forest) had codes for each of the over 1000 million people traced for 6000 years. According to their studies, Jesus Christ (code LDLR-236) had two children with Mary Magdalene. The story of Jesus and his love for a prostitute touched Tahnda’s heart with a feeling of tenderness. Human, at last. And hence, surrendering to beauty and love. Jesus and his family were also related to King David and 4000 of generations before, based on the Old Testament, leading to Adam and Eve. How could such fabule be turned into solid believe?

Not tracked so far, Thanda found his beloved grandmother Amama's first husband and a brother of hers had emigrated to Idaho, where there were still Basque communities. Thus, Thanda could identify several generations of his Basque ancestors, learn about his American family, and take away a poster that, in the form of a fan, showed those fascinating roots, surely full of epic. Each person, a universe, a hero of their own history. Thanda thought about how little we knew about our own roots and even less about the hierarchies of power and the imposed myths. In his childhood, he had to memorize the list of forty Gothic kings while he knew almost nothing about his ancestors, more humble and more epic their anonymous stories.

They bid farewell at Salt Lake City Airport. Adam would spend some time in Berkeley looking for contacts for his creative source, while Nayra would return to her almost immovable routine of taking care of her children away from her beloved. Until when?

On the return trip, he finished his poem as he left the United States, a country whose soul, Thanda thought, was trapped by the myths of religion, homeland, and money, allies in a form as contradictory as it was perverse.

I banished the language of the prophet, the one who professed a single God.

And his prophecies and threats to those who used reason.

I banished the thrones and the kings, all the fallacy of power.

And the hierarchies that impose that others must obey.

I banished the walls and borders, those that try to separate us.

All shields and flags, any form of labeling

I banished the fangs of wars that bleed those who want to love.

And their medals and badges, cowardice is not to desert.

I banished the supposed truths and those who want to impose them.

Those who differentiate between ages, the monopolies of knowledge.

I banished the claws of fears, discovered the magic of living.

And I shook off all creeds, and here I am with nothing to pretend...

I banished from my soul all certainty except to love...

He was looking forward to returning to "his island" and sharing those verses in his circle of tenderness.

# The Covid Pandemic bursts, Fear halts the world. January 2020

After his trip to the United States, Thanda went to celebrate his mother's ninetieth birthday in Madrid. It coincided with his annual trip to teach at the master’s in international health organized by his friend Miguel at the University, to share his ideas with students whom he aimed to inspire for revolution. He took the opportunity to share his feelings and tenderness with his mother and spend days at her beloved house in Robledo, which Moyes and María continued to care for, meditating in front of the cypress tree that grew with the essence of his father. He felt guilty for his carbon footprint from crossing the Atlantic, but it was necessary to share time and care with his mother, surely what would bring the most joy to his father from the universe.

For three months, worrying news had been arriving about a strange pneumonia diagnosed in China. Through David Ho, Aimsa and Jonay's friend, Thanda contacted a researcher in Wuhan named Xi. He told him how on December 29, four patients with a strange pneumonia were admitted to a hospital. All of them worked in the seafood wholesale market. The hospital reported it to the disease control center in Shanghai, where he worked, and they initiated an investigation, finding more symptomatic cases of pneumonia in workers and customers related to the market.

Two days later, on the last day of the year 2019 for the Western world, twenty-seven people had already been diagnosed with pneumonia of unknown cause, and seven of them were in critical condition. On the first day of 2020, the market was closed. In laboratory samples, they ruled out other known infectious causes of pneumonia and could not confirm the presence of viruses responsible for respiratory epidemics in the last two decades such as SARS, MERS, or avian flu.

A week later, on January 7, 2020, Xi and his team isolated the virus causing the disease and managed to sequence its genome, which consisted of a single strand of RNA of thirty thousand nucleotides, the purine bases described by Cajal a century ago. They sent it to the World Health Organization five days later. This allowed laboratories around the world to begin producing specific diagnoses via tests by multiplying their genes through the PCR technique. By mid-January, there were already sixty diagnosed patients, and the first cases outside of China were confirmed: two in Thailand and one in Japan.

By the end of the month, there were seven thousand cases in all provinces of China and in fifteen other countries. One hundred seventy patients had died, almost all in Wuhan, most with underlying diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, and vascular diseases that weakened their immune systems.

The head of emergencies at the World Health Organization, an English epidemiologist with the look of a hooligan named Mike, whom Thanda met through work in Brussels, recommended to the newly appointed director-general, the Ethiopian biologist Tedros, to declare the epidemic as a public health emergency of international concern. The impact it could have on low-income countries and those with fragile health systems alarmed him. By mid-March, there were over a hundred thousand diagnosed cases in a hundred countries, and four thousand people had died from the new disease. The World Health Organization decided to recognize it as a pandemic.

After giving his classes, Thanda took what would be the last commercial flight from Madrid to Havana before the restriction imposed by the pandemic.

Upon arriving in Havana, he was isolated in his home in quarantine for two weeks. After finishing that period in isolation, Cuba decreed confinement, and Thanda continued to work from his solitary home. Without wifi and still with little "data" to consult news from the world, he learned that the number of confirmed cases in the world continued to grow to half a million by the end of March.

Gradually, governments began to share information, and almost all followed the example of Wuhan and China, which apparently by closing borders and limiting the mobility of their citizens, contained the number of infections and deaths to a peak of one month and less than one percent of all deaths in the world's most populous country.

By the end of March, the epidemic was subsiding in China, but it had been increasing in Italy, which already had the highest number of deaths. Their data reflected that the median age of those who died from COVID-19 was nearly eighty years old, more in men than in women. Only two percent were previously in good health before the infection. At the beginning of April, the number of cases and deaths doubled, and the epicenter moved to Lombardy and Madrid, from where his mother and sisters spoke to him every day, terrified.

The Intensive Care Units of Lombardy in Italy and Madrid in Spain, the two epicenters at the end of March in the world, already surpassing China, began to fill with seriously ill patients. There were reasons to worry because the epidemiology was not well known, its way of attacking the human body, what drugs could be effective, and if it would be possible to develop a vaccine. The formula that the World Health Organization soon began to spread was to "flatten the curve" of the epidemic, to "not collapse health systems." With that mantra, governments, after closing borders, began to close schools, universities, hotels, and restaurants, businesses except for essential ones such as food and medicine, and even health centers and non-urgent or serious disease care.

Thanda began to read everything he could find on the internet. He made a diagram in his room to try to better understand the pandemic that seemed to be slowly spreading throughout the world and could change the course of humanity.

He started by trying to understand the virus: it belonged to the family of coronaviruses, named for the spikes surrounding its capsule, which, under the electron microscope, gave it a crown-like shape. According to the variety of genes and proteins, they were classified into four genera: Alpha, Beta, Gamma, and Delta. The virus causing the pandemic spreading among humans was a beta-coronavirus, which along with the alpha genus caused respiratory infections in humans and gastroenteritis in other mammals, almost always mild, and mostly asymptomatic, evidence of a favorable evolution of mutual adaptation.

The virus benefited from sharing human cell "tools" to reproduce, and humans learned from the genetic structures of the virus. Many changes in human evolution had been due to the integration of viral genes into its genome, such as, apparently, the evolution from reptiles to mammals. What contribution would infection with this new coronavirus make to human evolution? Time, perhaps much beyond the generational span, would tell.

It was normal for each coronavirus to adapt to a species of mammals. Six of them affected humans. Rarely, coronaviruses from other mammals could mutate and infect humans, causing more harm because they were more unfamiliar and elicited more virulent reactions. This happened with severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in 2002 in Guangdong Province, China, and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) in 2012 in Saudi Arabia. Thanda thought, a pandemic every decade.

The size of COVID was barely a hundred nanometers in diameter, one ten-thousandth of a millimeter, about a thousand times smaller than a red blood cell.

He then studied, from what he could read, its "brain": its genes. Its RNA sequence was approximately thirty thousand nucleotides long. Scientists from around the world shared information on more than five hundred genomic sequences of the virus. It was found that the RNA encoded four proteins that made up its skeleton: the S protein (for "spike" because of the spike shape on the surface), the E protein (for "envelope" in English, like the covering), the M protein (for membrane), and the N protein (for nucleocapsid, inside the virus and surrounding RNA). It was also discovered that it was the S protein that could «assemble» into human cell receptors and thus entering them. It used cellular enzymes to make RNA copies and synthesized its proteins, thereby creating new viruses. It fulfilled its aspiration to reproduce and perpetuate, like any living being, including humans.

Thanda recalled his training in epidemiology. It had been described that the virus was transmitted through the air via coughing, sneezing, speaking, simple breathing, and even hand contact with contaminated surfaces. The virus could remain active on various surfaces, up to three days on steel or plastics and four days on glass or bills. Hands transmitted the virus to mucous membranes through the unconscious act of touching the face about two thousand times a day, and from there, it found its way through the conjunctiva, nasal passages, or mouth. To try to understand the key to the epidemic's spread, he sought to determine its "R0" or reproduction rate, the average number of new infections that each infected person can generate. Xi collaborated with the Chinese Academy of Sciences in estimating an R0 in China during February of almost four, although a British group estimated an R0 of three.

It was also discovered very early on that the receptor on the human cell where the virus attached and entered was the same one that recognized an enzyme called "angiotensin-converting enzyme," related to increasing blood pressure when little blood reached the kidney, also present in the lungs and the heart, something that his "cousin," the SARS virus, had already done fifteen years before.

What scientists from around the world began to observe was that the virus triggered in the human body an intense inflammatory reaction called a "cytokine storm," proinflammatory proteins released by neutrophils, macrophages, and mast cells.

Thanda had great respect for a Cuban scientist who would already be retired in many other countries but who, like so many other Cubans who had experienced the triumph of the revolution in their adolescence, continued to work in their seventies with few resources but unwavering commitment. It was Agustín Lage, the founder and director of Cuba's flagship biotechnology center, the Center for Molecular Biology, with whom Thanda had fascinating debates at the headquarters of the Pan American Health Organization. Lage, as everyone called him, had observed in the first Cuban patients infected with COVID-19, mostly older people with weakened immune systems that he called "immunosenescence," when the virus was not neutralized by the immune system, it replicated and caused some damage to lung tissue, which activated macrophages and granulocytes, which released massively and indiscriminately proinflammatory cytokines and caused severe respiratory failure.

Thanda imagined the human body as a country where if any furtive immigrant - virus - crossed the border - the skin -, it should be detected by customs and stopped, but if it did not because it had few or poorly prepared agents, then it would blend into the population, disrupt public order, and the population with the infiltrated fugitives would be attacked by a "riot police" in a violent and indiscriminate way. Interestingly, if the body did not react so violently, the virus would cause limited damage while it replicated and spread to other hosts. He thought to himself that it was often the irrational fear of the unfamiliar that generated violence and damage at both the molecular and social levels.

He tried to find ways to encourage collaboration between Cuba and the European Union to respond to the pandemic from his work. Cuba shared with China a research and production laboratory for Interferon alfa-2b developed by the Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (CIGB). It was a molecule produced by lymphocytes in their fight against invading agents. Between Cuba and China, three hundred thousand doses were manufactured in aerosols and began to be administered to severe cases, and it was used during February and March in Wuhan patients. They reported through the press that it improved the course of severe cases. They received requests for shipments from various countries in Latin America, Asia, and Eastern Europe. Thanda spoke with the director of the CIGB, Eulogio, to find ways to collaborate, who told him that due to the US blockade, they could not continue their production due to a lack of basic supplies such as Petri dishes for cultures or containers, bottles, and even boxes for distribution.

The United States was already showing its first signs of insensitivity to the pandemic's drama and continued its cruel embargo on the island, blocking supplies from other countries, especially India, "the pharmacy of the poor world." The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres, made a plea for a minimum of sensitivity to the global drama and tragedy, asking for an end to bombings and military attacks. Not even Trump complied with that, as he continued insensitively bombing Syria and other places in the world to preserve its imperial privileges.

Since the CIGB had purchased a factory in the Basque Country with the plan to commercialize its biotechnology products in Europe, escaping the blockade of the United States, Thanda proposed to Brussels an agreement to support the manufacturing of interferon alfa-2b and include it in the treatment of patients, who, increasingly, were filling the ICUs already throughout Italy, Spain, and spreading to France, the UK, and the rest of Europe. The proposal received no response. Like so many of Thanda's proposals in his twenty years in the European Union. He attempted this operation with Algeria, a friendly country of Cuba, the first recipient of Cuban internationalist missions since its independence from France and now a supplier of oil due to the collapse of Venezuela. This proposal was also ignored. Thanda was beginning to suspect that Washington's long arm was infiltrating the corridors of the European Union in Brussels.

An Italian colleague who was a classmate of Marco, Thandiwe's partner in Ukuzwana, described in the autopsies of a good portion of the patients who died from COVID-19 disseminated thromboembolisms, which were possibly the cause of multiorgan failure and death. Thanda communicated this to Pedro, who was compiling information for the scientific team in Cuba that was deciding on treatment protocols, to José Moya, a Peruvian doctor representing the Pan American Health Organization in Cuba, and to Miguel in Spain, to consider introducing anticoagulants to prevent disseminated intravascular coagulation that led to the death of many COVID-19 patients.

Thanda thought that no one really knew the magnitude of the epidemic. Its curve could be inferred from the number of deaths, deferred by about two to four weeks after infection. But how many people were infected? Each country tested severe suspected cases, or all compatible clinical cases, or also their primary contacts, or even the contacts of contacts in the previous fourteen days. But no statistic was comparable with other countries nor representative of the real epidemic. All countries established a coordinating team for pandemic response and reported daily on television, radio, and other media the number of new infections and the number of severe cases and deaths. That daily "missal" listened to with devotion by the entire world population and consolidated into global data by the World Health Organization, was based on partial figures that did not reflect the true magnitude and nature of the epidemic. From these figures, rates of epidemic reproduction and disease lethality were deduced, with the false denominator of the number of infected. It was like searching for keys at night only under the lamppost because there was light there and drawing conclusions from it. By the end of March, the country conducting the most tests, up to ten thousand a day, was South Korea, where, logically, the R0 expansion was greater, and the lethality rate was lower.

He remembered the community diagnosis of Ukuzwana and how each health center in Cuba and Spain could study its community, including household surveys on their resources for confinement, teleworking possibilities, or the need for work outside the home, the presence of elderly people living alone, the prevalence of chronic diseases that increased virus lethality, and seroprevalence studies in representative samples of the communities. He proposed this to former classmates and residents, now in the Ministry of Health in Spain, without success.

By the end of April, there were already more than a hundred laboratories in the world producing tests that detected Immunoglobulin G (IgG): the antibody that the lymphocytes of infected patients learned to produce specifically against the virus. The presence of this antibody indicated previous infection. The proportion of people with IgG against COVID-19 was the key data to understand the magnitude, geographical and demographic distribution, and lethality in each group. Thanda could not understand how, instead of going out to understand the disease, health centers were closed, attending only by phone and to decide whether to send ambulances to take seriously ill patients to the hospital. Population studies of IgG cost one millionth of what countries were losing by closing their economies and could provide clues on how to respond intelligently to the pandemic that had already gripped the whole world with fear. He insisted in Spain, Cuba, and other countries on the importance of conducting population studies and designing, according to their results, intelligent strategies, but it seemed like he was shouting in the desert.

During April, infections and deaths continued to rise, reaching nearly a quarter of all mortality in Italy and Spain during the peak week of the pandemic. The use of masks began to be recommended, which until then had been discouraged by the World Health Organization except for medical personnel. Shortly after, the confinement at home of non-essential workers and those who could telecommute was imposed, gradually infiltrating into every home of the privileged professions that did not earn their salary with the sweat of their brow. For most people in the world who lived without the "pseudo-work" of interacting with a screen, the restrictions were impossible to comply with.

Just as AIDS divided the world at the end of the previous century into poor-condemned and rich-well-treated, the pandemic that swept the world twenty years later divided it into telecommuting-salaried workers, protected in their homes, and manual laborers, exposed to the virus because they had to go out to seek their livelihood.

A tragedy was unfolding within the generalized social tragedy caused by the pandemic. Terín, a sweet and intelligent student from the courses Thanda taught at the university, told him about the drama of the elderly people living in "nursing homes." Almost one in three people over eighty, about two million in Spain, lived in these residences, the vast majority of which were private and attended by Latin American immigrants. That's how society had evolved. Something as essential as returning care in their fragility to those who had given it to the now working generation was often delegated to others, many from other countries, and often in other homes. After outbreaks of the virus occurred in some nursing homes, with devastating effects on older people with chronic illnesses, visits from their relatives were prohibited.

Thanda thought about it with pain because he wanted to return to Spain to take care of his mother, now in her nineties. It broke his heart to be so far away. Many of those people became ill and, lacking family members or transportation to take them to the hospital, died in the residences with only contact with the caregivers, clad in masks, gloves, and plastic dresses to prevent contagion. The pain of thousands of elderly people dying alone at home, in residences, or in hospitals, without a loving hand in their final moments, was immeasurable. And it was the result of a civilization that sidelined its elders and applied fear and distance among all members of society. Even funerals and burials were restricted to no more than three people.

The epidemic had begun to recede in Wuhan while spreading to the rest of the world. Every day he spoke with his mother and sisters, discussing the number of deaths in Madrid, which reached nearly a thousand in one day in mid-April, almost half of all deaths in the country. His mother locked herself in fear at home and cried thinking about the immense suffering of tens of thousands of people from her generation, many of whom were in nursing homes, agonizing without the warmth of family.

There were reasons to be alarmed, to prevent infections, and to seek treatment schemes for the affected. So that the world would unite in responding with intelligence and solidarity. But fear clouded reason and fueled selfishness.

Thanda made extrapolations of the epidemic in Wuhan if it were to spread with equal magnitude and virulence to the rest of the world. It would cause a million deaths in 2020, out of a total of over sixty million deaths per year, that is, less than two percent of the total. It was serious, and each life was incomparable and a tragedy to avoid. And the global alarm was an opportunity to call for solidarity and a change in way of life. It was surprising to him that for a risk of less than two percent of deaths, the world had been alarmed and paralyzed, while other causes he had fought for many years, such as malaria and AIDS, with twice as many deaths, or at their root, deep inequality, with ten times more deaths each year, were constantly ignored and did not make any headlines in any newspaper on any given day.

He made a comparison: considering the advanced average age of those affected, the epidemic could cause the loss of about five million years of healthy life, the comparative measure of disease burden among health problems. Every year humanity lost about two billion years of healthy life (more than three months per person, on average) compared to the best health in the world, that of Japan. More was lost in early childhood, although it was increasing in adult ages in low-income countries. But it was also increasing in middle-income countries. Less health was lost each time due to infectious diseases and more due to chronic diseases related to unhealthy lifestyles. Metabolic and vascular diseases, as well as mental and various forms of cancer, were related to sedentary lifestyles, unhealthy diets, and exposure to industrial toxins. In total, in the absence of prevention, vaccine, or effective treatments, the emerging epidemic would cause the loss of about five million years of healthy life, 0.25% of the loss of human health compared to more than 50% due to inequality. Furthermore, climate change would progressively increase its proportion as a cause of human life loss to more than a third of the total, largely overlapping with global inequality and affecting those who had contaminated less: low-income countries and those born after 1990, the so-called Millennials. The human mind, especially in its collective actions, was remarkably arbitrary, Thanda thought.

The world was slowing down its frenetic economy, which was good news for the environment and perhaps for the awakening of a human consciousness dulled by ceaseless and limitless production and consumption. During the first quarter of 2020, the world decreased carbon emissions for the first time since it began burning fossil fuels with the industrial revolution, but still at levels that would not prevent irreversible and irredeemable warming by the middle of the century.

What was surprising to Thanda was that to stop the COVID-19 epidemic, the world was willing to sacrifice about four trillion dollars in losses due to economic paralysis that year, while for the silent inequality causing two hundred times more health loss, barely one hundred billion dollars were allocated, and very indirectly and ineffectively, forty times less. The comparison of what health economists called "cost-effectiveness," the cost to recover one year of healthy life, was about one hundred dollars to mitigate, in vain, each year of life lost due to unjust inequality; and about eight hundred thousand dollars for each year of life attempted to be rescued from the clutches of the epidemic. The comparison echoed what the World Bank proposed in the 1990s as the maximum cost-effectiveness of public health interventions, thirty dollars, with which the governments of rich countries accepted as cost-effectiveness in their health system protocols, about one hundred thousand dollars. Adjusting for inflation, the price of human life remained in the same macabre spectrum: about three thousand times higher in rich countries.

The COVID-19 epidemic affected rich economies, and that was how the world reacted.

Thanda thought that society's reaction to the epidemic mirrored that of the human body to the pandemic. The "cytokine storm" in the body might be causing more harm than the virus itself in killing some cells. At the same time, the exaggerated and indiscriminate reaction with social and economic paralysis could be causing more damage than the epidemic itself. It was the elderly, those who had given their lives for those who now made decisions, who needed to be embraced, protected more, and with more humanity. Thanda thought with concern that the world's reaction to the pandemic was neither intelligent nor compassionate.

It was an opportunity, perhaps the last in the XXIst century, for Humanity to change course towards less inequality and pollution, with more intelligence and solidarity. Thanda would put, from his "Tenderness in Third Avenue," now orphaned of gatherings due to political and social alarm, his whole heart into it.

# Safe Hugs. Navarra, may 2020

Beatriz was already ninety-two years old. Her white hair tied in two braids, her short and almond-shaped honey eyes, her gentle smile, and the traces of so much lived experience in wrinkles of knowledge and feelings, depicted an expression of kindness and sweetness that her family and neighbors felt as a blessing.

From the porch of the old family farmhouse of the Belokis, she looked at the silhouette of the Navarrese Sierra de Aralar. The ten mountains outlined in the silhouette of the distant and nearby mountains to the north, almost blue in the twilight nimble, evoked the milestones of her life, for which she felt profound gratitude to the universe.

She remembered with the first western hill, prolonged and gentle, her childhood and adolescence in that same farmhouse where the old oak boards of the staircase still creaked towards what was now her bedroom of love and her cradle of dreams. Next came a rugged peak with which she remembered her time studying in Opus Dei in Pamplona, from her high school years to her law studies, living in the residence of Opus “supernumeraries” under strict codes, prejudices, and penances. Looking at that peak and remembering that time always made her emotional and feel sadness,yet ineffable tenderness, recalling that young woman she had been tormented by fear. Following was the tallest, firmest peak, on which a plateau could be discerned, with evoked how she and Meimuna crossed paths and love, the most forbidden and the most beautiful, flooded her life. Behind that peak was a smaller one, with beautiful color contrasts, which brought to Beatriz the image of the birth of Moyes, her beloved and brave son, the most magical translation of violence into love, darkness into light. Following was the silhouette of a prolonged massif with a rough and steep peak, her life in Brussels fighting in the cold bureaucracy. In the middle of the massif stood a granite crag that symbolized for her the moment when, in Rome and hand in hand with her brother Patxi, she decided to free herself from the moralistic prejudices that had suffocated her life and to surrender without the chains of modesty and the gag of imposed codes, to life as a couple with her beloved Meimuna and their son Moyes. Following was the rugged plateau in Brussels with some peaks of her legacy fighting in the distance with her brother Haka against child trafficking and with him and Fernando against blood diamonds in Sierra Leone. Towards the east, there was a firm and mysterious mountain from her time in New Delhi, discovering a spiritual world that bathed her soul with serenity. After that mountain, there was a beautiful descending plateau towards the east, her life, for the past ten years, in the family farmhouse, and in which, several abrupt cliffs reminded her with vertigo of the marches of Haka and Patxi.

Her gaze ended the journey clouded with gratitude and emotion, knowing that her strength was running out, and she would merge into the energy of the universe, leaving behind an incarnation as fragile as beautiful, as mysterious as magical.

In the ten years since they had restored life to the family farmhouse, they had been animating a beautiful eco-village of almost fifty farmhouses with which they shared the care of the orchard and the forest, food and firewood, looms and workshops, horses and carts, assemblies and celebrations, sunrises, and sunsets, welcomes and farewells to life.

Meimuna had been writing a beautiful manual on "ecumenism in love." In the spacious stone hall of the farmhouse, she received groups from all over the world, some on their way to the Camino de Santiago, with whom she discussed the common sense of religions and the brave and pure search for each one's connection energy with that of the universe.

Moyes and María already had two young children, Sol, and Luna, and alternated between times in the Casa Garay de Robledo and the Beloki farmhouse, continuing their struggle against evictions and the abuses of banks and economic powers insensitive to the pain of increasing and extreme unjust inequalities.

Moyes collaborated with Thanda in his studies of inequality and its price in human lives, which they studied and published every five years, participated in the degrowth network with Thanda's Mexican friend, Miguel, and debated with Piketty, Stiglitz, and Correa on the end of capitalism and the alternative of collaborative and harmonious economy of eco-villages.

Beatriz felt a strange peace as she became aware that the end was approaching. She shared her feelings with Thanda, who sent her a song:

Life is gradually coming to its slow decline,

losing sight, hearing, memory, and agility,

we refuse to accept it and ignore the end,

often acting as if immortal destiny.

No one knows where this slow decline leads,

the precipice approaches, we prefer not to speak,

for the doubt of what follows even troubles the cardinal,

and thus, we disguise our abysmal vertigo.

But I am convinced that we must trust

the imprint we leave through our love,

the memory of that love lives on in others,

the more you give of your soul, the smoother the journey.

It is wise to carry little weight when traveling,

it is also wise to live without wanting to accumulate,

and I do not only refer to material aspects,

it is even more essential to know how to deliver the soul.

No one knows where this slow walk leads,

there are those who assure us that there is a God beyond,

they proclaim themselves as his spokespersons and pretend to save us,

from the hell in which we burn if our thoughts differ.

There are others who tell us that we will be reincarnated,

and there are those who claim that there is nothing beyond,

I believe in those who say that no one really knows,

what awaits us when we stop breathing.

What I feel is that love transcends time and place,

by surrendering in love to the universal energy,

by loving ourselves without fear, there is no longer anything individual,

we are everything we love, and thus there is no end.

Beatriz, with little strength and very aware of her final decline, looked with tenderness at Meimuna, so beautiful and sweet, at Moyes, so brave and noble, at her happy family, at the generous neighbors, at the mountains of her life. She repeated inwardly, like a powerful mantra inspired by her brother Patxi and reflected in Thanda's song, "*we are everything we love, and thus there is no end*."

They had celebrated Mother's Day on the first Sunday of May with Moyes and his family, who proudly declared having the gift of two wonderful mothers and the message of the bravest love.

A few days later, Beatriz noticed that she couldn't smell or taste a "porrusalda" that Meimuna had prepared. The next day she began to have a high fever, cough, and difficulty breathing. She felt too weak even to get out of bed.

She asked Meimuna not to call anyone. She wanted to peacefully end her long life with soothing herbal infusions, surrounded by the love of her family and listening to the song Thanda sent her.

Moyes had gone to the village pharmacy to get paracetamol to lower his mother's fever because they couldn't bring it down with compresses of spring water or with a willow bark infusion from the farmhouse. When he mentioned Beatriz's condition, the pharmacist said it was mandatory to report suspected cases of infection to control the epidemic and informed the health center. A few hours later, an ambulance from the public health service arrived at the house. A doctor, a nurse, and two assistants, dressed in plastic suits and bulky masks, got out. Meimuna welcomed them at the door:

* We've been informed that there is a person on the farm with possible COVID symptoms.
* My soul partner Beatriz has a fever and difficulty breathing, but she prefers to stay at home.
* We can't allow that, ma'am. If she has the virus, she could have transmitted it to you and continue spreading it in the community.
* Please, don't worry. She doesn't leave the farmhouse anymore. We can take the test, and in any case, we want to take care of her with love, and forgive me for the comment, without plastics.
* I'm sorry, ma'am, but by public health law, we are obliged to take her to the University Hospital of Navarra in Pamplona. We will now test all contacts with a PCR, and if they are positive, they must remain in quarantine on the farm and inform us if they have symptoms.

It was futile for Meimuna and Beatriz to insist on their desire to stay on the farm. The emergency team went up with a stretcher, an oxygen cylinder, and a briefcase of medicines, IV fluids, and intubation and manual ventilation equipment, to the bedroom where Beatriz was.

The doctor examined her and found a temperature of almost 40°C and signs of dehydration and cyanosis. The pulse oximeter revealed saturation below 90 percent. Beatriz was auscultated, and the doctor could hear scattered crackling rales.

They explained her the situation, in their terms:

* Beatriz, you have symptoms of a respiratory infection, and it could very well be COVID. We need to take you to the hospital.
* I beg you, brothers, leave me here in my bed. I just want to rest gently while looking at the mountains.
* I'm sorry, ma'am, but we must take you to the hospital. We have orders. It's for your own good and for the good of your family and society. We will now give you oxygen and an IV to help you breathe more easily. They will take good care of you there.

The voice was distorted behind the bulky mask, mixing with the rustling of plastics and the rattling of the stretcher they were beginning to assemble to move Beatriz. With barely any strength, she looked sadly at Meimuna, who was holding her hand.

Beatriz was brought down in the stretcher through the steep stairs and, once in the ambulance, the doctor gave her an IV prepared by the nurse, who also put an oxygen mask on her. Meanwhile, the assistants swabbed Meimuna, Moyes, Maria, and the little ones for a PCR test, telling them not to leave the farm until they were informed of the result.

Meimuna watched from outside the ambulance, trying to convey encouragement to Beatriz and hiding her emotional turmoil and her fear of a very possible ending in which machines, plastics, and laws robbed them of the desire and almost vital need to embrace each other in life's most significant moments.

Beatriz began to feel some relief in her breathing with the oxygen flow she received through the mask. The doctor and the nurse, busy taking her blood pressure and checking her oxygen saturation, accompanied her around the stretcher. She noticed that the doctor was talking to the nurse, who was looking for some medicines in drawers and injecting them into the IV. The way to the farm was bumpy, and the knocks were felt in her already fragile spine. She could barely see a faint smile from the nurse through her mask.

She preferred to close her eyes and think of the silhouette of the mountains with which she remembered her adventure through life, and inwardly see Meimuna's beautiful smile, which in her last glance could not hold back tears of emotion.

They arrived at the hospital in Pamplona an hour later. They lowered the stretcher with Beatriz securely strapped to it, transferred her to another stretcher, and the ambulance team hurriedly said goodbye due to other emergencies. An emergency orderly, barely greeting her, pushed the stretcher to a room in front of a counter labeled "triage," where Beatriz could see a dozen more stretchers with patients waiting to be attended to. She noticed that they put a red mark on a folder left by the ambulance team with her data.

Meimuna and Moyes couldn't leave the farmhouse until they knew the results of their test. They called the hospital, but the line was busy, and they couldn't get through.

A young doctor, wearing a face shield, blue gloves, and a white plastic gown, hurriedly asked about her symptoms:

* Good day, ma'am, tell me: do you have difficulty breathing?"
* A little, doctor... but don't worry, you have a lot of work, let me be at home with my family, please.

Without responding to her request, drowned out by the noise of the crowded emergency room full of patients, she began to hear her lungs. Beatriz felt the cold contact of the stethoscope membrane moving over her fragile chest. She tried in vain to make eye contact with the doctor, noticing an expression of fatigue and anguish.

She waited for about two hours in her stretcher in a room with fifteen or twenty other patients in stretchers, almost all connected, like Beatriz, to IV fluids and oxygen flows. Since almost everyone was in a semi-seated position to facilitate breathing, she could see the eyes of the patients, uncovered by masks. They were all elderly people, like her, except for one very obese man whom Beatriz thought might be younger because of his black hair. She could hardly connect with anyone's gaze; almost everyone had their eyes closed, and those who didn't were looking at the ceiling or into the imaginary infinity within those emergency room walls. She heard cries of: "Oh God! Nurse! Call my family, please! The wedge, nurse! Get me out of here!"

Beatriz managed to make eye contact with an elderly woman about six meters away from her. Her white hair was disheveled, her breathing was agitated, and her gaze reflected anxiety. Beatriz thought she recognized a former classmate from her youth. She smiled at her with her eyes, and she noticed that the woman returned the smile. She thought about the fleeting magic by which the lower eyelid contracted and seemed to offer a raft of peace and trust to the window to the world, which now revealed itself as cruel and cold.

She tried to look beyond the cold walls and to hear beyond the cold noise, to remember the silhouette of the mountains she saw from the farmhouse, Meimuna's sweet smile, Moyes' passion for life, Haka's bravery, and Patxi's serene demeanor.

After about two hours, another doctor arrived, who for the first time introduced herself, called her by name, and looked her in the eyes tenderly:

* Beatriz, I'm Doctor Hernandez, how are you feeling?
* I'm having a little trouble breathing, but I'm calm. Could you please let me go home? I want to be with my loved ones when the time comes. I've had a long and beautiful life...
* I'm sorry, Beatriz. Your PCR test is positive. Going out into the street and to your home will put other people and your family at risk. Besides, your saturation is less than 90%; you need oxygen to recover. Have confidence in getting better and returning without the virus and fully recovered with your loved ones.

Beatriz felt in her message and in her voice the essence of the doctors' devotion to alleviating patients' suffering, and she was moved. Human kindness pulsated beneath every skin, oozed like dew in the morning, shone like the sun at dawn. Only a few passing clouds dimmed it...

* We will see how your ventilation evolves to see if you need to be admitted to the ICU; there are many patients waiting.

Beatriz began to have more difficulty breathing, and they increased the oxygen flow until Dr. Hernandez told her they were going to take her to the ICU to help her breathe better.

With hardly any strength left, Beatriz said:

* Please, can I speak with my family?
* What's the number, Beatriz? I can call them from my mobile.

Beatriz couldn't remember it, even less so with her mind clouded by the lack of air. Meanwhile, Meimuna insisted on reaching an overwhelmed emergency line with calls, unable to communicate.

They transferred Beatriz to the ICU. About twenty beds in a rectangular room around a counter with busy equipment and nurses were enveloped in the sounds of monitor "beeps" and the mechanical breathing of ventilators. A nurse in a plastic suit and a mask approached her gently:

* Beatriz, my name is Fatima, and I'll take care of you here in the ICU.

With hardly any strength left and thinking about her sister-in-law from Madeira, Beatriz smiled at her with her eyes. Fatima placed electrodes to monitor her heart rate, a cuff to measure her blood pressure, and a pulse oximeter to measure her oxygen saturation.

* Fatima, could you please let me talk to my family?
* Do you remember their mobile number?

Beatriz tried and managed to give Meimuna's number. Fatima called her from a mobile phone in the ICU, connecting by video so she could see her beloved, who emotionally said:

* Sweetheart, how are you?
* They're taking good care of me, don't worry. I just want to tell you that I love you all very much. I asked to be taken home.
* Moyes and I are asking to come see you, dear. Be strong. Moyes, Maria, and the little ones, Sol, and Luna, send you lots of love, as do all the neighbors. They came from the eco-village to meditate together at home and send you lots of light.
* Give them all my hugs. I am in you, you are in me...

She could see through the video that Meimuna was moved, and the image appeared to Moyes, who smiled at her and said:

* Mom, I love you, you are my hero and my inspiration.
* Take care of Maria, Sol, and Luna, son. The world is changing, it's lighting up a new dawn, and it needs you with your nobility and kindness.
* I will always give my best, Mom, with the light of your inspiration and guidance."

Fatima took back the mobile phone and told her, moved:

* I see from your family that you have been brave with love...
* To love is to be brave, Fatima.

After hanging up, a doctor approached her somewhat hurriedly:

* Beatriz, we're going to lay you on your belly, as we've found that it improves breathing.

With the last thread of strength, she had and her breath interrupted, Beatriz replied:

* I beg you, doctor. Think about your mother. Let me go back to my family. Focus on those who are younger and have more life ahead of them..."
* You can't leave with your infection, Beatriz, for the sake of your family. We're doing everything we can to help you improve.

As they placed a supplement on the mattress at the head, to put her facing the floor, Beatriz could hear Fatima addressing the doctor:

* Don't you think we could request a bed in the internal medicine wards, give her a sedative to ease her anxiety, and allow her family to come and be with her and share their very possible end with love?

Beatriz heard the doctor reply:

* Fatima, you know that visits from family members are not allowed. We can't set precedents; it would be chaos, and infections in society and among us would increase. Besides, we have a treatment protocol to follow to better understand how to treat this disease. We have to be firm and consistent, Fatima.
* More than sensitive and human?

Beatriz couldn't hear anymore. They turned her over and connected a mask that surrounded her face, with a cold flow of oxygen reaching it. She only saw the gray tiled floor and heard the distant "beeps" of the monitor and the orchestra of ventilators. She spent an entire day like that, her consciousness drifting back and forth, taking her to memories of the mountains for which she remembered her life with immense gratitude, and repeating Thanda's mantra: "*we are everything we love and thus there is no end*."

She spent the whole night in that position, and when she felt the shift change, they turned her over. Her breathing became agitated, and she couldn't speak, barely even open her eyes. She searched with her hand for someone to hold onto amidst anguishing vertigo, in vain. They decided to sedate her, intubate her, and connect her to a ventilator.

Meimuna persisted in calling the phone from which Nurse Fatima called her, but they told her she was sedated to better assist her breathing. She continued meditating with the eco-village group around a photo of Beatriz and some candles lit in her memory.

Moyes felt a profound sadness and a deep desire to hug his mother. He talked to Thanda about the situation, who recommended that he get an antibody test because if it was positive, he posed no risk to anyone and could hug his mother without affecting anyone, not even himself.

Against the health center's order not to leave the farmhouse, Moyes went to a private clinic where he found out they were doing the IgG test. The next day he got the result. It turned out to be positive. In addition to the desire to be with his mother regardless of his own risk, he felt, with anguished guilt for his condition, that although, along with Maria and their children, he always took precautions to protect his mother, perhaps he was the one who infected her. Two weeks ago, the eco-village had gathered to celebrate the summer solstice. Perhaps they got infected then.

With those thoughts, he went to the hospital entrance with the test result and tried to enter, to which a security guard, wearing a cumbersome mask, told him that visits from family members were not allowed.

* Good afternoon, sir. My name is Moyes Beloki. My mother is in the ICU. I need to go see her. I have this positive antibody test. I've had the infection, I can't infect anyone or be infected, and my mother and I need that hug, which could be the last.

The guard felt Moyes' anguished request and his tear-filled gaze, and cry for humanity, for logic, but he could only respond with the hierarchy's directive:

* I'm sorry, sir, I'm just following orders.

Moyes thought desperately: how can there be people who limit their lives to "following orders"? Where do they leave their wonderful ability to think, feel, and direct their actions with kindness to the world? At what point do we trade our freedom for security, for a salary, for a code under which everyone lives like robots without the capacity to decide?

He insisted in vain and decided to stand outside the hospital with a sign that said:

* I have antibodies, I am healthy, I am not harming anyone, I just ask to hug my mother. Have we lost reason and humanity?

He spent the whole night in front of the hospital, under the gaze of passersby. Some of them took pictures that they posted on social media, and shortly after, some journalists came to interview him and take pictures.

In the morning, a woman in her thirties came out and said:

* My name is Fatima. You're Moyes, right? I saw you on the phone yesterday talking to Beatriz. Your sign has gone viral on social media.

Moyes thought of the macabre image of viral: hopefully reason and humanity were as viral as the virus...

* Yes, Fatima. That's me. Thank you for giving love to my mother and letting us talk the other day. Is she still sedated and connected to the ventilator?
* I'm very sorry, Moyes. Your mother just passed away.

They looked at each other with tears in their eyes and hugged, breaking all the rules.

Moyes felt something inside him unravel like a hot iron. Possibly he infected his mother, although he was very cautious with masks, hygiene, and asepsis. Or maybe it was other villagers. But with an almost harmless infection in young people, he could have lovingly accompanied his mother, who bid farewell to life alone, connected to cold and useless tubes, hearing the robotic sound of the monitor beeps, without even a hand to hold onto in her final trance, from which to feel in her leap into the abyss that she was not alone...

He returned to the farmhouse and informed Meimuna, Maria, Sol, and Luna, and the villagers who were awaiting news. Moyes hugged each one tightly and gave all his love.

Luna played on her harmonica the melody that Nothando composed in Haka's march. Moyes, whom Jonay and Thanda had taught some guitar chords, sang "Stars wont be enough…," by Jonay for John, and "Endless" by Thanda for his father.

Beatriz rested, giving life and strength to an oak tree in the courtyard of the farmhouse, around which the eco-village of brave love began to gather.

Moyes spent a month in the main square of Pamplona with a sign that read:

-I had COVID without symptoms. I have antibodies. I can't infect you; you can't infect me. I just want to hug you.

He gave thousands of emotional hugs to people who had gone months without any human contact. Some asked him to come to their homes to hug their elders. Many young people got antibody tests and joined Moyes in a movement they called "*Hugs without fear*," which spread throughout Spain.

A few weeks later, they were arrested for public endangerment. When he got out of jail, Moyes and Maria fled for a while from that collective madness and joined the *Open Arms* ship, which rescued African shipwreck survivors trying to reach the cruel and insensitive shores of Europe, which looked the other way in the face of their desperation. The land of medieval castles reflected well that spirit of old Europe with the luxuries of the court now abundant supermarkets with thousands of products from all over the world, its crocodile pit now the Mediterranean Sea, and its drawbridge now guarded by the well-paid dictator Edorgan, who received a billion Euros a year for such an unworthy function of the nobles who paid him for it.

# The ethics of Equity. July 2020

The pandemic continued to advance, claiming the lives of the elderly. They departed from life without hugs, without feeling the warmth of a hand, often without even a glance. Since April, the number of deaths had stabilized at around six thousand per day worldwide, reaching almost half a million deaths by the end of June, still less than two percent of all deaths, as Thanda had calculated would occur when the first news from Wuhan arrived.

The distribution was highly unequal worldwide, and it was not easy to understand why. The hardest-hit countries like Spain had cumulative rates of around one per thousand, accounting for about ten percent of all deaths in the first half of that fateful year, while countries like Cuba barely reached one per hundred thousand. Cities in countries with high levels of overcrowding and poor hygiene conditions, with no access to masks or even clean water, such as those in Haiti, Bangladesh, Nigeria, and many others, barely recorded cases. In others, there was a clear concealment of the epidemic, as in Turkmenistan, where mentioning the word COVID was prohibited. There were many more questions than answers, and those that existed were not certain.

Thanda, who had been appointed as a visiting professor at the National School of Health in Spain the previous year, gained access to preliminary data from the first population “seroprevalence” study he had insisted on. The first part of this study investigated the IgG seroprevalence status according to age, gender, and geographical distribution in a random, stratified, and representative sample of the entire country. The preliminary results, published in the world's leading medical journal, The Lancet, showed that, with a margin of error of fifteen percent, the proportion of infected people was almost four percent, which meant almost two million people, compared to the fewer than two hundred thousand who had been identified by PCR tests for suspected cases and contacts by that time, only one in ten of the actual infected cases. All the epidemiological curve and lethality data communicated every morning in Spain by Dr. Simón, a former cooperation colleague of Thanda's, were partial and influenced social, political, and health measures. The reporting of these biased data had become a kind of daily mass in almost every country in the world. No one was willing to contradict or even question it. The “seroprevalence” study was barely communicated to the population, and newspapers removed it from their websites within hours.

The same happened in Cuba with Dr. Durán's daily communication, which every Cuban listened to every morning on television and radio. It was like "the absolute truth" of the epidemic. Thanda could not understand such a degree of irrationality in information and submission in the population. Finally, in May, Cuba began a population-based study based on the same methodology as in Spain. An isolated publication in Granma provided preliminary data from three thousand PCR samples, which found four positives.

Domitila, a young French journalist whom Thanda had met through the musical family of the "peña de la ternura," with whom he practiced French in nice gatherings discussing life and the world, wrote to him on WhatsApp at the end of June to ask for his opinion on the pandemic. She worked for Radio France International. In response to her question, Thanda made a proposal:

* Domitila, can you ask questions at Dr. Durán's press conference as an accredited foreign journalist in Cuba?
* Well, with caution, as my permit is still provisional.
* I understand. Look, I think in Cuba and around the world, information about the pandemic is being conveyed wrongly.
* Tell me, although you know that nobody likes to admit mistakes, and in Cuba even less, as they feel very vulnerable to constant attacks and defamation.
* I know well. See if you can diplomatically convey this doubt to them.
* Tell me, Thanda, I trust you.
* Something like this:

'Dr. Durán, if population studies have shown a prevalence of active cases (positive PCR) of just over one in a thousand, can we infer at least eleven thousand cases in the country? If we also consider the average period in which infected individuals test PCR+, about three weeks, the cumulative number of infected individuals could be around forty-four thousand. Since, so far, you have reported, in your daily press conferences, a total of two thousand three hundred patients with PCR+, out of more than a hundred and sixty thousand samples, could we estimate that the level of detection of accumulated infections has been only five percent so far, that is, one in twenty? How can such significant measures for society and the economy be taken with only five percent of the information?'

* Okay, Thanda, I'll send it to the press conference coordinator.

The next day, Domitila wrote to Thanda on WhatsApp:

* Thanda, I sent the question and received this response from the press conference coordinator:
* Domitila, did you ask that question? It seems like it was made by someone who deals with statistical issues and for someone who also masters those topics. Remember that Dr. Durán is an epidemiologist, not a mathematician.

After that initial response, his tone became increasingly defensive:

* And furthermore! Think a bit! If there were really forty-four thousand infected people in Cuba, you, and everyone else would have noticed. Such a figure cannot be hidden so easily. The emergency rooms in hospitals would be overcrowded. It's a matter of logic.

Then, even without a response from Domitila, latent fear crept into every Cuban of being a "target of malicious defamation":

* I find your question very malicious. Not only are you questioning the reality of a country where you live and know that it is impossible to hide these figures, but you are also assuming something that is not true. Recently, you participated in surveys with medical students and professors. If reality were as you expose in your question, don't you think you would have been able to corroborate it in those surveys?

He concluded, accepting as the only possible truth what was presented in the news and in Granma:

* The reality is much richer than a calculation or a statistical forecast. It has been demonstrated by the very curve that Dr. Durán talks so much about, in which we have fallen below the most favorable scenario. An example that statistics help, but reality is much richer. And everything is relative.

Domitila tried to explain the calculation, made with data from the Cuban study itself, but they refused to convey her question, and she feared they would revoke her accreditation as a journalist.

The next day, the coordinator, even more indignant or perhaps clouded by Thanda's logical challenge to his supposed "logic," wrote the following to Domitila:

* I think you are overlooking a series of variables that influence this statistical analysis. You know them better than I do. There are specific conditions in Cuba that make it different from other countries in terms of health issues. Ask the French authorities who received a Cuban medical brigade in Martinique.

It was sad to see the closed-mindedness, the lack of space to speak freely, to ask for logical clarifications, to propose alternatives to the generalized lockdown that was causing so much harm.

A few days later, Thanda managed to meet with his friend José, the representative of the World Health Organization, with Lage, the sage of BioCubaFarma, and with the deputy minister of health, who confidentially shared with him that the seroprevalence of the study indicated a 3%, but that it was confidential and "sensitive information." That meant not forty-four thousand infections, twenty times more than those detected, but almost three hundred and fifty thousand, one hundred and fifty times more.

The "state of siege" that Thanda had discussed with MINREX friends after the accident blinded reason and blocked the virtue that his father had inspired in him: humility. This blockade gave way to arrogance, to triumphalism exaggerating achievements and victimhood explaining shortcomings.

As much as Thanda loved Cuba and was willing to fight with Brussels to defend the ideas of the revolution and cooperate towards greater equity for both Cuba and the world, he was pained by the lack of humility in the authorities.

To the information bias that dominated the entire world of communication and was passively accepted by most of the population, was added a fact that Thanda analyzed in detail according to the results of the population study in Spain, which had already completed the second phase with more than sixty thousand representative samples. When relating the number of deaths to the total infected, the lethality rate was 1.3%, the same as that of seasonal flu, which had fluctuated in serotypes and transmission for at least a century. A widespread flu.

But when calculating the lethality rate according to age groups, the result was even more revealing. Those over sixty-five years old, that is, the retired population, or those with risk factors associated with greater virus lethality such as obesity, hypertension, chronic bronchitis, and immune defects, already constituted a third of the Spanish and Cuban populations. The same was true for the European population, aged and with chronic health problems due to sedentary lifestyles, unhealthy diets, and air pollution. All of that was a consequence of the urban-consumerist model, to which even Cuban communism was not immune. In them, infection by the new virus had a high lethality, averaging eight percent, increasing with age or the severity of chronic health problems. It was clear that they needed to protect themselves from infection and be attentive to any symptoms for early diagnosis and treatment by a strong primary care system, not closed or minimized as many governments had decided.

The surprising thing was what happened in people under sixty-five without chronic diseases, most of the "workforce": the lethality rate was less than 0.05%, one in two thousand per year, almost equal to the probability of dying from any other cause in that age group. There were clearly two epidemics, a very mild one in young and healthy people, and a more severe one in older or sick people. Why treat everyone equally and confine them together?

In the early months of the pandemic, the most nationalist and capitalist presidents, Trump in the United States, Bolsonaro in Brazil, and Johnson in the United Kingdom, had proposed not to stop the economy, arguing that doing so would have worse consequences than the epidemic itself and would prevent natural immunity, called "herd immunity." All three fell ill and recovered, further minimizing the epidemic, although conceding to control measures when the number of deaths began to cause alarm. Another country that chose to allow social mobility relying on natural immunity was Sweden, but although initially it was very little affected, in July the number of deaths from anemia began to rise and its model fell into discredit. The pandemic began to be politicized: the left parties called for keeping the population at home to protect collective welfare and subsidize affected businesses and unemployed people, while the right wing resisted confinement as an abuse of individual freedom and advocated for allowingnormal economic activity. Collective rights versus individual rights. Faced with each other, each arguing ideological reasons, without paying close attention to what the data said.

Thanda studied in detail every dimension of the pandemic and found "five imbalances" in five ecological dimensions of the virus's relationship with Homo sapiens. Which didn't seem very "sapiens."

The first was the biological one in which the hyperinflammatory damage was greater than the direct damage from the virus.

The second was the scientific one in which research had focused, once again, on hospital treatments for advanced and severe cases, largely ignoring early treatment of still mild cases at the primary care level.

The third was the psycho-social dimension, a dimension of health almost forgotten in the face of the emphasis almost exclusively on the physical dimension, leaving millions of elderly people living and dying without the affection of their loved ones, an immense and immeasurable suffering.

The fourth was the epidemiological one, in which the data analyzed by Thanda showed that the risk of dying from COVID in healthy and young people was minimal, compared to the higher risk in older and/or sick people.

The fifth imbalance was the socioeconomic one, affecting very unevenly people with higher incomes and white-collar jobs, who could telecommute and maintain income and protection, compared to people with lower incomes and blue-collar jobs, who could not work from home and total control measures reduced or nullified their income and family protection.

The dominant strategy of confining populations to their cities and individuals to their homes exacerbated the last three imbalances, causing immense suffering and injustice.

Thanda wrote a proposal based on this analysis in which healthy and young people would go out to work and expose themselves, and if they were not IgG+, they would isolate themselves from older people with risks, who should be cared for by doubling primary care and social care through economic policies that prioritize social services throughout their chain, not just hospitals. When they were progressively infected, Thanda calculated that, without social distancing or masks, and even "promoting hugs," at a rate of 5% per week, and if they were detected IgG+, they would become on the one hand social-human agents in the care of the elderly, so lacking in affection even before the pandemic. Additionally, they would be creating a herd immunity that would allow, in the absence of a vaccine, the gradual release of risk groups, from younger to older and higher risk, minimizing their chances of infection until the virus was eradicated when the proportion of IgG+ people was higher than 60%.

He wrote his proposal by letter to the European Union and the governments of Spain, Cuba, and Mexico, where he had contacts; and to dozens of newspapers and scientific journals, receiving silence in response. He spoke about it in his conferences at various universities. He then published his studies on social media, but with little echo and even some very critical comments. It only resonated in an Argentine newspaper that published his ideas in headlines.

Thanda felt that the world was paralyzed by fear and that the political hierarchies were taking advantage of it by increasing their authoritarianism and economic hierarchies by increasing the enrichment of a few and inequalities. While the poor with blue-collar jobs decreased their income by half, already before the pandemic insufficient for lives in a curve of equity according to Thanda's analysis, the upper-middle class with white-collar jobs maintained their income locked up in their homes, and the top one percent of economic and financial power was enriched, even more the one in a million, the billionaires of the digital world of Silicon Valley, Google, Amazon, Facebook, Uber, and others, who multiplied their billion-dollar profits while others did not even get the minimum to eat.

Thanda convened a virtual meeting with family, friends, and, with the help of Aimsa, representatives of eco-villages. There were more than five hundred people from over forty countries. He spoke to them like this:

* Family and friends of the soul. I write to you from a solitary home in Havana, where I remember you every day with deep affection. The pandemic is causing pain, and even more pain is being caused by the way it is being faced with injustice, in which the crack of inequality is getting deeper and deeper. People are staying at home listening to messages of fear, entertaining themselves with digital videos, communicating, like us now, through screens, buying food and whims through Amazon, and perpetuating their dependence on a perverse system of destructive production, alienating consumption, and accumulation of property and capital by a few increasingly powerful and in collusion with artificial intelligence and genetic manipulation that I fear will lead us to a world coded without any space for freedom.

For an hour, many reacted. Some downplayed the situation, and others echoed Thanda's fears. Many spoke of the opportunity to change the system.

Joinay reacted:

* Exactly. Now is the time. Billions of people are in a state of alarm, and even shock. The privileged ones who can do so are spending more time with their families. Transport is becoming more local. Life in nature is now seen as safer, and cities are demystified. It is time to call for global awareness for harmony in nature, disconnection from networks of polluting electricity, alienating screens, and enervating consumption.

Aimsa took the floor:

* Thank you, Thanda. You're right. It's time. Thank you for your analysis and your commitment. In the six months of the pandemic, five thousand new eco-villages have joined, almost twenty each day, adding more than two million more people, bringing us to twenty-three million, more than two Cubas, and they are also accepting the formation of such villages in China. It's time to show that the United Nations doesn't work because nations lack empathy and are not united. We need to propose profound changes that can only come from communities to the global network, but we can also influence from the global network to the nations if we strongly advocate for the values of equity and harmony with nature.

They shouted "Amandla," the Ndebele, Zulu, and Ukuzwana cry that had given them strength thirty years ago in their fight against AIDS, from which arose that beautiful network of lights of hope that gradually infiltrated throughout the world.

After the meeting, Thanda received a call from his friend and equity ally, David. He was witnessing the enormous injustices that the pandemic was revealing and deepening in Boston, where he lived, and in his beloved Ecuador.

In the streets of Guayaquil, the corpses of those who had died from COVID and in absolute poverty were left to rot on the sidewalks and in front of funeral homes due to a lack of means to care for them, neither in life nor even once they had died.

In Boston, as in New York, refrigerated trucks used for frozen meat were being adapted to store the bodies that were filling hospitals day by day, where the emergency rooms and ICUs could no longer accept more patients.

Hart Island was filling up with bodies that no one was claiming, even more so than usual in the epicenter of capitalism. Thanda couldn't understand how two percent of deaths in the world could cause such a collapse: perhaps their concentration in some cities, even without knowing why, and the way of reacting by directing all attention to hospitals that lacked any effective treatment.

The pandemic hit the weakest the hardest, with fewer prevention possibilities and more infections, worse health conditions and more sick people, less access to healthcare services and more deaths, and less possibility of confinement and more unemployment and poverty, desperation, and anguish. The burden of inequality they had been measuring and publishing for ten years was increasing in ways not yet known.

To this was added the obscene trade, once again, of the major pharmaceutical companies, which were pushing for pressure trials of drugs and vaccines while fiercely protecting their patents, with which, as happened in the AIDS crisis, to enrich themselves. Even without clarity on when and how effective the vaccines against COVID-19 would be, which already amounted to more than a hundred candidates in trials in different phases, the potential productions of the most powerful and advanced were already being sold to rich countries, which, without any scruples, hoarded what might be the salvation from a pandemic that was suffocating the world.

David proposed writing a letter to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres: a call, a cry, alerting to the unjust inequalities that the pandemic was deepening, calling for the creation of a task force to mediate and act for economic and health equity, and to strip patents from medicines and vaccines vital to facing the pandemic. David prepared a draft, Thanda contributed other ideas, and recommended contacting their good friend Paulo in Rio, with whom ten years ago they had forged alliances in Geneva defending the right to health. Paulo replied saddened by the galloping progress of the pandemic in Brazil with an insensitive and arrogant Bolsonaro, Trump's ally.

They shared the letter first with a group of friends and colleagues with whom they had fought together for many years for health defense, in communities, in countries, and in the world. Through their networks, they began to receive endorsements for the letter.

Thanda wrote to Chomsky, through Jonay, who enthusiastically joined. Then former presidents like Lagos of Brazil, Mujica of Uruguay, and Lula of Brazil, as well as Oscar Arias and Esquivel, Nobel Prize winners, joined. He sent a message to the former Spanish president Zapatero, who also joined, and after him, former Italian presidents, French presidents, and former British prime ministers. Meanwhile, more than forty former health ministers from around the world, activists of all origins and conditions, professors, illustrious and anonymous, doctors, and health professionals joined. They kept receiving endorsements. Adam helped them create a website where more and more people, organizations, and networks joined. They were joined by the World Medical Associations and Nurses, the Federation of Public Health Associations, National Health Institutes, and the Union of Science Academies, and later Oxfam and other social justice networks, each bringing together organizations in countries around the world. Thanda failed to convince Doctors Without Borders, somehow anchored in their exceptionalism, as was the case with the United States, although for very different purposes.

In less than a week, they had more than five hundred individual endorsements and two hundred organizations representing over two million healthcare professionals, public health experts, economists, officials, and activists, all united in that cry against injustice that had been throbbing with pain before the pandemic and was now revealed even more starkly and immorally. The letter was published in The Lancet and triggered a movement began spreading worldwide.

In the same week they sent the letter to Guterres, Trump decided that the United States would withdraw from the World Health Organization, thereby cutting off a fifth of its funding, perhaps at the most critical moment in its history. A few weeks later, they received a response from Guterres, who futilely called for a ceasefire to palliate the pandemic in solidarity. He referred them to his deputy, Amina Mohammed, an elite Nigerian with a history and demeanor from the World Bank, who then directed them to speak with the Director-General of the World Health Organization, Ethiopian Tedros, who then referred them to his deputy, Szakob. They only agreed to collect stories of inequity and publish them with a World Health Organization that now had little strength, resources, or moral leadership.

They then called for a large assembly of all signatories to publicly launch the movement. Tedros and Michelle Bachelet, a pediatrician, former health minister, and two-time president in Chile, first director of UN Women and now the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, attended. Thanda moderated the meeting and prepared the speeches for Tedros and Bachelet.

Bachelet read entirety the speech Thanda wrote for her. As in his former days in Brussels, he was able to put into the mouths of leaders, this time the highest representative of human rights, the commitment to the right to health and link it to "the ethics of equity." He compiled all his endeavors and efforts from his studies in La Laguna, his residence in Madrid, his magical time in Ukuzwana, his time as a firefighter, his time as an official in Brussels, his work for justice in Mexico, and his present efforts to defend the values of Cuba in greater freedom, those he advocated in his conferences and writings on equity for the world, and the connection to the network of eco-villages where harmony with nature would lead the world to the ethical space of equity.

He argued, and as Bachelet expressed in her speech, that ethics is a commitment to shared and feasible aspirations for all. That in health, the ethics accepted by all is the constitution of the World Health Organization and its "highest attainable standard of health for all." That this was the definition of equity, fair inequality with a commitment to a minimum for all. That this required a new global economic order that would limit accumulation and allow everyone to live on a curve of equity, collective ethics, and lives in conditions of dignity. That this meant making the right to health firmer and more binding, and measuring it by the metric of health equity, the best thermometer of justice. That it also required a global pact to encourage global collaboration to translate humanity's fascinating quest for knowledge into knowledge and devices to preserve life and curb patents when they interfered with it.

A fight was beginning, even more urgent and necessary, daring, and determined, for the ethics of equity.

# Revealing Greed, unlocking Knowledge. October 2020

Thanda spent the Covid lockdown at the House of Tenderness on Third Avenue in Miramar, Havana. He set out to make use of the solitude and confinement to organize the flow that sprang from his soul and simplify his material life. After the pre-dawn poetry inspired each day by a drawing from his father, hesought ideas hewished to share, put them into initial verses, walked in his shorts to the sea on 24th Street, entered through the "sticky rocks" with his mask to see the bottom and turn the verses into a poem and the poem into a song underwater, in complicity with his finned friends. He returned humming his song and meticulously noted it down in the Chords and Tabs app.

Then he watered the garden, smelled its scents, and gathered vegetables and fruits for his breakfast. Messages, calls, and webinars followed, the new form of group communication that the pandemic brought through software allowing voice and video connections with hundreds and thousands of people. It was fascinating to exchange with people from all corners of the world without using transport, even mostly polluting ones. Yet, at the same time, Thanda felt that empathy was further atrophying due to the lack of hugs, looks, and commitments, and the inequality between the privileged world of words-telecommuting-salary-protection and that of sweat-street and field-wage-exposure became clearer and deeper. Thanda felt guilty for belonging to the world of privileges.

He needed to forcefully express his ideas, fight for them from within power, and seek the way out to the natural, real, simple, and communal world. He knew his eco-village was waiting for him somewhere. But first, there were tasks to be resolved to try to change the perverse order dominating the world.

After the launch of the global equity movement and the commitments Thanda put in the speech of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Thanda proposed to his kindred spirits, Jonay, Aimsa, and Fernando, to draft a proposal for an "International Treaty on Human Knowledge Collaboration" to encourage globalsharing of ideas, not competition, and translate it for the good of all, not the benefits of a few. With the "spirit of Ukuzwana" and the collaboration of the family of souls-around-the-world, they could stir consciences, reveal the plots of perverse power, and encourage a change that the pandemic was revealing even more clearly and offering, like every crisis, the opportunity for transformation.

Twenty years after achieving the first treatments against AIDS in Zimbabwe, and fifteen years after they managed, through the patent pool, to lower the prices of AIDS medications worldwide, another pandemic was becoming the business of a few, ignoring the death suffering of millions. They had to join forces, in memory of Anwele, John, Patxi, Beatriz, and many others who fought fiercely for a fairer world.

The network of eco-villages demonstrated that it was possible to live with local sovereignty, sharing in community and in harmony with nature, to meet basic needs for water, food, energy, and housing. To collectively face risks like the current pandemic, to advance in understanding, diagnosing, and treating diseases, and to communicate ideas and knowledge, they needed to change trade for collaboration and the consumption of non-essential distant products for universal access to knowledge for the global good.

They convened a "webinar" with the leaders of the United Nations who had already committed to the movement launched by Thanda and David. Jonay convinced Kurzweil to involve leading scientists from Silicon Valley and their allies from pharmaceutical companies and financial groups dominating global trade. Some twenty progressive heads of government and representatives of the eco-village network also participated. In total, they managed to involve twenty thousand people, thanks to software designed by Adam and Joseph. Communication through social networks like Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, Twitter, WhatsApp, and others was now joined by virtual meeting platforms used by hundreds of millions from their "pseudo-word-work," such as Zoom, Webex, Google Teams. All of them were controlled, censored, and blocked by the CIA when power was threatened. Moreover, the United States blocked many of them in Cuba, from where Thanda would coordinate the meeting.

And among all of them, he invited leaders of open-access platforms that challenged the "knowledge-business" system: Alexandra Elbakyan of Sci-Hub, which was approaching a hundred million freely accessible scientific publications, Christine Peterson, creator of the open-source software concept, a member of Ray Kurzweil's Singularity and the Foresight Institute, and Bruce Perens, founder, and leader of open-source hardware movements.

After the "politically correct" welcome speeches from the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Director-General of the World Health Organization, the Non-Aligned Movement, and various governments worldwide, Thanda introduced the meeting with an analysis of the global pharmaceutical market:

* Brothers and sisters from around the world. This pandemic demonstrates with even greater force that we need to share, not compete, collaborate, not accumulate. The well-being of all comes through local natural harmony and global collaboration. Not through natural destruction, blind consumption, and global competition for the benefit of a few. Let's review how the links of knowing how to alleviate suffering work in the world today and make that knowledge reach everyone, especially those who need it most.

Jonay presented his analysis of clinical research:

* Over the past few decades, the idea of 'purism' in the evidence of the effectiveness of any medication through 'double or triple-blind' studies has been accepted. Molecules are tested, mostly researched in universities or research centers funded by public tax funds from citizens. But that common effort begins its perverse path towards the privilege of a few due to clinical research. The theory is that, to avoid subjective or interested interpretations, patients are divided between those who receive potentially effective drugs against the disease and others who receive a 'placebo,' seemingly identical in form and taste, except for the absence of the active ingredient whose effectiveness is being studied. Neither the administrator, nor the patient receiving it, nor the observer of the effects know whether what they are administering is a drug or a placebo. It is decided by a machine, signs already of human power being taken over by artificial intelligence. This 'Russian roulette' often plays with the lives of patients, assisted in the public system with taxpayers' money, and with investments from pharmaceutical companies in providing 'incentives' to doctors to allow such protocols in their patients, and to finally collect the results that are globally published in the 'library of truth' Cochrane. Doctors from all over the world have joined in, competing for the money and prestige of participating as researchers in these trials, which are life or death for many. I believe that 'triple-blind' has an even greater blindness: that of the suffering of millions of human beings waiting for solutions without so much insensitivity to their pain.

Thanda then shared his experience with it:

* That's right, Jonay, I've experienced it in my family. When my father was diagnosed with lung cancer, the doctor who attended him dismissed him, due to his advanced age, as a candidate for triple-blind studies of immunotherapy and ignored my messages and questions, even when my father was seriously ill in the hospital. The day he was dying, that doctor without any human sensitivity walked down the hallway, greeted me uncomfortably and hurriedly from a distance, and didn't even ask about my father. If patients are not 'eligible for studies' or 'publishable,' they lose interest, and the treatment is cold, distant, and even contemptuous. Soon after, it was my sister who was diagnosed with lung cancer as well, a terrible coincidence and macabre consequence of legal and promoted tobacco addiction. After a long and painful process of tests, surgeries, and the poison of chemotherapy, she was offered to enter a 'triple-blind study.' The immunotherapy under study had already been proven effective in a more advanced stage, but due to the 'purism' of the exclusive Cochrane system, she was offered as the only access to immunotherapy, which offered hope to many cancer patients, to be, like tens of thousands worldwide, a 'guinea pig' and play Russian roulette to receive the drug, during weekly sessions for a year, which could help her, or a pure placebo that would do nothing. There are hundreds of cases in the records, just in that hospital, that did not receive immunotherapy and had already been cured or died. Sharing that information with other hospitals worldwide, there are hundreds of thousands of patients to compare with: why not compare the effect of giving the new and promising drug with the previous cases where it couldn't be given? This could avoid the cruel argument of triple-blind, an excuse of the industry like 'billion-dollar investments' that justifies later 'patent monopolies' and obscene profits. I sincerely believe that this perverse game is not necessary and is used to maintain the hundreds of billions of this insensitive industry. I have calculated that the excess mortality of the placebo groups in trials worldwide, which could be avoided with comparisons of archived cases, can reach fifty thousand unnecessary deaths each year: a passive genocide in the name of the purism of science.

Aimsa then continued with the story of 'the broken chain of knowledge':

* When the cloudy business of triple-blinds demonstrates some degree of effectiveness of a drug, the laboratory registers the medication as useful for such or such disease or degree of the same, and each country's drug agency approves it, usually without further questioning, for public use. The drug business moves more than three billion dollars, more than arms sales, and enjoys the highest profit margins. The six main pharmaceutical corporations, whose representatives are participating in this meeting – Bayer, Novartis, Merck, Pfizer, Roche, and Glaxo – concentrate at least a third of the profits and are also part of conglomerates alongside chemical, biotechnological, or agrochemical industries. In some cases, like the Bayer-Monsanto conglomerate, also present here today, their chemicals produce cancer, and their drugs treat it, often without curing and at prices inaccessible to many. We know that there is sensitivity to human suffering in them and that we can count on everyone to transform the business of a few into the good of all.

After moderating a tense debate with pharmaceutical companies, who claimed that without them there would be no new medications, Thanda gave the floor to her firefighter and global health policy friend, Sergio, who now worked in a public hospital in Spain:

* As Aimsa explained, public health systems pay high prices for medications under abusive patents, with the spurious justification of the great investment in their research: with molecules developed in public universities, patients in public centers, and doctors with public salaries. To further promote the use of drugs under the abusive monopoly of patents, companies, through an army of 'representatives' who stroll through hospitals in elegant suits and colorful brochures, sweet-talk doctors with gifts of all kinds, including trips to conferences where the information is directed towards the use of drugs from big commerce. Very few doctors in Europe or the United States have not been invited to a congress with a trip, hotel, lavish dinners, and included excursions at least once.

Thanda then introduced Marco, as a doctor from the Ukuzwana mission in Zimbabwe, and his experience in that dark link between knowledge and the common good:

* During my residency specialization at a hospital in Verona, I opposed the practices that Sergio mentioned. I had denounced them in a local newspaper. After completing my specialty, I couldn't get any job. I was stigmatized as an 'anti-science' doctor. That's why, out of solidarity and vocation, I came to Ukuzwana with the Trastébere congregation, where I am deeply happy with the simple life and the vocation of service. My denunciations in the press caught the attention of a judge whose father fell into the networks of triple-blind studies and probably died with placebos, the bullets of this macabre Russian roulette. The judge tracked me down, I testified in the Verona prosecutor's office, and I provided data for an investigation that exposed what everyone knew, and everyone kept silent about: most doctors in Italy received gifts and sums of money from pharmaceutical companies. One of them, Glaxo Smith Kline (GSK), heir of the Welcome Trust that blocked access to AZT in Africa thirty years ago, had induced more than four thousand doctors and three hundred public health system leaders to collaborate and benefit from their business. The Fiscal Police discovered in the company's accounting a sum of one hundred million euros, destined for a 'promotion' program controlled by a computer system known as Giove, in which a sum was decided for the representative and the value of the prize for the doctors with whom they reached agreements, according to the number of patients included in treatments with the company's drugs.

Thanda noticed that several representatives of pharmaceutical and financial corporations were leaving the webinar, but that every minute thousands of participants were joining, and that, on the networks, via webstream, the audience had already reached a million.

Thanda spoke again:

* We have reviewed the broken links in the chain: the first one in how the knowledge of so many dedicated researchers is co-opted by the profit-driven industry and tested on patients through 'triple-blinds' that are even more blind to human suffering. Thus, a few corporations dominated by a few financial powers dominate the big business of 'selling health.' Then, to compete in the market, practices of collusion with healthcare professionals are used, diverting public resources for the privilege of a few. But there is a fundamental issue that further limits access: how patents prevent much of the world from alleviating suffering that global knowledge could prevent by shielding 'their knowledge' with monopoly rights at exorbitant prices compared to production costs, which are argued to be fair to recover and reward 'their effort.' The goal and the result are obscene profits for a few. I would like to introduce you to Alin, with whom Aimsa shared her childhood living on the streets of Calcutta and who has been fighting for thirty years from CIPLA, a laboratory that shuns the billion-dollar profits of patents and prioritizes access, at the production cost of drugs free from that chain of greed, called 'generics.' They have supplied more than half of all the medications used in the public systems of low-income countries in Africa and Asia.
* In the nineties, we started at CIPLA manufacturing antiretrovirals against AIDS at a hundred times less the cost of patent monopolies, receiving complaints from billion-dollar corporations demanding their right to patents. It was sad to see that, despite our efforts and offering those medications within reach, many countries, under pressure from corporations and countries of global financial power, avoided buying them and saw millions of people die because of that business. They were not killed by AIDS; they were killed by greed. We have continued doing the same with other medications for other infections, chronic diseases, and cancer. Every day we receive accusations, lawsuits, and sometimes threats from those billion-dollar companies. A few years ago, we were sued by Novartis for manufacturing a molecule called imatinib, which had been proven effective against leukemia, at a production cost of less than ten dollars a day compared to the nearly one hundred dollars a day of 'Glivec' patented by them, which generated them hundreds of millions of dollars in profits. India could, with the generic, prevent the deaths of around a hundred thousand leukemia patients per year. Year after year, we have continued manufacturing life-saving generic drugs and partnering with countries to defend their right to use them in their public systems against demands from big corporations, as Merck did against Thailand for its Efavirenz monopoly against AIDS, Pfizer against the Philippines for its Norvasc patent against heart failure, and hundreds more worldwide.

Thanda continued to encourage the discussion:

* Now David will speak to us about what is happening with medications that can help COVID patients.
* Ten years ago, Gilead developed an antiviral called Remdesivir with public funding from federal funds from the American government. It was tested to treat hepatitis C, but it was discovered that another called Sofosbuvir from another company, Farmaset, was more effective. Gilead bought that company, patented the drug, and monopolized it at very high prices only affordable for wealthy countries, thus making billions in profits. Since Gilead saw no utility for Remdesivir, it was used in Ebola control programs in West Africa, where I have been working for five years. It was also tested in zoonotic flu outbreaks in the last epidemics, SARS, MERS, and avian flu, with discrete results. When the current pandemic broke out, Gilead designed clinical trials with Remdesivir to treat severe COVID patients and, even with dubious results, it was accepted by the Food and Drug Administration, perhaps after some call from Rumsfeld, patented, and commercialized at three thousand dollars per dose. Quickly, Gilead licensed its production to seven companies in India, Egypt, and Pakistan, to avoid 'unfair' generic competition, selling it at slightly lower prices and only to certain poor countries. The United States immediately bought half a million doses, almost the entire production for three months, leaving Europe with only thirty thousand doses that it rushed to buy. The American federal government paid about one and a half billion dollars for a drug that taxpayers helped produce. Some experts like Andrew Hill in Liverpool have estimated that the production cost is as low as three dollars. Only with the American market, Gilead is doing a business of more than a billion dollars. The government, infiltrated by former executives and shareholders of Gilead, under the influence of its former director, former Secretary of Defense, and major shareholder Rumsfeld, tolerate this robbery. The agencies of the United States and the European Union, which finance more than eighty percent of global research, allow publicly funded researchers to protect their patents however they want and monopolize the market at the prices they decide, often abusive, ruining health ministries in the North and limiting access to scraps of donations-with-advertising, presenting themselves as supposed companies that generate health and champion solidarity.

Jonay intervened again:

* Thank you, David. Never has humanity concentrated so much effort in such a short time to understand. Hundreds of thousands of researchers in their laboratories, many of them with more imagination than resources and will than support, strive to understand how the COVID-19 virus works, its thirty thousand nucleotides organized into ten identified genetic sequences to manufacture its proteins, enter human cells, and seek, like any living being, to survive through mutations and reproduction. Even more complex is understanding how our immune system reacts and where it fails to recognize the virus or, perhaps even more harmful in this pandemic, overreacts and harms ourselves, perhaps selfishly resistant to living in molecular harmony with this new guest in our body. And even more complicated, it seems, is understanding how society works and the powers that try to dominate it, not always with the best intentions. Worse is happening with vaccines, still to be proven effective and safe. Buhleve will speak to us from the Latin American School of Medicine in Havana, who will share her opinion on this, also cloudy, horizon:
* Today there are two hundred and sixty candidate molecules for COVID vaccines being tested at an accelerated pace. Many of them are transgenic, with mechanisms of action in our bodies about which there are great uncertainties and perhaps many risks that we still do not know. For large corporations, it is a great opportunity to be able to experiment massively, with public funding, and advancing trials of technologies like gene therapies in humans, whose research was called into question in recent decades. According to the World Health Organization, there are forty COVID-19 vaccines in clinical trials. Half of them are based on untested genetic engineering techniques in humans. These 'transgenic vaccines' introduce the viral RNA or its DNA mirror by plasmids, pieces of carrier DNA, or inactivated viruses, into our cells. Conventional vaccines, on the other hand, are based on inserting a dead, attenuated virus or parts (antigens) of it, which teach our immune system to recognize that virus and prevent future infections. The new transgenic vaccines, however, introduce the viral DNA or RNA into our genes to take control of the genetic protein production system, encode in it a protein like that of the virus, and make the immune system react, preventing infection. There is great concern among many scientists, healthcare professionals, and people worldwide about how these vaccines could artificially make us transgenic, even in a millionth part. Once the viral DNA or RNA is introduced into our cells to create the virus's S protein, it is not clear how the production of that antigen will be stopped or what effect the continued presence of synthetic DNA/RNA in our genes will have. It is also not clear for all vaccines if the immune response provoked against viral molecules could cause severe inflammatory responses and autoimmune reactions, as the natural virus infection does. Due to the urgency of having a vaccine against the pandemic that has paralyzed the world, research regulations have been relaxed, and evaluation times for vaccines are accepted that will only be able to appreciate short-term risks and not the adverse reactions that often arise later. Many of us fear that the patterns of gene expression of the inserted genes cannot be controlled, nor whether those transgenes or their parts move within the host genome and what kind of modifications to life they may imply. It is also not possible to know if the sequence of the transferred DNA ends up in the environment invading other forms of life as has already been seen with transgenic seeds. I want to express here a fear of the threat against which my father, Haka, fought his last battle: the industry that manipulates the life of the planet with transgenic seeds and massive herbicides, Monsanto. Allied with Bayer, it may have altered the balance of planetary biodiversity and now, associated in turn with Johnson & Johnson, AstraZeneca, and other groups that champion gene therapies, they seek to extend their genetic manipulation to humanity itself. Genetic modification of plants to produce 'edible vaccines' is even being investigated. Little is known about the consequences of their release into the environment, but there is already evidence that genetically modified crops have negative impacts. I want to ask the representatives of these companies if they would honestly vaccinate their children with these manipulations of their genes.

At that moment, the representatives of those companies and others left the meeting. Several of them wrote to Jonay saying they would sue him for defamation.

Jonay concluded:

* We are already nearing the end of this session analyzing current challenges of knowledge and its tortuous and often narrow and blocked path towards the common good. Ricardo, from Oxfam, will tell us how, despite the risks and without yet knowing the effectiveness, corporations competing with their patents for the lucrative pandemic business are already dominating the markets:
* The countries that accumulate world financial power are buying billions of doses of potentially effective vaccines. Five of these agreements have been made public: the British AstraZeneca, the Russian Gamaleya/Sputnik, the American Moderna, Pfizer, and the Chinese Sinovac. The United States, the European Union, the United Kingdom, Japan, Switzerland, Australia, and Israel have applied the 'me-first' principle and have secured, for their citizens, 13% of the world's population, more than half of all vaccines that can be produced in the coming years. The corporations that will dominate the market are not interested in overproduction and price reductions, so we are already seeing secret agreements among them to restrict production and maintain high profits. As with oil and all natural resources in the world, dominated by the concentration of capital and financial power of a few. Like Gilead with Remdesivir, but on a much larger scale, Moderna has received two and a half billion dollars in American federal funding, from the taxes of its citizens, and is already designing its plan to market five hundred million doses in wealthy countries.

At that moment, the director of the World Health Organization intervened, speaking about the "ACT-Accelerator" strategy to promote research and development of diagnostics, medicines, and vaccines. Seth Berkley, CEO of the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization, GAVI, complemented him and spoke about the Covax initiative to promote access to the vaccine for countries with fewer resources. They defended corporations like Sanofi and GSK, which had donated two hundred million doses to "poor countries."

In response, Thanda replied:

* Allow me to doubt your 'good intentions.' The coordinators of these research strategies are FIND for diagnostics, founded by the Gates Foundation, Welcome for medicines, with its history of limiting access to life-saving drugs for poor AIDS patients for two decades, and GAVI for vaccines, promoted by Gates, who also manages Covax. Citizens of rich countries pay taxes to governments that surrender to the power of pharmaceutical companies for the health business. Barely 0.5% of their income is allocated to cooperation, which ends up financing the same corporations or the philanthropy that supports and defends them, for supposed global solidarity and justice. These companies and their 'charitable' initiatives have opposed our call to waive patents or even, as Costa Rica requested, create a patent pool so that, even regulating franchises and prices, global production, and access to prevent disease and death from COVID are not hindered. This has already happened in many diseases, and they continue to file lawsuits against countries that do not respect their monopolies and obscene profits. How can they expect us to believe them, and how is it possible that the same companies that have been enriching themselves at the expense of the illness and suffering of most humanity for decades, are now claiming leadership in global health? Gutierres, Tedros, Bachelet, how do they delegate the governance of world health to those who parasitize it?

# The light of Harmony in simplicity. Mid-way Farm. July 2020

The pandemic continued to spread throughout the world, unleashing another even more damaging pandemic, that of fear, fueled by the powerful who imposed lockdowns in homes and communities, prohibited hugs, and continued to ignore and disregard Thanda's proposal to allow young people, with little risk, to immunize themselves and work with humane treatment for the elderly, who languished in loneliness in their homes or agonized among plastics and cold masks.

Thanda combined his efforts to increase projects with Cuba and against the American blockade, and to encourage a new social model that continued to shield itself against globalized capitalism, already the owner of the rest of the world, and was based on the harmony of community eco-sovereignty and collaboration in global public goods. He had long discussions about this with "wise Jam," who had developed a strange disease that prevented him from walking but maintained, at almost eighty years old, an enthusiasm for encouraging the ideas he shared with Thanda in a project about to take off: the ecosovereign municipality of Martí. They only disagreed on one issue: animal sacrifice, so integrated into Cuba's culinary tradition that opposing it seemed like anathema. Thanda also tried to include an ecosovereign island within the island in cooperation projects and with an antenna dreaming of harmony to the rest of the world, from the mythical film school of San Antonio de los Baños. Despite the distance from Nayra, with whom he had lived together for almost four years, and from her mother and children, he felt it was a great privilege to be in Cuba at this stage of her life, sometimes hidden at work, with ideas of resistance to capitalist imperialism and complicity with dear brothers and sisters who, from their simple lives, gave him the most luminous lessons of generosity in work, in art, and in the often heroic task of surviving each day.

The pandemic caused the already fragile and battered Cuban economy to drfit towards collapse. Despite the large house assigned to him by the government and the pickup truck he brought from Mexico, Thanda tried to share them with everyone, in meetings and in moves and removals, and to live as much as possible like his Cuban “comrades”. Without using CUCs, the currency of foreigners and privileged Cubans, food was limited to farmer markets run by peasant cooperatives, with barely a dozen types of crops.

He supplemented this with a garden in the corner of the yard free form the shadow the large flamboyant tree. Thanda neither knew nor needed to know where other types of stores in Havana were, almost absent. He gradually set out to live without spending money and to give away everything he had accumulated, even in memories, from so many years around the world. He obtained a thirty-two-gigabyte USB stick attached to a bracelet to digitally store his diaries, novels, songs, photos, his father's drawings, his titles and lectures, his studies, and books on equity. Adam helped him create a website with what Thanda wanted to share with the world: his ideas and passions through stories, accounts, and songs. Also, with he exception of the the trips to take care of his mother, he set out to live without carbon emissions. He walked or used the bike left by her good friend Sergio, ate from the garden, and didn't use the air conditioning, which was so overused in Cuba, or even light at night.

Thanda studied in detail the carbon emissions in each country and time, and for each polluting human activity: forms of food, transportation, heating or cooling, consumption, and even saving. From his studies on equity, he applied the concept of an equity threshold above which the average emissions per person would lead to climatic disaster. Humanity was approaching the worst legacy of a generation to the next. It was the greatest ethical challenge and responsibility of a generation, of societies, and of everyone in the history of humanity. What he discovered was that there was a powerful relationship between having or earning excessively, as he had shown in her equity studies, and immoral emissions and harm to other people; whether spent or saved, everything ended, when it was above what was essential and sovereign, in the speculative and destructive global machine. He organised all thiat information, million of data and algorithms, with the help of Abel, into an app that he hoped could awaken individual consciousness and spread like a flame among the young people of the world who would lead a profound change in the way of living. Rosa, a beautiful and brave defender of harmony with nature and the regeneration-healing of damage from so many years of mistreatment, allied herself to disseminate it, including spreading a Ted Talk.

Approaching sixty years old, Thanda decided to ask for one more year of work with the European Union in Havana, completing five. He knew he could contribute to keeping Cuba away from the empire and stop its victimhood with the blockade, so healthy for the pure soul of revolutionary ideas. It was also essential for Cuba to rid itself of fears and hierarchies, of eating with cruelty and burning fossils, and to approach Eila's utopia. Thanda even dreamed of sailing on the great caiman to the east, crossing the ocean, returning colonization five hundred years later in the form of light of a new dawn without property, without borders, without truths or hierarchy, in natural and human harmony. He set out to put his whole soul into it for the remaining two years, even in loneliness, away from his partner, away from his family. He would leave Cuba with his memory bracelet, a backpack, and his Paracho guitar. He registered a foundation, ValyTer, in which to share the savings towards a community project in natural harmony and with open arms to every empathetic soul. His little Eila, connected with all the Eilas of the world, in the network of eco-villages, saw, even clearer and stronger than when he poured her dream into Courage and Tenderness, as the horizon of light of Humanity, escaping from the dark abysses into which the sinister power had been plunging her.

The garden kept growing. Thanda prepared furrows with the compost made from the red flowers of the flamboyant tree mixed with soil enriched by worms, which digested food scraps and even paper. His good farmer friends and leaders of Cuban agroecology, Funes father and son, shared seeds with her, and lettuces, broccoli, tomatoes, eggplants, bell peppers, basil, rosemary, oregano, mint, celery, cilantro, yucca, sweet potatoes, turmeric, ginger, corn, sweet cane, and passion fruit started to sprout. He also planted moringa trees with shoots shared by her good friend Yunalvis and mulberry trees from her comrade in struggles Marcelo, with which he made healing infusions. And a neem tree also started to grow, from which she prepared a liquid that protected crops from pests, although all the crops growing naturally, without plowing or mowing, exuded health, almost one could say, joy. His great pride was the Malabar spinach which grew, first climbing on poles, then on ropes between them and the plum trees that were growing. He had to extend hemp ropes to the flamboyant and coconut trees, and the garden became a lush forest that he took care of meticulously and, in return, fed his body and soul. He adapted kombucha to the oregano from the earth and the mango leaves, and Marcos promoted it with the brand "ValyTer." He exchanged his surplus spinach and kombucha for rice and beans during the cherished Thursday gatherings at Pedro and Suzy's house in Vedado. He completed his first songbook of 111 love songs inspired by his father's drawings, which he recorded in an improvised studio in a corner of her room. Thanda was passionately advancing in his novel Tenderness and Courage, which he shared from a distance with his beloved partner Nayra and with his children. He also shared and discussed chapter by chapter with his dear friend Sergio in weekly gatherings. Shortly after, Sergio left with his family for Cape Verde, a symbolic destination, close to Eila. He continued to share it with Alina, a teacher from Santa Clara passionate about the ideas of a Cuba in natural and community harmony. His days flowed with the lovely routine of the rooster's crowing, poetry to his father, his dance with the sea, tending the garden, his mango, spinach, and ginger smoothie, his work on screens from home or in the office, which timidly opened up, with masks and without hugs, the dusk writing fervently some messages to Nayra and the family, and feeling as the sun set and with it his refuge in the world of dreams.

Thanda so learned that life offered winks at every step for the soul to flow and understood that the desert of solitude in his intimacy was a gift to let flow without codes or shame, without schedules or commitments, with nothing or no one, his soul in stories and songs, elusive from her skin.

One of the areas of cooperation with Cuba was "food security." In one of its many contradictions, Cuba, so proud of its sovereignty, had gradually become dependent on food and fuel imports from the "socialist field" in exchange for its sugar, rum, cigars, and medical services. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rigors of the Special Period, it opened its doors to tourism, like an abandoned woman, to obtain the foreign currency needed to pay, now without the barter of friends, for food and oil, including the shame of "American chicken." The objective of the large cooperation program agreed with the Ministry of Agriculture, still called Sustainable Food Security (SFS), read: "To meet the healthy and ecologically sustainable nutritional demand of the population." Thanda asked at the large program launch event, paradoxically, like almost all cooperation encounters, at a grand hotel in Havana:

* And what do we do if the demand, as it seems, is neither healthy nor ecological?

With the complicity of Marcelo, a former Brazilian priest passionate about justice and nature in whom Lula entrusted agrarian reform and now represented FAO in Cuba, and his friend Frei Beto, the Brazilian Jesuit "confessor" and confidant of Fidel, they encouraged the government to change, at least in speech, production for self-sufficiency, large monocultures for family agroecology, and the concept and name of the security policy to sovereignty. Food sovereignty meant that communities around municipalities ate what the land provided them, not what caprice or customs made them expect from distant lands. And for this, "nutritional education" was essential. Wheat flour from Canada had to be replaced with local cassava, Vietnamese rice with traditional biodiverse beans, New Zealand milk with kombucha, and, above all, chicken with sweet potatoes. To mention some of the many crops that Cuba's lush land could offer in mutual care of health with Cubans. Thanda constantly looked at Eila and her rising sun of ecosovereignty and networks for shared goods.

The plan for Food Sovereignty and Nutritional Education had already been approved, and its law was openly discussed. The excitement among Cuban agroecologist farmers with whom Thanda maintained a close chat was growing. The pandemic, the collapse of tourism, and Cuba's need to decrease imports pushed the government to increase local production, but Thanda thought it was done mistakenly. First, they bet on intensifying the planting of "short cycle" crops, which would take advantage of summer rains, and Thanda received a request to divert two million euros for the importation of agrochemicals, including herbicides, to spray them in the fields in the six municipalities of Santa Clara and Sancti Spiritus where they intended to innovate food sovereignty models. The sense of ecosovereignty was being broken. After multiple meetings and calls, he managed to avoid such invasion and limit it to a few locally produced biofertilizers, encouraging agroecology, which could well feed Cuba in health and care for its magical natural harmony.

Shortly afterward, he saw on the news how the National Assembly approved, without discussion and unanimously, the strategy of planting transgenic corn and soybean seeds for chicken and pig feed, which continued to be cruelly slaughtered. Although it was argued that the transgenic seeds were developed in Cuban laboratories for a decade and would only be destined for animal feed, Thanda felt the claws of Monsanto and Bayer infiltrating the purity of the country that had resisted the invasion of agrochemicals bathing most of the world's crops, out of dignity and necessity.

Loose ends had remained since Haka's last battle, the one she helped Zimbabwe protect itself from the invasion of Monsanto's transgenics and herbicides. Thanda met with Buhleve, who continued enthusiastically with his work at the Latin American School of Medicine. With Aimsa's help from New York, they had closely followed the merger of Monsanto with Bayer. The major shareholders of both were largely the same, and BlackRock managed the financial speculation of both. Bayer's history was also similar in the horrors of chemical warfare, allied with Hitler in his most terrible massacres. Both the Auschwitz grounds and the Zyklon B gas used to murder hundreds of thousands of Jews belonged to Bayer's predecessor, IG Farben. More than four hundred parliamentarians in Germany, both regional and federal, had worked at Bayer and pledged loyalty, hiding any shadow that would affect the flagship of German chemistry. The merger between Bayer and Monsanto brought together two giants in the control of seeds and pesticides worldwide. Although Bayer supposedly bought Monsanto for sixty billion dollars, the major shareholders were American, and the transgenic monopoly company would remain with the name and headquarters in the United States. To supposedly prevent monopoly practices, the European Commission conditioned the approval of their merger to the sale of Bayer's seed and pesticide business. Bayer sold them to companies that shared capital and even origin, like BASF, which dominated the big data of global agriculture. Shortly before, the American chemical company Dow had merged with the conglomerate DuPont, and ChemChina with Syngenta. These three big companies dominated the way humanity treated the Earth's surface and did so to exploit it without scruples, deplete its life, and maximize profits.

They had to alert the government and even more so the population about the dangers of letting Cuba in the giants of soil and life destruction. The government argued that the transgenic seeds they were starting to use had been developed in their laboratories for a decade, without affecting human consumption, only for corn and soybean forages. And that it would be temporary to prevent a food and supply crisis aggravated by the coronavirus health emergency. But Thanda feared that the invasion would be inevitable once the doors were opened. They were already aiming to introduce sugar cane seeds more resistant to the effects of climate change.

In response to Thanda's warning messages about transgenics in debates and the cooperation program, citing those already made by Fidel in his last years of life, devoted to organic agriculture and the cultivation of moringa, the Ministry of Environment stated that it would ensure adequate risk assessment, transparency in information - including labeling of all products related to those crops. It also declared to ensure the principle of "ethical-scientific responsibility" to comply with the "Life Task," the Cuban program for protecting nature and facing climate change and its effects, including soil salinization.

Meanwhile, Nayra fought another battle in Berkeley. She encouraged a group of young people to study the effects that processed foods by large food corporations had on their health. They identified the thresholds of salt, sugars, and hydrogenated fats from which the marketed foods were toxic and affected their health. They found that those toxic foods were sold mostly in the checkout lanes, the final aisles before the cash registers, and were strategically placed at the children's eye level so that they would be seduced by their advertising strategies at that moment of waiting. Thus, it happened that most children in Berkeley were already addicted to those junk foods in the form of bars, chips, or sugary and sweetened drinks, slowly incubating the diseases of hyper-consumption: hypertension, diabetes, and obesity. Tirelessly, they went to schools and community centers, to stores, health centers, and city hall. They proposed a law that would prohibit the sale of those toxins, at least in those places where parents ended up giving in to their children's whims. They sought signatures throughout the city to support their proposal and managed to submit it to a vote by the city council, which approved it. These were the small great victories, those of ordinary people, and those that would join in a network and change the world. From examples like that, even if they were more symbolic, a proposal could continue to be presented for the state and then for the country, and then withdraw such slow poisons from all sales. Upon approval, they began to receive threatening letters from the lawyers of companies that did not want to give up even a small space of business. One of them, the soda association, argued that their low-calorie or "zero" sodas helped reduce sugar intake and prevented diabetes. They investigated the effects of aspartame and found suspicions of neurological toxicity since the 1970s, although many studies argued it was safe. Each of the studies in favor of aspartame consumption had been funded by the companies that marketed it, the same ones that spent millions on advertising and lawyers to block any regulation against them. As expected, Monsanto was the major producer of aspartame, and up to a third of the processed foods in the world contained that toxin.

From his life by the sea, garden, novel, and guitar; and his eagerness to encourage brave Cuba towards ecosovereignty, Thanda got to know families of farmers who were betting on harmony with nature. One of them was the Funes family. A professor and a reference in global agroecology, he defined himself as an apprentice farmer on the Marta farm, in honor of his mother and teacher, along with his faithful companion Claudia. There, they felt the true paradise, where, he said, "there was so much left to dream and even more to do." Thanda shared with Fernando a past as a firefighter, which explained his perseverance in the face of setbacks. Obstacles, blessed obstacles that seemed to cloud dreams, when in truth they made them "survive vicissitudes" and leap "over what tempts to think that the dream is impossible." His thesis on family agroecology was aptly titled We Are Here to Stay. In eight hectares without water, stony, clayey, of low fertility, plagued by marabou with barely any electricity and with a poor dwelling, he could see that the challenge was the most faithful ally of his will. The challenge of the "impossible" and the will forge from the spirit of Marta, his mother and tutor, strength and inspiration, and hand in hand with Claudia, they incubated what they would soon drink together in Cuban tradition, the aged "aliñao" of fifteen years, which showed that a life, an adventure, a dream, already flew free and safe.

Thanda debated with Fernando whether local sovereignty was utopian in a globalized world, one that would preserve planetary boundaries through local self-sufficiency "pollinated" with global knowledge.

Whether it was due to the value of resisting the market or due to the lack of imports of machinery, fertilizers, pesticides, and animal feed in the 1990s, Cuba transitioned from intensive industrial agriculture to resilient and sustainable agroecology. The Peasant-to-Peasant Agroecological movement emerged, the soul of the worldwide Peasant's Way, and continued to bequeath horizons of community sovereignty in alliance with nature to be a part of it, not owners, and to nurture, shelter, and protect in harmony with it. Fernando was passionate about beekeeping, the worship of the queen by her fifty thousand workers and drones in a fascinating organization to become the most valuable species for life on our planet. And in this, Fernando became a faithful ally in Cuba.

Thanda was beginning to understand that it was about accepting that the baton of the complex and magical harmony of which Humanity was a part was not, nor should it be, in its hands. Intelligence, awareness, and consequently, true freedom should guide blind Humanity to choose to return to harmony with nature and not to submit to the already outdated and destructive anthropocentrism.

Later, he traveled with Jam, Sergio, and Marcelo to the center of the island, to the Finca del Medio, where the Casimiro family had also been building a orchard of self-sufficiency in which three generations coexisted in harmony and complicity.

Descended from a "wizard" (name for the farmers in the volvanic terraces) grandfather from the island of La Palma who emigrated to Cuba and married a Creole woman, Antonio had inherited about thirty hectares of stony and arid land in the municipality of Siguaney in the middle of his life. Along with his faithful companion Caridad, whom he ceremoniously called Mileidy, they were digging inch by inch, removing stones, plowing a garden, and building a humble cabin where their children were born, José, Leidy, and Chavely, and with them came the generation of grandchildren.

The Mexican pickup arrived under a heavy tropical storm at a point on the road where the eldest son, José, was waiting with an ox cart. The rest of the family welcomed them at the entrance. They arrived at the farm at night, after passing through muddy roads through forests, pastures, cornfields, and rice paddies. Casimiro was a large man in every dimension. Tall and strong, heavyset, with a wide and full face framed above by an old straw hat and below by a thick gray beard. His imposing appearance surrendered to a tender gaze; his eyebrows almost always arched towards the center revealed that his long and brave struggle had toughened his hands but left almost virgin the innocence of his heart and his incredible capacity for amazement by the world and its infinite displays of beauty.

Leidy and Chavely combined beauty, strength in farm tasks, intelligence as leaders of agroecological thought, sensitivity in craftsmanship, sweet motherhood, and an almost devout loyalty to their father's vision and commitment to nature and family, both diluted into one. After finishing the little house and the garden, they prepared a dam where streams and tropical storms left their magical elixir of life and formed a large lake where they swam in the afternoons. The dam, in the form of a lovely walkway with oaks where the family gathered to watch the sunset, separated the slope through which the gravity flow of water moved a contraption designed by Antonio: a "hydraulic ram" that pumped water through pipes to imposing cisterns from where the water spilled through pipes and furrows into the fields. Among the cisterns was the stable where the cows were milked and where, every morning, as precious as the milk itself, the nutrient-rich and microorganism-laden manure was collected and mixed in a collector with water from the cisterns and rock dust to add minerals. Almost ceremoniously, that immense broth was mixed by the family with care and devotion to feed the fields. Part of that magical brew went to a bell under which anaerobic fermentation let the gas flow for cooking. The fields overflowed in permaculture with all kinds of crops of tubers, legumes, vegetables, and fruits. The youngest daughter, Chavely, took charge of building beautiful houses of baked clay bricks, with magical vaulted shapes. Hanging from their outer walls were hives of stingless bees, which sucked nectar from the flowers surrounding the houses and the central courtyard covered with a beautiful vine that offered shade relief from the tropical heat. The day passed in harmony with the sun and the animals; the aromas and flavors of the fields permeated all the senses, and the sweet coexistence in harmony of the three Casimiro generations made Thanda feel a renewed hope and confidence in humanity while also a deep longing to live with her partner, her children, and hopefully soon her grandchildren.

In this middle farm, everything flows in harmony.

Nothing is lost in tedium, how beautiful is its symphony!

The hydraulic ram is the heart, the waters like blood.

And in the fields, crops, grains, and crayfish are sprouting.

The pastures are the food, the cows the digestion.

Their dung is the energy and good nutrition.

The mills are the lungs, the cisterns like the spleen.

The lilies are the kidneys, the dam, the backbone.

Butterflies’ dopamine, earthworm’s serotonin

Hummingbirds’ endorphins, bee’s oxytocin

This island of hope, of nobility in loyalty

Inspires us to the alliance for the new humanity.

The one that cares with its hands for the faithful nature.

Where everyone, like brothers, drinks... from its beauty

There were about fifty thousand of these families in harmony and as key groups of cooperatives, which, within the centralized system of Soviet socialism, echoed the principles of eco-villages. Thanda spoke with the National Association of Small Farmers to join the eco-village network, and she overcame the government's skepticism toward any alternative to the homeland at war, to the state of siege. Deep down, and while deeply in love with Cuba and defending it against the defamations of the United States and the cowardly echo in Brussels, Thanda could not share the sense of homeland because it implied borders, nor the revolutionary cry of "homeland or death, we shall overcome" because she did not believe in any of those three words.

That night after dinner, and with a profound feeling of tenderness in community with the Casimiro family, Thanda sang to freedom that broke the chains, many of them unconscious or assumed by men and women who pretended to be free:

I banished the language of the prophet,

who professed a single God.

And his prophecies and threats, to those who used reason,

I banished the thrones and kings, all the fallacy of power.

And the hierarchies that impose that others must obey,

I banished from my soul all certainty, except love...

I banished the walls and borders,

those that pretend to separate us.

All the shields and flags, any form of labeling

I banished the teeth of wars,

that bleed those who just want to love.

And their generals and medals, cowardice is not to desert.

I banished from my soul all certainty, except love...

I banished the supposed truths, and those who try to impose them.

To those who differentiate ages, to the monopolies of knowledge.

I banished the claws of fears, I discovered the magic of living.

And I shook off all creeds,

and here I am with nothing to pretend.

I banished from my soul all certainty, except love...

# Fight or surrender. Berkeley, noviembre 2020

Nayra had collaborated with the Biden campaign for the United States elections on November 3rd. Like many American citizens, she felt fatigue, frustration, and shame towards Trump's ignorant and abusive narcissism, rather than enthusiasm for Biden. Fourteen billion dollars were bathing the power struggle of interests, manipulation, and image marketing. An illusory game of freedom in which a "product" was chosen in the so-called game of democracy.

The pandemic continued to spread, perhaps already having infected ten percent of the world's population, although only one-tenth were detected, and almost all severe cases were over eighty years old. Thanda continued to insist to anyone who would listen on the need for natural immunization of the young, protection for the elderly, and permeating that cold interface with the youth as they became immune, as Moyes claimed at Beatriz's death.

Shortly after Biden's election, which Trump still rejected, two American laboratories, Pfizer and Moderna, announced the preliminary results of their phase three vaccines, in about thirty thousand volunteers each. Barely a hundred infected, 0.3%, in about three months, ninety percent in the placebo group. There were still many doubts, such as whether it protected against mild infections - perhaps reducing natural immunity - or severe ones, as there were only five cases, and it did not allow knowing its effectiveness in preventing them. Nor could it yet be known if it protected all ages, if the protection was long-lasting, and, above all, if the transgenic technique of introducing, for the first time, reverse genes (RNA) could have unknown long-term adverse effects, even in the offspring of the vaccinated.

But there were clearly political intentions related to their major investors, who had "bet" on Biden, and above all commercial intentions as the stocks of both companies quickly rose, and most revealingly, a few days later their directors, neither they nor their families were volunteers, sold overvalued shares. Furthermore, the global system was becoming increasingly selfish, with companies competing for a huge business of about twenty billion dollars a year. Rich countries rushed to hoard production. The crumbs, through Gates' GAVI and its COVAX system of price differentiation based on the arbitrary classifications of the World Bank, ensured that patents were "protected to death" - pun intended. It barely left five percent of potential global production for half of the total population, in countries without production or purchasing capacity.

Thanda studied with Moyes how the map of world power had been transformed over the last decade, since Moyes presented his analysis upon graduating from the London School of Economics. They had to go back a bit to understand the roots. After the great wars, the Bretton Woods meeting organized the rules of the money game in the world: an ounce of gold was exchanged for thirty-two dollars, the dollar ruled over other currencies, the International Monetary Fund controlled the balance, and the World Bank lent for the reconstruction of Europe in ruins. Commercial banks lent dollars to American families who embraced the Hollywood American Dream. When Arab countries decided to raise the price of oil in 1971, the United States entered a trade and federal budget deficit. Nixon then delinked the dollar from gold and devalued it to increase exports. No other currency took over, and the dollar, since then with a virtual value, continued to reign. Ninety percent of international exchanges in the world were done in dollars, through the SWIFT system. Shortly thereafter, Reagan and Thatcher agreed on the Washington Consensus, limiting the role of government to almost solely protecting the power of the rich with weapons, and the market took control of the lives of almost everyone. The US government continued to constantly borrow and pay for its budget with treasury bonds bought by everyone, especially the Japanese and Chinese, who produced for American insatiable consumption. The banks that lent them began to be controlled by the banks that "invested" their money in the large corporations whose stocks and "financial derivatives" were bought and sold every day on Wall Street, which became the world's largest casino. These investment banks like Merrill Lynch, Lehman Brothers, Baring, Bear Sterns, or Morgan Stanley became multimillionaires with the speculation of unreal money and mostly distant from the savings of citizens. Mortgage speculation reached a limit and exploded in 2008 with the collapse of Lehman Brothers. But such was the power of these groups over banks, government, and people, that governments around the world paid with citizens' taxes for the ruins of the usurers, on whom, paradoxically, they depended. The Obama government came, and its social discourse tried to regulate the unleashed capitalism with the Dodd-Frank Act, which limited that speculative game. A third generation of usurers emerged, this time with a level of complexity and infiltration that escaped all government control: the "asset managers". Behind that elegant name hid true global speculation groups. The new sharks of the world economy, more voracious and immune than ever before.

With the help of "perverse artificial intelligence" like the Aladdin software and "speculative products" like iShares, they adjusted purchases and sales of stocks and their financial derivatives to the second, grouped them into packages where they "bet" on all economic groups and supposed competitors, modulating the market, diluting competition, and generating safe profits for speculators and multimillionaires for them, their managers. They managed the capital of ninety percent of the companies in the S&P 500, which in turn dominated ninety percent of the global economy. Their power was such that it influenced global currency changes and dictated "risk premiums", interest rates, on the debts of countries around the world. The US government handed over bond management to them, its debt, co-opted into the speculative game of the rich, and ensured them a cushion, if necessary, of fiscal bailout with the taxes of the rest. All this was happening while the world paid its anxious attention to the pandemic.

The oligopoly of global speculation was dominated by Vanguard, State Street, and above all BlackRock. The latter "managed" more than seven trillion dollars, ten percent of the global Gross Domestic Product, and achieved profits of up to 30% on their investments, which encompassed all major companies in all sectors, including the military, and their supposed mutual competition. Bayer and Monsanto, the greatest threat to life on the planet, merged under the pressure of BlackRock, the main shareholder of both. Its president, a Jew from Los Angeles named Larry Fink, became the guru of economic growth, and even the supposed revolutionary López Obrador in Mexico subjected his supposedly social policies to the advice of the king of speculation. Mexico granted BlackRock to complete the Mayan train project that devastated, with Monsanto's transgenic seeds, the virgin lands of the Yucatan and the simple lives of its people. Fink advised or directly managed government debts, the "toxic" assets of banks, as in Spain, often rescued with public money; pension fund planning, as in California, and even economic policies, like that of Mexico, ensuring that they left the dominant space to "their" corporations. Global public finances depended more on the trust of speculators than on the efforts of citizens and the decisions of their supposed leaders. And of course, they influenced elections.

Something could hinder the power of the sharks of the world economy. Trump's trade war with China limited global speculation. It was revealing and worrying to see that the supposedly more common good-oriented party, the Democrats, spent more on the campaign and received more support from the real power behind the scenes, Wall Street. In addition to the history of alliances with financial speculation and the support that Biden gave to military interference, Kamala Harris had links to Silicon Valley big tech companies to which she had been very accommodating during her time as Attorney General of California compared to her tough stance on minor crimes and drugs, and with the death penalty. Both clearly gave the space of power, perhaps in connivance, to Google, Facebook - and their acquisition of WhatsApp and Instagram - and Amazon, the three ways Americans sought information, related, and bought, and which with their systems from Microsoft, Apple, Cisco, and Warner accumulated immense power in shaping collective thought, the economy, and politics. It was no coincidence that these large companies were donors to the Democratic Party campaign.

During the first week of November, the world was attentive to the change of power in the economic and military empire, which so unfairly conditioned human and non-human life on the planet. Biden and Harris won, although Trump filed appeals for alleged fraud, rejecting defeat. Larry Fink bet on Biden and Harris, and it was very likely that he would continue to pull the strings of American and global finances. These were not omens that the system, the factory of human injustice and natural destruction, would change with the elections.

Thanda spoke with Nayra. They had to try to influence with ideas of equity, the network of eco-villages, and knowledge towards the common good, before the Democratic government took shape. Kamala Harris had an apartment in San Francisco and networks of friendships since her time at Thousand Oaks School, in Berkeley. They found common friends and encouraged them to participate in a debate on "The Ethical Principle of Equity." They organized it with Jonay, with his analysis of artificial intelligence, Aimsa to talk about the network of eco-villages, Fernando from Eila's experience, and Moyes from his analysis of the global economy. In addition to Kamala, they invited thought leaders in sciences, artificial intelligence, health, economy, ecology, politics, and laws, who in turn invited students of all grades and nationalities.

They also invited Kurzweil to dinner to exchange ideas before the debate with Kamala. He confessed to seeing the danger of artificial intelligence to which he had dedicated his life. BlackRock's Aladdin software was becoming the brain of international finance, coded to benefit its investors, BlackRock's billionaire clients, to the maximum. To minimize the risk of Aladdin failure, Larry Fink had developed a laboratory in Palo Alto where one out of every four of its thirteen thousand employees worked designing robots that analyzed billions of data - big data - in real-time and constantly reconfigured themselves to increase their analytical capacity more and more.

They held the meeting at the Dream Institute where Thanda had presented his equity studies ten years earlier, self-exiled from the bureaucracy in Brussels. There were barely thirty participants, but they connected via webinar with over five thousand in about fifty countries.

Thanda began the debate with an introduction:

* Kamala, known friends and friends to meet, here in person and virtually from many countries, thank you for joining us. We believe that the nature of the human being, in addition to aspiring to survive and reproduce, is empathetic to the feelings of others and desires the common good. Our intelligence allows us to discern the causes and consequences of our decisions and act in consciousness, the basis of freedom. On these three human conditions, empathy, intelligence, and freedom, the ethical principles of society are based. What unites us as a society in a shared objective guides our efforts to achieve it. Equity is the fair distribution of resources to enjoy shared objectives. There are societies, and then Aimsa will talk about the network of eco-villages, in which people decide to live without individual properties and without hierarchies. But still, the majority wants to have individual properties, and legal and political frameworks to defend them. Politicians, Kamala, you are people in whom society trusts to ensure that the distribution of resources and collective efforts is fair. That is why your main function as public servants is to defend the principle of equity, nurturing intelligence, consciousness, freedom, and empathy. Would you agree with that, Kamala?
* Good morning, everyone. My name is Kamala Harris. I am a daughter, wife, sister, public servant, and vice president-elect of the United States. I identify as she/her. That's right, Thanda. And I have defended this all my life. The United States is based, as the foundational letter of our great nation says, on the principle of individual freedom to pursue happiness. We do not believe in communism because it suffocates that individual freedom. Our moral values guide that happiness towards the common good. And we, the leaders in whom society trusts the government, must on the one hand defend the individual freedom to pursue dreams, and on the other, ensure that everyone has equal opportunities to do so. I have fought as a student, lawyer, prosecutor, and senator to ensure that those opportunities are equal regardless of sexual identity and skin color, the two causes that have contributed most to unjust inequalities in our country and the world. I have also fought and will continue to fight for immigrants to legally join in the pursuit of their dreams in our country and for all families, regardless of their economic condition, to have access to education and healthcare.
* Thank you, Kamala, those words reflect principles that embrace the hopes of many people in this country and around the world after four years in which Trump ignored and even scorned them. Since we agree on the ethical principle of equity, I want to share with you, in six minutes, the results of ten years of studies and the message of the movement for sustainable equity in health, representing more than two million scientists, professionals, academics, and health rights advocates worldwide.

Thanda had chosen for these crucial six minutes in which she wanted to influence the thinking of perhaps the most powerful person in the world for the next decade, three messages with images and graphics. In the first one, he talked about the criteria of sustainable equity, in the second about the price of injustice in human lives, and in the third about the curve of equity, therefore, ethics, in the distribution of resources.

He projected on the wall of the Dream Institute the first image, with the criteria for better possible health.

* Health, defined as physical, psychological, and social well-being, is the most precious and constant shared goal across time and cultures. The only common commitment of all countries regarding this goal is "the best possible health for all." After coordinating global health policy in the European Union, I came here to Berkeley ten years ago to study what the best possible health was and if it reached everyone. The most solid indicator for measuring health is life expectancy. While it measures the quantity of health, it is also closely related to its quality. What is possible is what we have the means for. Material resources and even access to non-material goods like knowledge depend, in today's world, on economic capacity. In the market society that you defend, except for love, of course, a fundamental source of health, everything seems to be bought and sold. The best feasible health, economically speaking, for everyone is what individuals and societies living with resources below the average achieve. Everything above the average is not feasible for everyone. And we also look at those "everyone" for the next generations, so we add the criterion of respect for planetary boundaries, starting with the average level of emissions that avoids ecological disaster for our children and grandchildren: one ton of CO2 per year. We have been looking for countries, regions, and communities that meet these three criteria: life expectancy above the average, income below the average, and carbon emissions below the threshold I mentioned.

He then moved to the second image and a video showing the loss of human life due to inequity, injustice.

* When we take the reference of that best possible and sustainable health for all and compare it with reality, we can detect the lack of health, or excess of preventable and unjust disease and death, due to inequity and absence of ethics, for each country, region, age group, gender, and over time. Thanda then projected a graph that took a month to prepare and had, through a video that progressed year by year from the year of her birth until 2023, with all possible data on inequity, global injustice, and its loss in human lives.
* This video shows the evolution of the number of deaths due to injustice and the proportion they represent of the total, their evolution over time and by country. The graph describes the distribution of that bloodletting of human lives in the last five years, by gender and age. The current world order allows seventeen million people to die each year, a third of all deaths, unjustly and preventably. That proportion of lives without the right to health has remained constant since the 1980s. For forty years, humanity has progressed in knowledge from micro-matter to the macrocosm, but it has not progressed an iota in justice, in the ethics of equity.

He continued with the third image and a video of the ethical curve of economic equity.

* Plato said more than two thousand years ago that among the citizens of a just society, there should be neither situations of need nor of excess wealth, as both were the genesis of the worst evils. Ninety percent of deaths in excess of feasible health for all occur in countries with average incomes below a threshold, defined by feasible and sustainable health models. That minimum income that allows for decent living conditions conditions a maximum income, as Plato said, above which others will not have enough. That "threshold of dignity" is about ten times the poverty threshold defined by the World Bank. The excess threshold, when we project it symmetrically around the average of resources and in a curve of normal, harmonic distribution, like all variables in nature, is half the average European income and a third of the average income in the United States. Above that threshold, not only is it prevented for others to have the minimum, but it is also incompatible with respecting the cycles of nature and, furthermore, it does not improve health, and, I would say, happiness, very different and distant from the pride of privilege. That curve defines the ethical redistribution of global resources, and it is calculated in the same way for sub-national levels, compatible with the global commitment to the right to the best possible health for all. We have explained this to the High Commissioner for Human Rights: without equity, there are no rights, and rights are based on the ethics of equity.

He concluded by quoting two important references from your roots Kamala: Gandhi said that "when I have more than my brother and he does not have enough, I am stealing from him," and Bob Marley said "live for yourself and you will live in vain, live for others and you will live again."

Kamala responded in this way.

* Thank you for sharing that vision and those analyses. It is true that we have to decrease inequalities so that everyone has the opportunity, with their effort, to prosper. In the United States, we enjoy cutting-edge research and the most advanced health care, we are supportive of the rest of the world, we have saved more than seventeen million lives by treating AIDS patients for fifteen years, and, regarding internal inequality, we are going to increase taxes on the top 1% to improve health and education coverage and quality. We are the country that fought against fascism, that promoted the United Nations and universal rights, that reached the moon, that propels the world with new quantum discoveries, and that will again be the leader of the free world.

Thanda sought to respond in this manner:

* Kamala, whenever I hear triumphalist messages, it leaves me concerned. I believe there aren't as many reasons as possible to be so proud of your history. It's important to critically examine what needs improvement, and even change. Yes, you fought against Nazism in the Second World War, but, even long before that, since the sinking of the Maine, the United States has been expanding its military presence worldwide, supporting fascist dictatorships on every continent, being involved in over two hundred armed conflicts, accounting for half of the world's military spending and nuclear arsenals, and it's the only country that unleashed a terrible nuclear holocaust. Regarding the United Nations, yes, it hosted the meeting of the league of war victors that later proposed a united world, at peace and respecting universal rights, but the United States is among the countries that have ratified the fewest human rights treaties, the only one that doesn't recognize children's rights, and maintains the undemocratic Security Council, and of its five members, who defend their superiority over the rest of the world, it's the one that has vetoed decisions by others the most times. Most grave at this moment is its denial of global commitments to combat climate change. Its solidarity is minimal, barely reaching 0.2% of its Gross Domestic Product per year, and it does so by imposing its priorities and procedures. AIDS programs impose medications under American patents that prevented over twenty million deaths from being prevented well into the XXIst century. Trust me, I was there. As for inequality in the United States, we've seen that fiscal redistribution would require much higher taxes on the rich, not just the top 1%, although that's essential. During the Clinton and Obama administrations, inequality, as measured by the GINI index, rose to some of the highest levels globally, perhaps underestimated by not capturing the immense billion-dollar profits of speculative groups. Recently, Biden said, I suppose to garner votes, that he wouldn't raise taxes at all for those earning below a thousand dollars a day. We've seen that Wall Street and the most powerful financial speculation groups, like BlackRock, have supported them in their campaign, and they celebrated their victory. It's said that Larry Fink, the billionaire who controls the management of seven trillion in assets, half of the American Gross Domestic Product, including pharmaceutical, agrochemical, and military patents, all of which cause enormous harm to human and natural life, could be poised to become the Secretary of the Treasury."

Thanda noticed Kamala tensing up, her gaze changing, erasing her friendly, almost victorious, smile and straightening up in her seat, preparing her response to attacks very different from those labeling her a socialist since Trump's campaign.

* I don't think you know or understand this country well, Thanda. We are peaceful, but we defend freedom and democracy in every corner of the world, sometimes with the lives of our troops. I don't think there's greater solidarity than that. We're going to return to the Paris Agreement and bet on a green deal towards a country with no CO2 emissions by 2045, ahead of the European Union. We innovate and take risks, which is why we lead in science and knowledge, and we know to recognize and respect, even applaud, those who strive in it, protecting their inventions with patents to reward their effort and encourage more research, from which everyone benefits. I don't think there's stronger leadership than that. As for our inequality, I assure you that we're going to curb the excessive power and profits of those who have the most but recognizing their innovative leadership and often their philanthropic example. We call it giving back here. There's an important part of justice that isn't, nor should be, in my opinion, imposed by the government: this is the country with the most charities in the world. With the redistribution of the wealthiest, we don't need to raise taxes on the middle class, who earn their money through their efforts. Without these elements of our way of living, fighting, innovating, working, and helping others, the world wouldn't have this country that indeed has inequalities but contributes a good part of the new knowledge towards well-being, and arguments for peace, democracy, and freedom.

She spoke with determination, almost fierceness, eliciting applause, and cheers in the room and in hundreds of rooms, even theaters across several countries. Everything was really false: the supposed fight for democracy was for their interests, the commitment to nature barely changed their production and consumption model, protecting patents often developed with public funds maintained billion-dollar businesses that contributed to their campaigns, and mentions of moderate taxes were a sign that constant unfair inequality would continue to grow. But her rhetoric and modes of expression, well designed by communication and marketing experts, elicited praise, and enthusiasm.

Nayra wanted to ask her about a very local, dramatic fact, in which she was involved:

* A question, Kamala, before the friends of the eco-village network, artificial intelligence, and the equity movement against the pandemic present their concerns and proposals. One of the saddest dramas of the last two decades in this country has been the opioid epidemic, which has claimed the lives of four hundred thousand people, many of them in their youth. I understand that you've committed to imprisoning those responsible for the pharmaceutical companies that encouraged this massive addiction and enriched themselves at the expense of so much suffering. But at the same time, as a prosecutor in this state, you toughened penalties for minor offenses like petty trafficking and prostitution, consequences often of desperate lives dragged by drugs. But what I'd most like you to clarify is why, having declared many times to be against the death penalty, you appealed against its abolition in California when Judge Courtney ruled citing the Eighth Amendment for the cruel suffering of an average of twenty years awaiting execution. Can you explain that contradiction and your objection to ending such suffering?
* Our democratic system of freedoms has an essential dimension in maintaining order and citizen security. We cannot be complacent against crime, although we can be compassionate and even offer pathways to reintegration for those who harm society, like the plan I implemented in California. When the abolition proposed by Judge Courtney was being debated, the people protested against Proposition 62, which nullified death penalties, yet they voted in favor of Proposition 66, which called for the rapid execution of convicts to avoid such long and cruel agony. When we hold public office, we must listen to the opinion of the majority, even if it sometimes goes against what we would wish for. I will continue to campaign against the death penalty.
* Thank you very much, Kamala, for all those answers. Count on us in the studies and proposals for sustainable equity for the right to health.

Thanda noticed how Kamala relaxed, feeling victorious and flattered in her power by the cheers of her followers. She reflected the supposedly social, supportive, and tolerant face of what was still ultimately a blind capitalism in its destruction of nature and alienated in its consumption, understanding the American dream as happiness, and the competition to achieve it as a way to "bring out the best in everyone" and elevate its winners. Ultimately, it was what that society wanted, as reflected in the over a thousand propositions that the citizens of the State of California had voted on in a hundred years, also with campaigns financed by the wealthiest, and almost always voting against more taxes and in favor of more security and property guarantees. It was the consciousness of having and competing that needed to change, but could it be so in a mass without empathy, without equity, and competitive among cities, dominated by a few guiding media, social networks, and advertising for consumption and propaganda for votes?

Before the recess for the next session on eco-villages, Thanda took the opportunity to intervene one last time in front of Kamala:

* The day before the elections here in the United States, the richest country in the world, one of the poorest on the continent, Bolivia, was electing its leaders. I want to share an excerpt from the words of Chopenacua:

“Today Bolivia and the world are experiencing a transition that repeats every 2,000 years, within the framework of the cyclicity of times, we move from the timelessness to time, beginning a new dawn, a new Pachakuti in our history. A new sun and a new expression in the language of life where empathy for others or the collective good replaces selfish individualism. Where Bolivians look at each other as equals and know that together we are worth more, we are in times of returning to being Jiwasa, it's not me, it's us. Jiwasa is the death of egocentrism, Jiwasa is the death of anthropocentrism, and it is the death of theocentrism. We are in a time of returning to being Iyambae, it is a code protected by our Guarani brothers, and Iyambae equals a person who has no owner, no one in this world should feel they own anyone or anything."

Could the United States transition from individualism to the ancestral Jiwasa and to the anarchic community of good, Iyambae? Could it leap with a magical quantum from the black hole of submission to powers it could no longer see or understand, to the courage of being oneself in harmony without codes or hierarchies with life?

# Vince or convince. Palo Alto, December 2021

A year had passed since Thanda and Nayra debated about a world of equity with Kamala Harris at the small and endearing Dream Institute of Berkeley. Hubert returned to Havana after a year of winning awards worldwide to present Epicentro in the place where it was born and within the Latin American Film Festival in Havana.

Nayra returned to Berkeley, where she continued to lovingly care for Enkidu and Jerónimo, navigating her adolescence in the complex, almost indecipherable virtual and competitive world. Teenagers in that country, and gradually around the world, were already spending more time looking at screens than at reality. Through screens, they communicated via WhatsApp, Facetime, or Skype, sent images through Facebook, Instagram, or Snapchat, videos through Tiktok and YouTube, made purchases on Amazon, and competed in killing games like Grand Theft Auto or Fortnite. Those were the most well-known, as there were already more than ten million apps, two thousand new ones each day, and millions of video games, which half of humanity played daily.

Studies, online due to the pandemic, had been losing clarity in the role of the teacher, the truthfulness of information on the web, the sometimes-absurd relativity of exams or grades, and the utility, in any case, of having titles. Education attempted to prepare children and young people to live in society, and since society was based on the competition of knowledge, possessions, and power, that was faithfully what educational systems around the world dedicated themselves to. Competing on the ladder meant elevating power and possessions, which were dominated by speculators, then by big entrepreneurs and bankers, followed by opinion manipulators in communication companies or influencers in the media, further down were officials, professionals of careers and trades working for a salary, and much further down were manual laborers in factories and fields, many of whom were immigrants. As Nour had told her parents fifteen years earlier: What ethical sense did the hierarchical scheme of education submissive to the system of capital and power have? Did it create people free to contribute to common good or quite the opposite?

Nayra continued to convey the values of generosity, creativity, and harmony with nature to her children, while, like Thanda, she lived with nostalgia and longing, perhaps already infiltrated in her feelings was resignation, traitor to dreams, the long distance, the "desert of hugs." She continued to fight to transform laws that could limit the dishonest and toxic harassment of large corporations in artificial food and tobacco. Through those struggles, she encouraged networks of young people in the San Francisco Bay Area to think of a different world like the one Eila and the eco-villages demonstrated was possible.

On Christmas 2020, Thanda was able to travel to Spain, accompanying her mother and family in memory of his father and celebrating life, still so battered by the pandemic of the virus and fear. During the trip, piloted by his friend Juan, he met a flight attendant, Mar, who united collaborations of art and poetry to raise funds for noble ideas. Juan contributed to this, and Mar organized support for Karelia and her humble dance school dreams for poor girls in Centro Habana, rich in passion. Thanda was constantly amazed by the multitude of souls vibrating with empathy and harmony. Truly, all were, just that some, blocked in their flow of love, sought false refuge in selfishness and power.

For his birthday, he gave himself the gift of traveling to visit a farm for sale in a valley south of Santander, near a village called Entrambasaguas. Along a little path, there were three houses, and the foundations of two others, amidst forests of oaks, beeches, chestnuts, birches, hazels, eucalyptus, and yews, lush meadows, and the birth of a crystalline river called Aguanaz. He fell in love with the place, which also had many other houses, meadows, and forests around in which to create an eco-village based on the harmony of family ecology.

Thanda dreamed of his horizon of freedom, of writing, speaking, and singing without any filters imposed by the hierarchy of the European Union, and from the coherence of living without harming the most sacred legacy to his children: nature. He lived her final stage within the institution working to help Cuba not to fall into the clutches of alienated capitalism and to find in harmony with nature the way forward. He encouraged exchanges crossing the Atlantic by sailboat between Cubans and Elieños to encourage in Cuba the "journey towards the rising of the new sun." In this, Sergio supported from Cape Verde, who had been promoting the eco-village movement and Eila's utopia. He also promoted food sovereignty projects challenging the root of an unhealthy dependence on remote foods, especially feed for the cruel diet based on animal sacrifices, in complicity for conscious food with Tito and Yunalvis. He also continued to encourage clean energy with his colleague Lucía and the care of the balance of planetary limits. Cuba could, through alliances of small companies, especially cooperatives based on social economy, manufacture cobalt batteries that would help, one per eco-village, store clean energy. With Marta and Tobias, she continued to forge a beautiful friendship, and at work, they continued to encourage the beautiful "transculture" project that was taking shape on a three-masted sailboat and thirty meters long where two hundred artists from all cultures and forms of expression of the Caribbean met and expressed in each port the magical fusion of art towards the vision of a world without oil or greed. The Film School of San Antonio and in the Higher Institute of Art, transformed in islands of eco-sovereignty and creation, promoted small eco-villages that, with the examples of the Funes, the Casimiro, and many more, shone brightly in the Caribbean. Their hundreds of filmmakers and artists lived the pure and clean experience of eco-sovereignty and embodied it in hundreds of documentaries, films, music, dance choreographies, and plastic arts.

They also promoted projects towards a digital society that would break the shackles of bureaucracy, the corruption of black money, and the secrecy of patents. They proposed a Cuba without money, where each Cuban would have a card where their personal, health, property, income, and expenses data would be recorded. In this way, it was possible to bet on an equitable society: no one would have, in properties or incomes, as the official wage table stated, more than seven times the minimum of dignity established by the methodology that Thanda had been proposing for ten years. Centralized prices and wages were not necessary, nor were restrictions on anyone's activity and initiative, which had proven, due to their impositions, ineffective and suffocating for so many years. Just by not-harming nature communities avoided having either too little or too much. Both prices and incomes were automatically adjusted according to each Cuban's condition, and everyone had enough, and no one had excess.

Most of the land remained state-owned, and the "usufruct" (state land lease for twenty years) program - linked to a ten percent contribution of its capacity to the community and to the care of planetary limits, was expanded. Thanda encouraged an international call of young peasants for food sovereignty in Cuba in natural harmony. He spoke with Deputy Minister Tapia and the Minister of Health to propose, in complicity with his friends Marcelo and Frei Beto, that one million idle hectares on the island be handed over to 50,000 *usufructuaries* organized into groups of young people from any country who wanted to go to Cuba to collaborate with means, theircommittment, and above all, their solidarity, in caring for nature and contributing to healthy agroecology for nature and for people, which Thanda insisted was the cornerstone of human freedom: the sovereignty to feed oneself. He continued through ministries, universities, schools, and in hundreds of meetings, encouraging a society and a life within the curve of equity, encouraging from Cuba many other countries to adopt similar systems in three phases: study of geographical and social equity maps delimiting thresholds of dignity and hoarding, followed by the disappearance of money and its replacement by cards called "equity guarantee" and finally an automated system of net salaries and individualized prices to progress towards the ethical curve of equity. It was the step of equity before Eila's non-property goal.

To better understand reality and direct his efforts in cooperation with empathy, Thanda proposed to the European and Cuban hierarchies to travel around the country by bike, visiting projects, municipal university centers, agro-ecological farms, and communities. He prepared a detailed map and the bike, which Sergio left in his care, and traveled by train to the westernmost point. From there, he began a route of twelve hundred kilometers, averaging fifty each day, resting on Sundays. In total, a month bathing in fascinating landscapes and epic settings. He was welcomed in each place with affection, and sometimes people accompanied him to the next stage. He checked his messages and distance tasks every day, in contact with his team in Havana. When he arrived at the University of *Las Villas* in Santa Clara, he joined a fascinating debate that his colleague Alina, a beautiful and brave champion of universal knowledge and consciousness of unique energy, prepared with students and professors to encourage a network of knowledge sovereignty. They designed it with the more than one hundred municipal university centers, as humble as brave and luminous, so that by sharing knowledge and its applications to the needs of communities, patents and the business of ideas would become redundant. Midway through, he spent several days at the Finca del Medio helping and learning to build Chavely's magical terracotta vaults. He had sent a 3D printer with Leidy and Giraldo, software to share prototypes with over a hundred thousand knowledge allies worldwide, and Antonio and his son were already designing irrigation machines, pumps, and mills. Thus, he continued his journey to the east of the magical island, where he poured his heart, soaking up the ideas and feelings of its people, and ending the evenings with the guitar and verses to the wind.

When he finished his journey and completed the final chapters of "Tenderness and Courage," Thanda felt fever and weakness. He was tested for Covid, and against his will and logical arguments, he was admitted to Pedro Kouri Hospital, a reference during his young years from his eager readings of tropical medicine before arriving in Ukuswana. Declining the use of television, air conditioning, and chicken in meals, he spent ten days completely isolated on a mat, eating only white rice twice a day. He took advantage of such captivity to write the proposal for the European Union's cooperation strategy with Cuba from 2021 to 2027. It was based on the ideas of "Tenderness and Courage" and on his dream of Valyter. Thus, he proposed three dimensions of cooperation, breaking the inertia of "sectoral cooperation" to which United Nations agencies and "specialized" NGOs clung for the succulent 7% of indirect costs and up to 30% of administrative expenses with which the costly "cooperation industry" perpetuated itself, of which barely a third of the funds reached those who needed it most. The first dimension he proposed was local: the foundation of people's and communities' freedom depended on consuming what was locally produced, in self-sufficiency and sovereignty, especially in basic goods such as food, water, energy, and housing, as the only chanceof escaping the global consumerism alienating consciences and polluting the skies. The second dimension was for the island; he preferred to call it so rather than a “country” as he could no longer believe in countries, nations, and even less in "homelands": he sought territorial cohesion between self-sufficient communities and fiscal equity to "contribute according to capacities and receive according to needs" –in that principle of Marx taken from the journey to Icaria of the utopian socialist Cabet, which inspired Thanda so much, a scale in time between the utopia of Moro, Icaria of Cabet, and Eila guiding a new Humanity. Such double solidarity based on the ethics of equity, which Thanda defended so much in universities in America and Europe, enabled everyone's rights to health and global public goods. Nour's experience made him doubt about "education." The third dimension was global and referred to the contribution of each natural region or island, such as Cuba, to develop knowledge and technologies to advance humanity's well-being in harmony with nature, and in this, Cuba had shown that it could contribute to global well-being with its biotechnology and medical services worldwide. After 42 versions discussed with European diplomats in Cuba and technocrats in Brussels following the hierarchy's directives, Thanda was censored for using the word sovereignty, as it limited European commercial interests, equity of contribution and access, as it sounded like Marxist ideology, and cooperating with Cuban medical services, as the "Washington long arm" incited the European Parliamentti acuse such global solidarity, perhaps the most important in the world in health, of "trafficking of human beings". Brussels also imposed the promotion of private companies as the basis of the European economy and “free market”societies. Between the European position in favor of private, competitive companies based on individual or corporate benefit and Cuba's prioritization of its inefficient and hierarchical public companies, Thanda tried to reconcile two visions that had been perpetuating serious social, inequality, or suffocating liberties, and ecological damages for decades. Even so, almost 80% of the text that Thanda drafted from his Covid confinement in the hospital was respected and approved by all European countries to guide cooperation in Cuba for the next decade.

Thanda began to feel suffocated, already after twenty years within the European hierarchical system. He had to camouflage his ideas and hide in his academic or social conferences. In late 2021, his mother had a serious fall and began to need support in all her needs. Thanda felt his father's presence: he secretly corresponded with him as he kept his mobile phone after his departure, and from it, he tried to feel him within after reading his writings and being fascinated by his drawings, writing to himself as if his father was. He asked him to take care of his mother with the deepest tenderness. With the cooperation program with Cuba approved, and with Nayra absorbed with her teenage children and the way of life in the United States, increasingly distant, Thanda sought some position in Brussels from where to work and spend frequent periods of days off or teleworking, taking care of her mother. That's how he learned about the call for a senior expert position in inequalities to advise all European cooperation. During many years, the Commission had not published any position of such a level; they were all "by appointment." He inquired before submitting his candidacy for the position, and he was informed that "it had already been filled." Despite his lifelong passion for fighting against unjust inequalities, his articles, books, conferences, and courses at twenty universities, applying it to the policies he led on children's rights, global health, and cooperation programs in Mexico and Cuba, his passion was disregarded. Or perhaps feared. He wrote to his father, and he, from their "secret complicity," replied: "when you believe in something, if a door closes on you, feel even more strength to fight for it, persevere, son. It is the struggle that makes you noble, not applause or pats on the back." Thus, Thanda, for the following three months, devoted two hours every day before his dance with the sea at dawn, to do what he would have done in such a position but with the freedom of his passion. He updated equity studies, created a database of over two million data points, half based on about two hundred algorithms, prepared an Excel dashboard, videos of maps with the cumbersome Statplanet software, and a document - "equity profile" - for each country in the world, including a historical account. He added everything to her Valyter.com website, now with the equity atlas, conferences, presentations, and recorded courses. He knew his father was winking his secret eye at him. His smile filled him with light, and that was enough for him to keep fighting rebelliously against any structure, hierarchy, or norm he felt was unjust.

By then, there were already more than fifty million people around the world living in various forms of spiritual eco-villages: in addition to communities in nature, eco-neighborhoods emerged as in Nagasaki, eco-cooperatives as in Cuba, eco-fleets crossing the seas, eco-tribes nomadically traversing eco-villages, pollinating ideas, and passions. They tried, with little success, to raise their voices at the United Nations, a symbolic forum of speeches and ideas, whose annual budget, five-thousandth of global spending, limited them to a forum of "politically correct" ideas, with an anachronistic Security Council that vetoed what was not suitable for dominant countries, increasingly focused on the United States, still allied with Europe, and China, increasingly allied with Russia.

Biden and Harris finally took power after a long legal battle against Trump, who claimed fraud in the campaign. His plan to tighten trade with China, the cheap factory of large American corporations, and to regulate powerful asset managers actually global speculation groups, triggered BlackRock, dominant in the world economy, to ally Biden's candidacy. It gained so support with funds, means, and the manipulative power of Carlyle. Biden allied without reservation with capital and arms, the true powers of the country farthest from social and natural harmony. The situation led Pfizer and Moderna laboratories to announce the pretended effectiveness of their COVID vaccine just days after the elections. Biden lost strength due to his age and his son's intrigues with Ukrainian gas, and thus Kamala, in the shadows, began to reveal her fluent rhetoric of freedom and at the same time proved her inability, or lack of will, as happened with Obama, to dismantle the complex world of capital power that influenced citizens' work and savings, government budgets and policies, and artificial intelligence control strategies.

The proposal for a renewed Cuba without money and based on the constitutional principle of equity, with more young people caring for nature and Cuban contributions to the global common good such as some vaccines and medicines, as well as cobalt batteries took off. It found echoes with the network of spiritual eco-villages which slowly expanded. Meanwhile, speculative capitalism, billionaire businesses, including those of vital goods such as medications or vaccines, and the submission of most of the world, which, without even understanding its chains anymore, sought refuge in digital communication, leisure, and consumption, grew.

The young members of the Ukuzwana family, Joseph and Nothando, along with Thandiwe and Marco, in the original mission, Buhleve at the Latin American School of Medicine in Cuba, Lisy, back in Brazil with her first love Joao, Saidu in Sierra Leone, Martin in Eila, Moyes and María back in Robledo, Daniela and Alain in Normandy, Ángeles and Laarsen in Sweden, Adam, Cassie, and Unai and Altea from Spain, and Nour from New York, were supporters of not waiting for capitalism to succumb to the alternative without property of the eco-villages or, for those who clung to the mental abstraction of property, to live by the ethical principles of equity.

They invited a debate over the internet with the remaining generation of pioneers, NoLwasi in Ukuzwana, Fernando and Umbela in Eila, Helen in Bulawayo, and Nadine in Johannesburg; and the intermediate generation, Thanda in Havana, Nayra in Berkeley, and Jonay and Aimsa in White Lake, joined by soulful friends with whom they animated eco-villages and equity and were preparing to make the leap that escaped the gravitational force of cities.

They called the meeting: "The revolution by example: with or without struggle."

NoLwasi began:

* Dear family, how beautiful to be able to connect all together. Since Patxi founded Ukuzwana and John founded Ternura, the alliance for the common good in harmony with nature has grown in the spiritual eco-villages. We fondly and gratefully remember Patxi, Haka, John, Beatriz, and so many others who guided us on the paths around the world with these noble principles. Their spirits are present among us now and guide us with their light.

Umbela continued:

* I share the deep feeling of gratitude to those who guided us and continue to give us light, to those who are bearing witness to harmony around the world, and to you, young people, who offer your courage to inspire a fairer world.

Adam spoke on behalf of the young people:

* Thank you, family. Without you, we would feel weak and lost. Thanda tells us that the equity model is inspiring debates in many governments around the world, and Aimsa tells us that there are already over a hundred thousand eco-villages in countries worldwide. These are our great references and hopes. First, to live with equity knowing that accumulation is unjust and absurd, and then property itself as a chain that suffocates the soul. But we, the young people born and raised in the spirit of Ukuzwana, want to share our concern for the world we see outside of these islands of harmony. These islands only house 0.7% of the world's population. The destruction of nature continues, with a hundred million tons of CO2 being released into the atmosphere daily, fifty million trees being cut down every day, and a hundred and fifty species disappearing daily due to human destruction. That greed, based on arrogant anthropocentrism and blind consumerism, sacrifices five hundred million animals each day under immense suffering. But also, the human species harms itself, letting seventeen million people die unjustly each year, about fifty thousand each day. We can live in complete harmony in our eco-villages, but we cannot turn a blind eye to so much suffering. We have to do something.

Thanda responded:

* It is a privilege to feel part of this family with a sense of unity towards those who inspired us on the path and are no longer in this dimension of existence, of unity in the ideas of gratitude to the universe, harmony with all other forms of life, and empathy to feel with the other and to feel ourselves part of the same energy. To flow in that beautiful harmony, *we need to have the courage to let our tenderness flow.* Your proposal to act on the networks of evil, pain, and injustice, as Haka did throughout his life, implies that the tenderness our soul feels for those who suffer through empathy must be turned into courage to denounce what is not fair and, if the system ignores it, to try to fight against it. Your proposal is ethical, Adam. But let's think. When many people contribute to a system, it may be because they do not know it, nor its consequences. In other words, they either contribute with low or no awareness to the system, or they know what they are doing and contribute consciously. In the first case, it is necessary to increase their knowledge of the causes and consequences of their decisions and actions. That is what we try to do from the network of eco-villages and from the evidence of the equity movement. Surely, we can do it better. Regarding the second situation, I wonder: is it legitimate to change a system if those who make it up agree with it? We do not agree, and we may leave it, maintaining an open relationship and exchanging or even, as John insisted, contributing with taxes for universal basic services. But I repeat, is it legitimate that besides alerting consciences about the harm of the destructive production model and alienated consumption, we fight against a system assumed as valid and even the only possible one by others, in fact, the majority?

Nour intervened:

* It is impossible for those who suffer from marginalization due to unjust inequalities to agree with the system and not want to change it. In any case, their consciences may be manipulated, or their will threatened with fear, so that they do not desire or fight for that change. For example, with elections: people are persuaded with propaganda of a supposed change, a supposed justice, and a supposed equality that is not true. We need to take it a step further. But besides, the system not only affects those who live in and contribute to it but all forms of life on the planet. We have an abundance of tenderness, but we must also be brave and dare to fight against evil, the cause of so much suffering, especially those who have not yet been born and even more so other animal species that suffer from our harm to the planet and our predatory instinct. Let's do something, family. I feel the symbolic call from here in White Lake that we must contribute to something that neutralizes BlackRock.

At that moment, Aimsa intervened:

* From the network of spiritual eco-villages, we are trying. In New York, we speak at the United Nations about our experience without burning fossil fuels or harming nature. Almost ten new eco-villages join the network every day. Nearly a tenth of eco-villagers are traveling the world and encouraging change in the paths, towns, and cities around the world.

Nayra continued speaking:

* It is very important that we speak to young people and use the means through which they communicate on the internet. Show them that another world is possible. They need to know that everyone is welcome in eco-villages to experience the joy of harmony in community and communal living.

Then Unai spoke:

* The example of eco-villages, the proposal of equity, raising awareness of ethical footprint, everything is very good. But it's slow and insufficient. At the current pace, it would take seven centuries to have a world of eco-villages. If each eco-village encourages the creation and development of another every five years, then we would accelerate the expansion, but it would take forty years. It would already be too late. At the current rate of emissions, which hardly changes with international commitments, in fifteen years we will reach a point of no return in warming, leaving a very uncertain future for everyone, including eco-villages. Furthermore, as Nour says, whether unconsciously or consciously, so much harm due to inequality and natural destruction is not fair.

Moyes explained further:

* It is impossible for the system to stop generating unjust inequalities and loss of life because of it. We must be brave and also intelligent.

Jonay intervened:

* You're right, Moyes. Let's think. Let's start by analyzing what ways there are to increase the level of consciousness of those who unknowingly contribute to others' suffering and even their own. By revealing and spreading the secrets of intrigues, perversion, and cruelty of public and private powers, so that people do not vote for them or buy from or save with them.

Joseph had prepared with Adam and in dialogue with the rest of the "Ukuzwana youth" a scheme of actions and alliances:

* The capacity for hacking exists to reveal those secrets. There are ways to access public and private information and to reveal and disseminate it, but the persecution by the power of the system is fierce; they have tens of thousands of people and billions dedicated to pursuing any access to "their secrets." To go unnoticed, a virtual private network - VPN - can be installed or services like CyberGhost can be used, but intelligence services eventually discover the origin and prosecute their leaders for "treason," like Assange, in the process of extradition for treason from the UK to the United States, or Snowden, who is in hiding in Russia. The Anonymous platform has managed to maintain the confidentiality of many hackers who reveal secrets to "checkmate" the government of the United States, but it is also very limited. Others, after being arrested, end up being co-opted by the system to switch sides and protect the security of public or private power, like Kevin Mitnick. If we do something, it must be done with a lot of intelligence and cunning. To reassure everyone, this connection is encrypted. No one is listening to us.

Buhleve then intervened.

* The legacy of my father Haka is courage, the courage to reveal the truth. He gave his life for it. The way was to pull the thread of dramas like child trafficking, as happened to me, or Monsanto's poisons. I've been thinking a lot about it lately. It would be exhausting to compile the millions of documents and pieces of information that reveal the perversion of governments of great economic powers, co-opted by them, of armies and the military industry, and of large companies with global trade. Not only, in the case of accessing with impunity to reveal all the perversion that dominates the world, it would be an immense job of detection, analysis, and structured dissemination, but it would be almost impossible for any citizen to devote the time to understand all the details before buying, saving, or voting.

Thanda intervened to comment on what Buhleve shared:

* That's right, Buhleve. As we talked about recently while walking along the Malecón. When twelve years ago I pushed for the European Union's child rights policy in Brussels, a Dutch minister with courage insisted on setting up a European system for analyzing and labeling any European or imported product where there was evidence of child labor. That proposal was rejected by the other countries, but I spoke a lot with that minister, who had, from her childhood in Indonesia, experience, and commitment to that kind of perversion of global trade. We investigated food products and raw materials from mining: there were almost no exceptions to the rule that all of them were directly or indirectly related to legal or illegal child labor in the countries of origin. When we investigated products, such as the majority, in which several countries participated, from packaged goods to electronic components, tracing child labor became an extremely complex task of espionage, but it almost always resulted in the fact that almost all globalized products involved child labor. Later, I was invited by the platform of European NGOs to reflect on their role in the XXIst century. Reflecting on the unconscious consumption that generates harm, I told them that the isolated positive actions they promoted remained important, especially as a testimony, but that it was necessary to counteract the much more widespread and powerful negative actions. I proposed to create a machine then, now it could be an app on the phone, that reads the barcodes of products in commerce and identifies those with immoral practices due to labor abuses, toxicity, falsity, price abuse and patents, and environmental damage. The work, which some NGOs started, was immense: in a large supermarket there can be more than ten thousand types of products for sale, on Amazon there are over twelve million different products. It is impossible to analyze each of them in all dimensions of harm, and also to maintain that database updated.

Then Aimsa intervened.

* What is true is that few companies dominate global trade. Let's start with food, what most people buy: ten companies control most of the feed, almost all of it made from transgenic soybeans and corn, seeds, grown with agrochemicals and herbicides, mixed with additives, and sold as processed foods. If each of these companies is investigated, not by product but by their general practices of environmental and human damage, the analysis is simplified, and general boycotts based on objective information can be proposed. We did it with several information and boycott campaigns against Monsanto, with little impact: their sales continue to increase, still camouflaged under the merger with Bayer. We have also done this with the IBFAN group against Nestlé, which contributes to immoral practices of child labor, illicit and perverse marketing of breast milk substitutes, and environmental contamination. Nestlé has over two thousand products and a good proportion of sales of processed foods, and we have reported on their dishonest activity through many media. We even convinced the Catholic Church in the UK in the eighties to participate in a boycott campaign. But the effect is minimal. Less than five percent of consumers worldwide participate in any kind of boycott.

Daniela, the youngest of the group, intervened:

* So tell us, please, what can be done to stop blind consumption from contributing to all that damage?

Joseph added:

* We can try to influence the redistribution of this great inequality in the world. Like Mr. Robot. We can use the SWIFT system and reverse it, but the poorest and most subjugated do not have credit cards or accounts in banks. And in any case, we must be very careful. With similar intentions, there are hackers, like the Algerian Hamza Bendelladj, who transferred four hundred million from billionaire companies to organizations supporting the Palestinian people, who are sentenced to life imprisonment. In addition, none of these actions has hardly resulted in a minimal transfer of opulence to necessity. We need to study how to make a much more transcendent, irreversible change and leave no trace.

Thanda shared his opinion:

* I believe that there is almost no global trade that is free from harm due to labor abuses or natural destruction. Big capital dominates trade and concentrates it in a few companies that produce on a large scale, which also control and camouflage prices to continue increasing their profits. To do this, it locates the extraction of destructive raw materials through large mining and oil companies, manufactures in countries with cheap labor under abusive working conditions and without any social protection, adds toxic additives to food dominated by a few corporations, especially Monsanto, and speculates with stocks and prices for more and more profits from fewer and fewer hoarders. That's why I believe that the solution is to consume almost nothing outside of the community or, at most, the region, what is not packaged, what we know at its source. Not only does this avoid so much damage, but it also recovers our consciousness of knowing what we consume and with it the freedom to, in empathy, direct our effort, exchange, and new ideas for well-being, in human and natural harmony.

Then Thandiwe intervened, from Ukuzwana:

* So, Thanda, if only local spending is allowed, the number of products will be much lower and it will be limited to much more basic needs. People with higher incomes will buy land and properties that will also go to a few hands. In Matabeleland there are a few companies, mostly Chinese, that are buying more and more land.
* That's true, Thandiwe. There is a basic principle that we must continue to bear witness to and fight for: that land, nature, cannot be owned by anyone, but cared for in harmony for the common good.

Nothando, who was already taking over from NoLwasi in spiritual leadership in Ukuzwana, asked:

* If we manage to have less global and harmful consumption, and nature is not owned by anyone, many will save their money and that dark magma that I feel is the "capital in few hands" that Joseph talks about will continue to grow. What can happen if people spend less and save more?

Joseph attempted to respond:

* Consumption spending above what is essential and local goes, as Thanda told us, mostly to large corporations and their systems of speculation and injustice. The paradox is that austere living and saving end up in the same sink of destructive production and consumption, of nature, conscience, and equity, and in its great ally, rather owner, global financial speculation. Most savings are placed in commercial banks that forward their "assets" - virtual money of the second generation - in investment banks and large companies - third generation of the "big lie" - which in turn are "managed" by major speculators like BlackRock, Vanguard, and State Street. These dark powers prepare packages of shares in combinations like iShares that Aladdin is in charge of making grow and increase the money of those who speculate with more and more false money, and in the large companies that, by scale and speculation, dominate the system and the lives of those who consume, save, and vote, with an illusion of freedom, in it.

Nour intervened forcefully:

* We cannot retreat into our eco village paradises or into theories of equity and watch as every day the monster of this perverse system murders fifty thousand people, fifty million trees, and five hundred million animals. I understand that from the example of another way of life we ​​can inspire many, but everyday counts. With intelligence and courage. May the tenderness of John and Patxi's memory inspire Haka's courage and give us the strength to, even at risk, even our lives, contribute to the collapse of this perverse system. What can be done?

Adam responded to his sister:

* We must think like an engineer. It seems that the foundation is an artificial intelligence, Aladdin, coded to favor the most powerful, so that the false money of the fourth and fifth generation continues to grow and thus exerts its power over the lower, higher levels in that imaginary pyramid, of money to governments, to their budgets and pension funds, to that of companies, banks, and people.

Joseph continued his argument:

* Let's think for a moment: what would happen if the base, Aladdin, falls down?: shares of almost all the world's major companies worth twenty trillion dollars would flop, and as in 1929 and 2008 the collapse of the stock market would lead to the bankruptcy of the major speculative groups, most of the investment banks, and many of the large companies that supply in turn many small businesses, family businesses, and even the stores where people shop. Production would plummet and so would trade, international investment, and consumption, all good for the environment and for a Humanity that slowly learns to live without money and in community.

Thanda reacted with concern:

* Your thoughts are noble, your concern is sensitive to pain, and your anger, which I share, is natural and necessary for change. I just want to tell you that we must be very intelligent and very united. The 2008 crisis, which was only caused by the collapse of some investment banks that took mortgage speculation to an unsustainable extreme, caused sixty million unemployed, especially among the poorest, a decrease in remittances sent by immigrants to their families, increased food prices, energy and transportation, medicines, decreased the capacities of the poorest countries to maintain health services, and as a consequence of all this, the number of poor people, according to the extreme threshold of the World Bank, increased by one hundred and thirty million. It is estimated that the increase in mortality from all this, especiallyduring infancy, meant about three hundred thousand more deaths per year while the crisis and its effects lasted. The collapse of Aladdin could cause a much more devastating effect. The eco villages offer the possibility of living with almost total independence from the system. But let's think with empathy that, fundamentally, they are a privilege of less than one percent of people who have been able to disconnect from the system or have had the courage to do so.

Unai then intervened:

* Maybe I'm going to say something very simplistic, but I want to understand: Thanda, you tell us that the current system causes seventeen million deaths a year. If the collapse of it causes, let's say, half a million, the effect is positive, right?

Thanda tried to respond:

* It's not that simple. The negative impact would be added to the prevailing injustice, as differences in wealth and in the ability to cope with the crisis could, until the system regenerates into a just order, further increase inequalities and the unjust suffering they provoke. We are seeing this with the pandemic, which collapses parts of the system and affects mostly the poorest. Capital is redirected and profits of Amazon and the big manipulative powers have increased as the time people spend in front of screens increases.

Adam spoke again on behalf of the youth:

* So what do you propose? We are willing to risk ourselves to fight, not to wait, we cannot be calm in our paradises knowing that there is so much pain, so much destruction, so much injustice.

Thanda responded:

* We all want the same thing, Adam. With the urgency and restlessness of youth, or with the serenity and patience of experience. I ask NoLwasi and Umbela to guide us. They inspired, with Patxi and John, Ukuzwana and the eco villages. They perceive their light like as no one else and it is for those ideas that we are here, united, dreaming and fighting, "*luñadores*" of a better world.

First, NoLwasi spoke:

* Siyalibonga abantwane wami (we thank you, our children). Patxi and John, and also Anwele, Beatriz, Haka, and all the ancestors inspire us with light and strength. I see the impatient strength of the youth and the prudence of those who follow us. We are already in the twilight of this existence, in deep union with those who have gone, especially our soulmates, and without fear of that leap. I see that, in different ways, we all want a world of harmony and to be generous in advancing in it. It is Patxi's legacy. Some with thoughts, others with actions. Do not act with desperate urgency or with complacency from privilege. Seek to find a way to combine everything. Just by thinking about it, trying it, and being united in that endeavor of goodness, the light already shines and expands in ways we cannot even understand. Siyakuthanda... (we love you)

Umbela said:

* My happiness is immense to hear all of you so eager to do good in harmony with all forms of life. I feel the same as NoLwasi. I remember how John used to tell me that the best way to defeat someone who wanted to harm us, always without understanding, was to ally them with the cause. Let's think deeper: where does so much pain come from? Either from ignorance or from fear. From the ignorance of not knowing, of not being aware of how what we do affects others. To achieve this, we must continue to speak and share in every possible way. Without moral judgments, but with facts, without thinking that we possess the truth, and with much humility. But it can also be because of fear that many act, knowingly, harming others. Fear of those at the top of falling to the bottom if they are not at the top of power, and fear of those at the bottom of feeling isolated and defenseless if they do not remain dominated by power. In addition to consciousness, we must appease those fears with love. That is the greatest of tests. Loving those who cause harm. And loving is not remaining silent, nor submitting, nor pleasing... it is extending a hand to be united, to let go of the illusions of ownership and hierarchies. Let us invite more and more people to experience life without those chains. And yes, in the meantime, let us see how that Aladdin can be redirected towards good, ally it with the cause: would it be possible to turn it into an ally that promotes what does not pollute or create inequalities?

Thus, the meeting concluded. Nothando shared the precious melody of Schindler's List, Jonay sang "there won’t be enough stars" and Thanda sang "endless" which everyone, from so many corners of the world, sang "your light in me unites me to the universe... endlessly."

NoLwasi bid farewell to everyone saying:

Let us engender from tenderness the most powerful courage: that of love.

# heartbreak. Castille. May 2023

The COVID pandemic that paralyzed the world in 2020 repeated waves, each lighter as the immunity of the youth increased. They bravely went out to get infected, immunize themselves, work for the common good, and embrace the elderly, even more so than before the pandemic.

The major pharmaceutical corporations attempted to profit from their genetically modified vaccines, which besides being unreliable, proved ineffective, with uncertain side effects, and counterproductive for the natural immunity of the brave, solidarity-driven, and harmonious youth, akin to nature. It was symbolic that it was the mild variant Omicrom hat immunized almost the entire humanity emerged from Africa, the continent forgotten by Big Pharma and the rich, hoarding countries. By the end of 2021, the world was slowly emerging from its confinement, though returning to a system still dominated by power and capital, cities and countries, consumption, and fossil fuels. But the seeds of change were already planted.

On February 24, 2022, Putin invaded Ukraine, turning it into a battleground between the imperialisms of the United States, allied with NATO and the European Union, and Russia, in collusion with China. A new world order and a renewed Cold War began, no longer so cold due to the bombings over Ukraine, with a nuclear rearmament capable of destroying all life on Earth two hundred times over and an accelerated climate change leading towards species suicide and the biocide of other life forms, innocent.

Since Thanda visited a group of houses within lands that included the birthplace of the Aguanaz River, in Cantabria, the land where his grandmother bravely defied traditions and fell in love with an anarchist, he felt that was the home that awaited him after so many adventures around the world. Between his roots in the Basque Country and his memories of childhood and adolescence in Asturias, laid that small province gravid with lush nature at the foot of the magnificent peaks of Europe and towards a port from where from his father sailed to England fleeing Franco with a small suitcase, a jacket, and a watch, which Thanda cherished as his most valuable treasures.

In September 2022, he invested his savings in that valley to found ValyTer, a place of harmony with nature and communal empathy. In all of this, as in all his steps, he saw the eternal alliance of love with Nayra, although he felt her increasingly distant, integrated into Californian society and jealous that their children had the "best opportunities" there. "We love each other very much, but we don't want the same things," Nayra would say. Thanda understood it, but he felt that, deep down, they did want the same thing, even though the paths were different, by then.

Year 2023 arrived, and the end of Thanda's time in his beloved Cuba was approaching, like the Victoria Falls after the calm of the Zambezi River. Everything seemed suspended in time, as if he did not want to leave an island as beautiful as troubled by internal ghosts and external demons. With salaries of barely a dollar a day and decreasing access to food, medicines, and basic products, Cubans who received help from abroad (who lived with "Fe" – *familiares en el exterior-*  relatives abroad) stood in endless lines to obtain, often in "MLC" stores ("freely convertible currency: currencies controlled by the government), food or hygiene products. But more and more basic consumer goods, such as medicines, had to be sought, with foreign currency, on the internet networks, like "Revolico," thousands of chat groups for each type of product, and paid for with illegal currencies or through "payment gateways" through which almost anything could be obtained with credit cards from abroad amid extreme shortages for most Cubans, left to the remote luck of surviving with their few pesos of state salaries. If a Cuban needed glasses to read, they often had to exchange their national pesos at an ever-rising rate. A pair of prescription glasses could be equivalent to two months' salary for a civil servant. Furthermore, to obtain them, they had to exchange their humble Cuban pesos for powerful dollars or Euros - which was illegal and theoretically punishable by four years in prison - to buy them "on the black market" - which was also illegal -. Cubans either read government propaganda in Granma or listened to Mesa Redonda or the state television news, or followed often defamatory news from the opposition in Miami often financed by the US government and spread in the social media. To survive, Cubans had to seek illegal alternative paths to the collapsing system. Thanda felt sorry for the desperate situation, especially for the lack of basic medicines translated into more and more deaths. He watched with pain and anger the deaths of his neighbor Chela, his dear friends Carlos and Lázaro, who could not receive the necessary treatments from a system that had been the hope and the strongest solidarity in global health since the revolution and had so inspired Thanda's committment.

He studied the demographic census of 2021 and estimated that life expectancy had collapsed by more than eight years compared to the five-year average Thanda used in his equity metric books. There were only precedents for such a decline in the collapse of the Soviet Union during the 1990s. The mortality rates that had increased the most were those of people over sixty who saw their children and grandchildren emigrate - more than half a million in the last two years -, their homes deteriorate without possible repairs, and they could not withstand the long lines where they barely received, with pensions of half a dollar a day, the most basic food. Stress and poor nutrition conditioned health problems for which dispensaries and even hospitals had no medicines. Thanda expressed his deep concern. United Nations representatives and the government told him that it was better not to talk about such statistics, that they were "sensitive information" and the government was "studying them." He felt angry. It was increasingly difficult for him to defend the Cuban model, hijacked by a hierarchy entrenched in fear, against the capitalism that invaded the world and harassed Cuba.

The disaster that was already lurking in almost every Cuban home was hidden: the lack of basic necessities, the sadness for those who left, and the frustration of continuing to hear every day on the news about "the successes of the revolution." What induced even greater irritation was seeing the government financing the construction of luxury hotels throughout the island: while people lacked food and medicine, while other hotels remained empty, and without explaining the sources of the funds, the government paid the French construction company Bouygues, reached agreements with Spanish, French, or Canadian tour operators, and planned foreign currency income for the state. The management of these and other large investments and the spending of their incomes, still potential and doubtful during and after the pandemic, was carried out by the business group of the Armed Forces, shielded from any accountability or fiscal transparency.

All this fueled aggressive and critical arguments against any political or economic limits that Cuba imposed on the free market, from the European and American right, who demanded cutting ties with Cuba and ending cooperation. Every week, Thanda had to write responses to parliamentarians, governments in Europe, and dissident organizations, often funded by the American government, explaining how cooperation funds helped needy Cubans without strengthening the communist government. It was exhausting to be caught between both forces and antagonistic positions, "liberal" capitalism (capital freedom), that efficient competitive nightmare, and centralized communism (by the vanguard of the communist party), that dream that proved so disastrous in so many cases, and in so many homes, even more so in Cuba.

Even the goal of equality in communism was crumbling, as the informal market of supply and demand, infiltrated by the global economy, filled the supply deficit of a bankrupt government with the exception of the shielded military world. Adam Smith theories reigned in Cuba, where the informal market already surpassed regulated economy and unleashed the wildest speculation of capitalism that now permeated every home, every street, every Cuban. Thanda was encouraged by the fact that almost three hundred academics and officials gathered in Trinidad to discuss, for the first time, inequalities in Cuba, once again expressing his passion for the "ethics and metrics of equity."

Thanda's days passed with his awakening before dawn announced by the crowing of Paco Jr., his enthusiasm for writing or composing or doing calculations, "songs, counts, and tales," followed by his "dance with the sea," his well-deserved breakfast from the garden, his hours of paperwork and work meetings, and his often solitary afternoons devoted to the equity atlas, writing Tenderness and Courage, composing sung poems, giving some online lectures, tending the garden, and waiting for moments to speak with his beloved Nayra, increasingly absent, more and more distant.

Faced with so little shared time, Thanda expressed his regret, and Nayra began to encourage him to meet other women for friendships and companionship. She told him that she gave him "her blessing," something that puzzled Thanda, despite being deeply in love with her beauty and bravery, and her many displays of tenderness at every step-in life.

For her, Thanda had spoken ten years earlier with courage from the institute of dreams in Berkeley about his ideas of equity, and since then had conversed in hundreds of places and to thousands of people. He did it with the passion that Nayra inspired in him, and when she was in the audience, or watching him online, they kept the code that he subtly touched his nose to let her know that he was thinking of her, that he thanked her for her constant affection.

Difficult times passed in Mexico and in Cuba, with the departure of his beloved fathers, with doubts about destinies, with the pain of distance... but there was always an immense complicity of ideas, of spiritual sensitivities, of ways of expressing oneself, of receiving common friends and family at home, of eating healthy, of transmitting to their children values of justice and humility, of embracing each other feeling the existential anguish dissolve as they created together a wonderful light of surrender to each other that transcended time, space, any thought or word, any doubt and fear. Thanda felt it thousands of times since the magical Hummingbird united them, he thought, forever, for eternity. Together in everything and always - Jetys - they used to say as their sacred code that kept them united and braided their hands and souls in the face of any challenge in life.

That's why Thanda couldn't understand Nayra's "blessing." He knew of their love, of the chemistry of their bodies, and of the quantum of their spirits, and that even better, the longed-for home, was yet to come. But Nayra began to distance herself. Perhaps Thanda did not understand her needs to take care of her teenage children, her excitement to put down roots in her San Miguel origins, to develop a career in encouraging young people to rebel and change the system without violence, to consider settling in American society until and after retirement.

Also, his great friend David had stayed in that country where a third of the taxes fed a perverse killing machinery worldwide, and in whose ways of producing, consuming, transporting, and understanding life, exhausted nature while insensitively avoiding international commitments. Nayra, David, and so many others, with such beautiful souls, noble ideas, and brave struggles for justice, ended up immersed in careers to be able to pay the mortgage or rent, health insurance, university tuition for their children, and expenses for food, hygiene, and the virtual world, all so controlled by the powers that speculated in the shadows of Wall Street and governed in the White House.

In addition to his rejection of such a system, despite longing so much, so much that it burned, for Nayra's embrace, Thanda spent all the free time that work allowed him in Cuba, taking care of his mother, increasingly frail, near Madrid.

More to prove to Nayra that her blessing could not cast any shadow over the love he felt for her, he remotely met a beautiful woman from Valencia with whom he talked about the complicity of ideas towards life in an eco-village. Every conversation he had with her, he would tell Nayra about it, telling her that knowing anyone, even only from a distance, reinforced even more that his love for her was forever. Nayra shared with him that, too, after so many years of distance, she had conversed with some men in spirituality meetings or while walking Ennai in the neighborhood but did not get close.

A trip by Thanda to take care of his mother in April was approaching and facing the possibility of meeting the lovely Valencian woman and showing her ValyTer, Nayra confessed to him that she felt sadness about it, but at the same time encouraged him, knowing about the pain of his already prolonged loneliness. Thanda felt in this an extreme generosity from Nayra, and gesture of pure love, without any desire for ownership. Love that only wished for the happiness of the beloved. Thanda felt his heart fuller than ever with love for Nayra.

Thanda thought that, after twelve magical years of union, shared tenderness in family, adventures in twelve countries of America and Europe, complicity of ideas embodied in articles, books, conferences, projects, so much connection between their gazes and their bodies as they merged, so many songs and parts of Thanda's novels inspired by Nayra, their magical beginnings with the hummingbird and the virgin of the knee... so much that it could be said that, despite the distance and the difficulties, a magical and immense universe had been woven between the two. Thanda realized that every little thing he did during the day lacked color and almost meaning if he did not feel Nayra as his accomplice, even if it was just telling her what had happened or what he had thought. His dance with the sea, his writings, his sweat in the garden, his successes, and difficulties at work, how he cooked his food, or even how he dressed. He composed and sang songs from a distance, confessed every idea to her, made political proposals, alliances with brave souls for the world, talked about their dreams... and, above all, Thanda declared to Nayra how fascinated he was by the beauty of her soul.

Could it be true that accomplice love, even at a distance like with Nayra for so many years already, dissolved the terrible existential anguish of the human being, alone in front of the universe? Faced with the unbearable vertigo of eternity and infinity? Faced with the limit of reason to understand so many whys, like the ones he asked his father as he left? Faced with the darkness of the doubts of the dogmas with which they grew up in societies that ignored the unique beauty of each free being?

Would it have been better never to have loved so much and so deeply to not feel now in such an abyss of loneliness and yearning with sensations that seemed to stab his soul, the companion hand, the magical alliance of Jetys that he believed eternal and that could withstand everything?

Thanda almost stopped being able to think about anything, to look at the imminent horizons that he had to draw, unveil, and conquer after leaving Cuba. He couldn't find excitement in anything. He just hoped for a message from Nayra that started with her usual "Hey darling..." and reopened the magical universe that his soul could not understand was fading away. The nights were so dark, and his thoughts so tormented by whys that he learned to count backwards from 64, as his father did in his last breaths of life, to dispel the loops of his painful thinking that found neither answers nor ways to overcome so much pain. He even began to think if it would be a just relief if that countdown gently led him to the light of his father...

The pain did not give respite. He felt as if his forehead was flooded with a fire that beat in his temples and pressed his brow as if it wanted to burn his tormented worries in a bonfire. As if wanting to evoke and treasure memories so imbued with Nayra's light and at the same time fearing to see them fade with the inexplicable rupture of such an ineffable alliance, which he refused to accept because he did not understand. For each image, glance, word, caress that came to his mind, brought more and more pain for fear that he would never again in his life feel such sweet companionship. Under the heat of his forehead, he felt behind his eyes, clouded by tears that burned him and that he concealed in public, a painful pressure. As if they refused to see a world that he could no longer understand. His lips trembled as if they couldn't find words or even ways to explain so much pain. A lump in his throat sometimes seemed to even tighten his breathing. His chest seemed to have filled with a cold and unbearable emptiness, and in whose sands of Artax's sadness, remembered from the neverending story, his heart galloped out of control, as if wanting to flee from that place of unbearable despair. Further down, his stomach seemed to twist, and his legs trembled not knowing where to go or find reasons to do so. Even his hands, as he wrote these same lines at the end of Tenderness and Courage, trembled, and so his guitar arpeggios could not flow. It was as if the earthquake of a soul melting in the fire of so much pain was transmitted to his entire world, shaking every loving cell that no longer felt the echo of such immense passion.

His whole body trembled silently and secretly with everything around him, which seemed to continue existing undisturbed. He felt as if the eternal that seemed to explain existence, what he trusted most eternal in his life, the union with Nayra, revealed itself as fleeting, transient, hostage to strange forces to which such beautiful light always seemed immune.

Thanda remembered Fernando's heartbreak with Kadijatu, whom he waited for in painful silence, and in vain, almost all his life, until he embraced Umbela. The pain of when Cristina took him away from home with their daughters still throbbed in his soul, overshadowing his soul for a decade until the miraculous hummingbird brought Nayra's light into his life. How long could the pain of Nayra's absence last, whose love reached the deepest corners of his soul? Perhaps for the rest of his life?

The pains of heartbreak, Thanda thought, were perhaps the most frequent "illness" in humanity. The cause was the asymmetry of giving oneself to the other in the fusion of souls. The energy of love, its flow in oxytocin, was blocked in those who did not love, out of fear, selfishness, or the pain of not feeling loved. In fact, he felt sadness for Nayra, in whom he felt that her gaze no longer shone, nor did the velvet of her voice from other times resonate within her, nor her immense tenderness. Where was Nayra? Was she trapped in that black hole of the competitive and consuming culture of the United States, which she denounced, but from which her beautiful soul was perhaps a victim?

Such a blockade, like a state of siege, as in Cuba, to the energy of love caused anxiety and pulses of cortisol, which in turn blocked the free flow of thinking and creating, and their tides of dopamine and oxytocin. A world that did not love could not be brave and in charge of its destiny. The key was always love. Heartbreak entered into spirals of selfishness and submission to myths and codes in which much of society lived without free love, without flowing without fears, being oneself. True love was renounced, that magical and unique alliance from the "transitory molecular assembly" that constituted material life, towards eternity through radiating energy and merging into the whole, as Aimsa explained forty years ago in a Himalayan ashram.

In the alliance of a soulmate, those intertwined energies reached fascinating strengths. Matter and fear, energy, and love, courageous in their most luminous essence.

When he thought about it, he concluded that the challenge would continue to be brave in love, supporting Nayra, trusting that life would take her to ValyTer to meet again in the most beautiful harmony, this time in nature and in a community of worthy self-sufficiency, in resonance with the network of spiritual eco-villages, a luminous north for a Humanity in darkness. He would build a place there for Nayra when her destiny whispered it to him with memories of Thanda's sincere and noble love. And around that home for his beloved, he would work in permaculture crop fields, walks through edible forests with berries and mushrooms, all while waiting for the day when the one who beat so strongly in his heart, Nayra, would return, which Thanda knew would be forever. He would wait for her with baths in the fresh and crystalline water of the Aguanaz river source, with noble sweat in the fields, and with encounters with walkers of poems, prayers, and dreams, with songs, tales, and accounts in which to propose a new Humanity.

He was sure that, even if another six years of distance passed, this time without perhaps even the daily messages and conversations, Thanda would be in Nayra's heart, as she was in his, despite the icy darkness of loneliness that returned to flood his walk, and they would merge again in the most beautiful light.

Otherwise, what sense would life have if one renounced, ignored, or repressed the most beautiful energy flowing from one's soul?

He thought about all this when he had to travel to Brussels for the tenth and last of his participations in the annual meeting of "cooperation chiefs." Due to his efforts in the censored "food sovereignty," he was invited to speak on a panel about the challenges of global agriculture and food. Before more than a thousand officials from the European external action service in Brussels and delegations from a hundred and twenty countries, he courageously exposed, thinking it would be his last conference, the ethical need to be sovereign in our food and in harmony with nature. He challenged the constant temptation of the Phoenician Europe of endless trade, now turned into a speculative economy of services and exchanges, the whim of consuming without restraint. Again, as the previous year in the face of his proposals for sustainable equity, he barely felt any gazes cross with the brightness of courage to change concepts and live with the ethics of a borderless world and in harmony with nature.

He continued his journey to Madrid to reunite with his mother. His heart trembled to see her in such weakness that she could not express herself in words, her lost gaze, her almost immobile body. When he felt Thanda's presence, she began to express laments that tore Thanda's soul apart. He could only embrace her, kiss her, caress her, and whisper to her that her father was waiting for her with a hug of light. He sang her the song of decline. He remembered his father, from whom he felt the strength to continue giving himself in love and care to his mother. He had spent four years devoting all his holidays to being by her side, part of the distance and absence from Nayra and the pain from it. All the pains seemed to intertwine.

By then he spoke with his younger sister, Gabriela. As lung cancer extinguished his father's life, she was also diagnosed with the same ailment caused by the sinister chemistry of the tobacco industry, against which Nayra now fought tenaciously. After removing half of her leftlung, she underwent the perverse "triple blind" with which the pharmaceutical industry laid the groundwork for its billion-dollar businesses. Some time later, she began to feel coughing and hoarseness. Imaging studies showed that the cancer had reappeared in her lung, for which the modern hospitals in Spain did not offer effective treatments. With a deep desire to continue enjoying the adventures of life and seeing her teenage children bravely take off on their flights, she sought alternatives in onco-thermia, phototherapy, and bio-magnetism, ways to interfere with the invasive energy of the tumor, which allopathic medicine of big pharmaceutical businesses did not understand. Thanda investigated with the Cuban scientists who led new ways of understanding cancer and knew, through Gerardo Guillén, a leader towards new vaccines against dengue in alliance with their common friend from Berkeley, Eva Harris, that they had confidence in a molecule that stimulated the immune system to inhibit the proliferation of capillaries around tumors, and thus fight against their growth and invasion. He sent his sister's medical history, and after analyzing the case, they offered her to enter as a "compassionate treatment," since, although it was not yet registered as a medication, they had long experience in the trial, its effectiveness, and its safety in solid tumors of other organs.

Thanda invited his sister Gabriela to return with him to Cuba and start said treatment. It was the first occasion when they would share time as siblings, without being surrounded by the rest of the family. He felt that, after so many years of Thanda traveling the world, they were, in part, strangers, united by tender memories of childhood and affection for their parents, now linked to the care of their mother's fragile situation. They shared ideas, dreams, and fears, feeling the fraternal bond that had been hibernating for so long in the distance. Thanda thought that Nayra and he, after the desert of distance, also needed to rediscover themselves.

After starting treatment at the La Pradera clinic, where the Cuban frontier of biotechnology knowledge was offered to foreigners, Thanda called for a gathering of tenderness in honor of his little sister's courage. Tenderness and Courage. Surrounded by the affection of the wonderful Cuban network that surrounded Thanda, Gabriela returned to Spain with renewed hopes in her fight against cancer.

Cuba's charm was such that Gabriela returned a month later with her husband and their two younger children. A few days into her second visit, after a heartfelt Reiki session with sweet Noelia in Guanabacoa, she began to feel intense shortness of breath and pain in her back. They went to a hospital where they did little more than administer oxygen and, due to severe respiratory failure, referred her to the reference hospital for all of Cuba. The Hermanos Ameijeiras hospital stood with imposing Soviet style with its sixteen floors facing the Malecon. They could feel the tragic decline of the economy and public services when in the intensive care unit, it took twelve hours just to administer analgesia and alleviate the intense pain that barely allowed her to breathe.

Gabriela's anguish was such that she managed to find her mobile phone in the bag she had taken to the hospital and tried to call Thanda to tell him that she could not fight anymore, that she asked to be sedated and end such an exhausting struggle for each breath. At that moment, a nurse told her she could not use the phone. On perhaps the worst night of her life, she felt as if she couldn't breathe and the pain became unbearable, fearing that her adventure in life would end there, truncated.

The next day, Thanda insisted that she be moved to a room where they could at least be by her side. They managed to get morphine, and the pressing pain began to subside, along with some improvement in breathing. Her husband and children returned to Spain, and Thanda suspended all work and the return trip to take care of his mother. He stayed by his sister's side, with whom he began to weave a love that had been dormant for so long. With a pulse oximeter he managed to obtain, he monitored the oxygen saturation in her blood. Although it was evident that the cancer had advanced and spread to the other lung, they were still small infiltrations and it could not be explained why there was such a lack of air, which sometimes lowered saturation to less than 60%, incompatible with life. He argued with the doctors about a possible inflammatory immune reaction, and they began treating her with corticosteroids, with slight improvement. Exhausted from so much fighting, Gabriela took a pill she often took to sleep better, and Thanda saw how her saturation improved. She also improved with the massages that Thanda began to give her in the painful area of her back. Alleviating the pain and relaxing the muscles, perhaps even the contracted diaphragm, which was squeezing her breathing, she began to improve somewhat.

They requested medical authorization to fly with an oxygen concentrator and morphine injections that her husband managed to obtain in Madrid and brought to her by a colleague of his cousin, the pilot Juan. A week later, they managed to leave on a flight with oxygen and opioids, illegal in Cuba. On the way to the airport, they saw, under an intense tropical storm, kilometers-long lines of cars to get fuel. The Cuban economy already seemed to be in its death throes, echoing the difficult breathing of Gabriela.

They arrived in Madrid after two weeks of fighting for life and a journey of so much risk and anguish. The next day, they saw in a hospital in Madrid how the tumor had completely obstructed the flow to the left lung, which had collapsed. They were able to introduce a fiberoptic bronchoscope and resect the invasive tumor with liquid nitrogen, and with that, the air, oxygen, and hope to continue fighting expanded. Shortly after, she managed to enter a treatment that combined immunotherapy with drugs that tried to inhibit the mutation of cancer, continuing to bet with hope on life.

Thanda felt the anguish of his sister's life and the desire, as he felt with his father, to give her some of his life. He even secretly asked his good friend Juan Carlos, a thoracic surgeon, if he could offer his lung to transplant to his sister, as he did forty years ago with the kidney for his father. He wanted to do whatever it took for his sister to continue advancing towards her dreams, which they discovered converged on the luminous vision of living in community and in natural harmony.

Thanda discovered time and time again that deep feeling that seemed to pulse in almost all people of a Humanity hijacked in another direction by perverse networks of power and destruction. There were already more than fifty-five million people living in the network of eco-villages inviting to that brave leap out of the gravitational force of cities and alienated consumption.

Thus, Thanda returned to caring for his mother, increasingly weak. She was cared for with tender care and sincere affection by Maritza, a courageous mother from Colombia, and Sarah, a sweet Peruvian, during the weekends. Almost all the time her eyes were closed, and although they still dressed her every day to be semi-sitting in an armchair, her strength was waning even to stretch her legs, and Thanda often had to carry her to bed. A cycle was closing, Thanda thought, of when his mother cared for him in her arms. Life in its eternal recycling of love.

In addition to giving lectures on equity ethics to university groups in Madrid and at Europe's last leprosy sanatorium, Fontilles, and online to groups in the Canary Islands and Chiapas, he was able to travel for two days to his beloved ValyTer, which awaited his freedom to begin his dream of turning ideas and words into a simple life that embraced nature and the walkers who wanted to share in empathy. He progressed with his friend Alfredo, his son David and their “nica” friend Stanley, in setting up a place that Thanda wanted to turn into a beautiful retreat surrounded by forest, waiting for the return of Nayra and the magical Jetys.

He walked through the meadows of ValyTer, still fascinated by so much beauty that awaited him, serene and patient, he felt a profound vertigo. His heart was torn apart by seeing how his mother's life unraveled, how cancer in his sister jeopardized her life, and how Nayra barely wrote to him anymore, and if they saw each other through the camera, he didn't perceive even a glimpse of the brightness of the last twelve years of magical alliance. Where was Nayra?

As he returned by train to Madrid, he looked at the plains of Castile, and he couldn't rid himself of the intense pain in his soul and vertigo towards the future once again in solitude. His only path had to be to continue loving without faltering in it and trusting in the energy of the universe with tenderness and courage. Thus read the final two verses of his most recent songs: "*there is nothing I do not want to love*" and " *we are everything we love, and so there is no end*."

#  The soul cant’s say good-bye. Havana, August 2023.

While Thanda's soul bled from Nayra's unrequited love, whose heart was now attuned to another man, the home of Tercera began to fill with the tenderness of the peñas and the company of Cubans. It became imbued with the energy and beauty of their souls without the shame, labels, and chains of ownership in which Thanda had been raised in Spain, under the shadow of Franco's dictatorship and the eternal fire of Catholicism.

His good friend Edu Bourke, an insightful psychologist and fascinating musician from Havana, shared with the endearing group of tenderness how he expanded his love for several partners into a harmony that had previously been labeled as immoral by the Catholic doctrine in which Thanda had grown up. Edu had sung for five years at the peña de la ternura, expressing his eternal love for his countryside companion Lisbet, who was now studying in distant Ireland with one of the scholarships thousands of young Cubans aspired to in order to escape a society where expressing alternative ideas to hierarchical communism was increasingly dangerous, and where having enough pesos to buy sufficient food was trying. His song about the three children they dreamed of bringing into the world shone in the peñas as a beacon of love, inviting more life like a magical seed. However, unlike Thanda, he didn't wait six years before beginning to suffer from the distance; it only took six months for him to open his heart to other companions who accompanied him to the endearing tertulias of Tercera. Christmas arrived, and Edu met Alison, a beautiful Cuban musician with whom he composed a song of fascinating sensitivity, "*it's not a sin to love*." Alison was also studying far away, in Canada, where she returned. Edu explained to Thanda and other allies of tenderness in Tercera, like Elias and Javier, how he could love all these women who illuminated his path from a distance and in their presence. Alison and Edu composed songs for Lisbet, wishing her "skin-deep" love, in person. He melted into sincere tenderness, confessing his love without chains, with beautiful souls around him. Thanda marveled at such generous and sincere love without constraints, previously labeled as "adulterous" and "immoral" by Western values so imbued with the moral precepts of Mediterranean monotheisms.

How had such concepts of ownership of the natural, the artificial, and the personal come to be established in Western culture? In what ways did they block, fragment, and limit the flow of love that pulsed in every soul? Could these barriers and chains be the burden that prevented the soul from rising in the energy of love that transcended matter and time? Could even the chain of "expectations" drown out the present and block the soul from surrendering to the beauty and love that surrounded us, thus plunging us into the anxiety of "what never comes"?

Thanda pondered all this when, in the midst of the pain of Nayra's unrequited love, they convened a peña to welcome the new year, 2023, in which Thanda would raise the anchors of beloved Cuba to sail back towards the rising sun where the dream of Valyter shone. During the flow of poems and chords, Thanda noticed a pure gaze from a corner of the porch where violet trumpets and moringa flowers fell like magical rain. Something in that gaze flooded Thanda's heart with a light he hadn't felt in years. After the peña ended, he greeted that beautiful soul revealed as Brisa, who worked in searching for books and documents in the library of the ISA, assisting hundreds of artists seeking their paths in expressing their souls through art, as beautiful and free as absent from the hierarchies in Cuba, which, like "Señor Azul," the anthem song of Thanda's adolescence against Francoism, seemed not to understand such beauty. Aute's final anthem of beauty and the verse ".. *more than nausea, it brings sadness, they never touched for a moment... the beauty*.." echoed in his mind, as Aute had just left the dimension of matter, when Brisa asked Thanda if they could practice some chords together.

Thus began Thanda to open his heart after almost six years of solitude in waiting, as he thought was his destiny, as it was for his Amama waiting for the migrating shepherd and the exiled anarchist. Brisa began to stay in the house of Ternura, and gradually a deep conspiracy between them was forged. They began to share sunrise dances by the sea, a ritual that Thanda had followed for more than two thousand sunrises without a confidant or witness. Brisa, from humble origins in a village in western Cuba, did not know how to swim, but she ventured hand in hand with Thanda into the depths of the Havana coral reef. On one of their routes of complicity with the sea, Brisa felt tired, and Thanda offered her to cling to one of his legs, swimming with strength for half a kilometer until they reached the shore. As a result of that effort, Thanda felt a slight pain in his knee and a slight limp, which he imagined was the stretching of the ligaments from such complicit traction, as the soul unraveled in the surrender of love. They also shared music sessions, readings from ValyTer, caring for the garden, walks by the sea, shopping for vegetables in the 11 and B market, cooking healthy and cruelty-free food, and, above all, sharing the pain of their souls, she also in the harsh transition of unrequited love. Brisa helped Thanda to shed expectations and preserve harmony with Nayra as a treasure.

Thanda delved into an unknown world of love without chains, without labels, without ages, without codes, without possessions. He initially felt much shame because of the age difference, as she was much younger than him. But he soon realized that such shame was mainly due to what society would say, with its prejudices and codes, rather than what both could feel in the harmony of their thoughts and feelings, their dreams, and aspirations.

Every night they embraced each other with deep tenderness, grateful for what they had lived, and with profound respect for each other's intimacy, which still throbbed in painful unrequited love. It took them two hundred days and nights to timidly bring their lips together. Thanda became fascinated by Brisa's purity, her humble means, and the lightness of her soul devoid of competing and possessing codes so ingrained in Western culture since the early agricultural settlements. They shared sensitivities for poetry and music, for the logic of quantum physics, for the liberating anarchy of hierarchical structures, and the violence of power, whether capitalist or communist, and for the courage to surrender to beauty. "... *that journey to nothingness that consists of the certainty of finding in your gaze, ... beauty* .."

Thanda found in Brisa's shy yet inquisitive gaze a magical glow that inundated his soul. He discovered a sea of serenity in the lightness of possessing almost nothing, not even enough for food, yet far from the anguish of those in the world from which Thanda came, who were consumed with acquiring.

Together, they propelled the ideas of equity ethics that Thanda had poured so much passion and study into for a decade. They published articles, co-founded the Cuban Center for Sustainable Equity, and published the Equity Atlas. Brisa also vibrated with the dream of Valyter, with simple life in nature, with harmony in community through tasks and arts.

Thanda felt once again the complicity in so many ideas for which he had fought for so many years in solitude. And at the same time, in a way he couldn't quite understand, he began to feel peace and serenity in his love for Nayra, which he knew would be eternal.

Before leaving his beloved Cuba, Thanda passionately dedicated himself to discerning a gradual system that would encourage his island of the soul towards local eco-sovereignty and collaboration in global public goods, moving towards income and means equity and towards the utopia of Eila, starting with its twin, the Isle of Youth.

He renewed his alliances with global ideas and proposals from Aimsa and Jonay, the spirituality of NoLwasi and Nothando in Ukuzwana, the harmony of Umbela, the courage of Adam, Nour, Unai, Ángeles, Daniela, Joseph, Moyes, Thandiwe, Saidu... the strong generation that followed, the memory of Nayra, the purity of Brisa, the affection of his mother, and the clean and gently powerful light of his spiritual parents, Patxi, John, and Haka, guided him on a path where each day he had fewer possessions and securities and more gratitude and surrender to simple harmony in nature.

That was how Thanda began to gift everything material he owned in the house of Tercera to those who needed it most. He left his family with photos and memories of craftsmanship. He kept only a few simple clothes, a pair of goggles for underwater vision, toiletries, and his Paracho guitar. He created the Valyter association with thirty soul allies to promote life in harmony, without emissions, possessions, hierarchies, truths, or borders, and invested his savings from his civil servant salary and the austere life of many years into this dream.

He donated his van to the Institute of Sustainable Equity he helped establish in Cuba, in partnership with equity centers in universities where he was appointed an honorary professor: at the Latin American School of Medicine at the National Agrarian University, at the Agrarian University of Havana, and at the University of Las Villas, where equity ethics became the foundation of all knowledge. In Las Villas de Santa Clara, his dear friend Alina prepared a narrative of appointment that unveiled Thanda's soul from the epic of his Amama when he was received in the library by the faculty of its four hundred professors who, while he was being appointed as a professor, sang Silvio's song of the woman with a hat, which had accompanied him so much since his solitary adolescence.

He compiled and scanned all his documents, his father's three thousand drawings, his diaries since he was seven years old and those dedicated to his daughters, his studies and program proposals to defend health in more than twenty countries, around fifty titles and appointments he saw as unnecessary and undeserved, and never spoke of them, over a hundred courses, lectures, and presentations at universities in a dozen countries, published and unpublished articles, scientific books, his 111 songs, his magical 11/11 always.. in mp3 and mp4 following his "soul script," and his novels, "Courage and Tenderness at the End of the XXth Century," and "Tenderness and Courage at the Beginning of the XXIst Century," about to be finished..., which together spun almost two thousand pages of a life of dreams and passion, pouring his being into characters that pulsed within his soul like a symphony that, he thought, only those who read "Valyter" could understand.

He carried all this on a bracelet with a 32-gigabyte USB. He made his equity studies, novels, and music public through a website he called Valyter.es.

Lastly, he gathered over five thousand sheets of documents, courses, procedures, including the sad divorce demands from Cristina, and created with them a sculpture of a tormented man, a soul overwhelmed by so many words and papers.

Light in baggage, he was ready to take flight.

He was sixty years old, almost twenty studying, almost twenty as a doctor around the world, and another twenty in the world of words through academia, politics, and even literature. He remembered Humet, whom his father and he often whispered about and who died at the age at which Thanda was now releasing the burden and finally flying, free. He identified with Humet's "return," needing to rid himself of "commitments and disillusionments that pinned him like a needle" and reconcile himself "by making the contents of the songs - and writings - he defended, his own."

He would have liked to stay in Cuba, to live in a rural usufruct as a committed farmer caring for nature and contributing to the community. He persisted through his efforts in politics, law, strategies, and cooperation towards eco-sovereignty with allies Marcelo, Funes, Casimiro, Giraldo, and many others, and even sent a letter requesting permanent residence to President Diaz Canel. But Cuba continued to live in a state of siege, and it was not easy for foreigners to access residences and usufructs. He hoped with excitement to return someday, perhaps sailing without polluting, to a usufruct to bathe in its landscapes and its people, inspired by the purity and beauty of Brisa.

The last peña of tenderness in Tercera, where he donated all the books, crafts, clothes, and household items he had left, was very emotional. More than two hundred people who had been part of Thanda's magical universe in Cuba came: young musicians, farmers, officials, diplomats, professors, students, scientists, poets, doctors, politicians, rebels... from all backgrounds, conditions, and ideas. They melted into hugs that had been longed for so long while Thanda sang "*El marido de la peluquera*". He remembered, as always, his father with "Endless". After four hours of poetry and music, amid tears and emotions, they ended with the final anthem that gradually joined Aute's beauty anthem, "... *my soul cannot... tell you goodbye.. stop loving...* ", while the paper sculpture of the overwhelmed soul burned.

There were so many memories, so deep was the mark that Cuba left on Thanda's soul forever that he felt the inevitable tearing of the traveler who leaves a piece of his soul at every port.

His love for the island where the hope of utopia throbbed, kidnapped in the rest of the world by capitalism and the empire of possessions, was infinite, now linked by the fascination for the pure beauty and brave love of Brisa, in harmony with his love for all the people who, near or far, illuminated his soul. He thought that this was true love, the one that, far from possessing, encouraged the expansion of love to everything nearby and far away, without chains, labels, or codes.

Due to so many soul connections, his ticket was round trip, feeling that he still had many dreams to share and challenges to fight for among that beautiful people and in that magical land, and to continue collaborating so that more young people would cultivate their beautiful fields with love and their grandparents would feel their embrace in the autumn of their lives through harmony between humanity and nature, from where surely the hope of Humanity would spring forth hand in hand with the network of ecovillages, already with sixty million people committed to that clean and bright horizon, and Cuba would be a beacon of that hope.

# The last battle, from the entrails of power. Brussels, Winter 2023.

When Thanda thought he could finally fly freely towards the harmony of Valyter, he was informed that before leaving his job in the European Union, he had to spend at least six months at his "control center" in Brussels.

By chance, covering a vacancy rather than respecting or recognizing his two decades of dedication to the right to health, a colleague and friend from his early years, Gayle, now in management position offered him to return to lead the health team again, and he felt his father's wink in that last challenge within "the power". In fact, Thanda was surprised to be offered such a position when he had been marginalized and clearly disregarded so many times for his alternative ideas to the supremacist and neocolonial Europe that oozed in all international relations, even in the made-up cooperation for development and humanitarian aid.

He maintained his studies, conferences, and the sustainable equity network that already brought together three million people committed to the right to health worldwide. Although his greatest dream and horizon was to reach Valyter, to be part of the network of spiritual eco-villages represented by Aimsa in its tenacious struggle. He felt, after so many years suffocated by hierarchies, codes, cities, words... a burning need to live what he had defended for so long, natural harmony and being in nature. That harmony was the way. He knew it through the ecovillage network since his epic time in San José, through his studies and his strength in the sustainable equity network, through his life in the garden and sea in Cuba, but, above all, because his soul told him so. It was the only hope for a humanity mostly immersed in destructive production, aggressive competitiveness, and alienating consumption.

And so, after leaving his position in Cuba, he spent seven months in Brussels where he returned to the challenge of defending the universal right to health. Now, thirteen years later, with the strength of his studies on ethics, metrics, and proposals for global equity, recognized in many universities and activist networks for the right to health, but ignored and despised at the headquarters of the European Union.

Of the fourteen countries with well-being in sustainable equity in 2010, and seven in 2015, the latest data from 2020 revealed that only one country remained as a reference: Sri Lanka. He searched for regions of well-being in sustainable equity ethics, although there were few data. Everything was a symbol that the era of nations should be seeing its sunset and give way to villages in sovereignty and global collaboration, like the network of spiritual eco-villages.

And so, he created a network of three hundred theses enthusiasts worldwide in equity ethics, a map of the two hundred thousand municipalities in the world. About ten thousand were identified, half of them in ecovillage networks, demonstrating that humanity could live in harmony, with solidarity scientific collaboration, exchanges of global public goods, in food and energy sovereignty, respecting nature and enjoying average life expectancies of over 90 years in active life, even sexually, as Pulido preached with his Kombucha. They were the harmonic cultures of the great-grandparents, which inspired three generations with the strength and light to live in simple harmony.

He also encouraged maps of cortisol in many countries, where it was demonstrated that living without freedom under hierarchies and outside the equity curve, both in deficiency and excess, generated anxiety, frustration, competitiveness, chronic diseases, and worse health.

With the memory of the tenderness of his soul children, the affection of Nayra, the simple purity of Brisa's love, the complicity with the great San José family scattered around the world, the memory of his father, Patxi, Haka, and John, and the alliance with Aimsa in unveiling the tentacles of greed, he was discovering a complicated network that made cooperation an increasingly pathetic showcase of a supposed European solidarity that actually only sought to defend its privileges in a fortress in front of which thousands of Aylan drowned in the Mediterranean, the largest cemetery in the world, as Francisco called it from his decadent Vatican.

He moved from his beloved Cuba to cold Brussels with barely what fit in his backpack, to a rented room in the house of a dear retired couple, Marta, and Heinz, who welcomed him like a son.

He remembered his Havana days at dawn with the rooster Paco, his ritual dance with the sea, his dedication to the projects of illusion in Cuba that sought an alternative path to communism-without-surrendering-to-capitalism, his garden, his guitar, his peñas of tenderness, his network of allies in poetry, music, the endearing friendship of soul hugs... and the purity in the carefree simplicity of his beloved Brisa.

Now he woke up under gray skies, walked on gray streets where gazes didn't meet, advanced in metro cars flooded with absent expressions, arrived at the building onrue de la Loi, 41, where the supposed greatest solidarity cooperation in the world was concentrated, and its kilometers of carpeted corridors lined with identical offices with officials as if hypnotized by computer screens that seemed to "order" their minds, their messages, their writings... their lives...

Like many "officials", Thanda received almost a thousand messages every week on his computer configured with security keys and surely controlled against any deviation from the power's directives. He had an average of twenty online meetings per week, and barely two or three in person. As was happening in the rest of Western European society, people were spending more time in front of screens than with people, reading words that, instead of looking into each other's eyes, were embracing. Thanda wondered what effect such a life would have on future generations. How would their capacity for empathy be, the strength to flow with love for everything? Additionally, what society read on screens was configured, filtered, controlled by the powers that his friend Chomsky described so accurately in "manufacturing consent".

Seven years before, Jonay had told him how from Silicon Valley they were designing computers that powered the systems by which Apple, Google, Facebook, Amazon, Tesla, and the rest of the companies in Silicon Valley detected behavior patterns and designed accurate strategies to manipulate the decisions of the majority by bombarding, according to behavior and consumption patterns of each citizen, the screens of mobile phones and computers, thus inducing desires, thoughts, and lives. The average number of messages sent by each person on the planet through American networks like WhatsApp, Facebook, or Instagram, the Chinese TikTok, or the Russian Telegram, among others, was already about a hundred daily, and they shared or stored about five hundred photos or videos each month. Each person on the planet had, on average, fifty applications installed, out of the more than two million available, and through them, they informed themselves, moved, decided their food and purchases, looked for work, and even a partner. And in their loneliness, even a robotic but sensual voice often spoke to them, claiming to come from "Palo Alto".

In total, humanity, absorbed in this virtual reality, emitted, and absorbed about 40 petabits (thousands of trillions) per year. Mobile phones had become systems for espionage or data collection and, at the same time, the co-optation of consciences. From just a few hundred data per person at that time when Jonay investigated the beginning of global data control, it was estimated that shared information systems already had an average of about fifty thousand data per person. These data were analyzed by computers in the hands of large companies through which the world communicated, bought, sold, saved, informed itself, and even loved. Internet information, personal, relational, professional, banking, medical, mobility by mobile phone GPS, or even what people said or saw, was processed, stored, coded, and converted into forms of mass and personal manipulation to thus guide their lives in all their dimensions.

It was surprising that even so, people believed themselves to be free to choose consumption of which they did not know the origin, to save in funds of which they did not know the destination, and to vote for politicians they did not know and if they trusted their proposals designed for manipulation, later negotiated to remain in power among themselves and allies or subjected by the same financial and media powers that induced their consumption, their savings, their votes, their lives. Freedom?

After scandals in the use of personal data from Facebook, Cambridge Analytica disguised itself as Emerdata. Its director, Johnson Chun, was a friend of Erik Prince, who had also disguised Blackwater, after falling into disgrace when his murders of Iraqi prisoners were filmed, into the group Frontier Services. They used data intelligence to help investors in the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative strategy in Africa. China was advancing in extracting oil, gas, and strategic minerals from mines protected by paramilitary groups trained and armed by Prince. The United States reacted with aggressive policies against China in the Pacific Ocean, where it seemed to be preparing its next battleground to maintain its military and financial hegemony, as always, far from its shores. After the COVID pandemic, they disguised their trillion-dollar strategies for global dominance: the Chinese "Belt and Road Initiative" and the American "Build Back Better", and the European Union's "Global Gateway", increasingly a clear lackey of the bully brother, the United States.

Thanda thus began his final stage from the bowels of power, analyzing the supposed European cooperation in health. The global health strategy for which he fought so hard thirteen years earlier was replaced without reflexion by a strategy born in the midst of the Covid pandemic and aimed at increasing security against new pandemics. Thanda spoke with each colleague on his new team trying to convey passion for the fight for universal health rights and recognizing in each of them leadership in a dimension of that noble struggle.

He discovered fascinating stories and souls sensitive to pain, eager to engage in noble struggles for the right to health. In his journey, he encountered François, who fought against leprosy not far from Fernando's adventures in Sierra Leone, and Bernd, who worked near Ukuswana and knew the reality of the marginalized. He forged complicity and friendship with Jeanne and her sweet yet unwavering dedication to access to medication, Amalia and her discreet but sharp relationship with research and evidence, Mar and her assertive commitment to guiding fortunes and companies towards the common good, Marten and his eloquent defense of sexual and reproductive rights, Anja, a globetrotter in the most challenging countries tirelessly advocating for primary care, Mie in her first job as an intern, always patient and kind in supporting Thanda in any task, Lisa generously devoted to human and animal health and their connections, revealing the challenges of planetary health, and Birgitte, an amazing Danish soul and ally from the past, who suffered from hierarchical pressure and joined Thanda to defend the right to health and expose ignoble businesses in its name.

Thanda’s proposals were repeatedly questioned and postponed by the hierarchy that Thanda soon felt was trying to block him in his ideas, in his passion. He also analyzed global and European cooperation for global health:

From his studies on equity, which still resonated strongly in Cuba - from the incipient center for sustainable equity - and in the global movement for sustainable equity in health, he concluded that 60 countries had health care expenditures below the model of best possible health, Sri Lanka, at about $150 per year. In total, the deficit for those countries to reach that minimum possible level of health care for all was $300 billion, barely a tenth of global military spending. He also analyzed what health expenditure was already enough to achieve the highest life expectancy, that of Greece, at $1,600 per year. Thus, he was able to identify thirty-six countries that were overspending on health, and the total unnecessary expenditure, which was about $6 trillion, twenty times more than the deficit for which sixteen million people died each year in absurd and cruel injustice.

Faced with such an unfair deficit, international cooperation in global health allocated around thirty-four billion in the previous year, partly due to the panic of the pandemic, which was less than a tenth of the deficit. Besides the fact that the scale of the supposed solidarity was so far from a fair distribution, only half of the global health cooperation was directed to those countries in greatest need, where, according to Thanda's studies, their marginalization from the knowledge and resources of the global economy translated into almost forty thousand deaths each day. For Thanda, each of those deaths had a face, like the ones he remembered from his beloved San José. Every morning he walked about fifteen minutes to the metro of lost gazes and counted a thousand steps: he calculated that each of his steps equated, at that time, to the death of a person due to the injustice perpetuated by the world's hoarding of resources by a few while others lacked the bare minimum. He remembered, suppressing tears of pain and anger, the words of Gandhi with whom he conversed so much in Tavistock Square in London: "If I have more than my brother and he has nothing to eat, I am stealing from him," and that "speed is irrelevant if the direction is wrong," while looking at thousands of people in the streets and metro tunnels hurried to their jobs, without making eye contact to produce more, trade more, consume more, live less...?

He walked through the streets of the Woluwe neighborhood in Brussels, flanked by luxurious houses with well-kept gardens and garages where luxurious cars were fueled by electric energy from a supposed ecological Europe which, after filling the skies with choking smoke for two centuries, still aspired to more global trade and consumption while burning the gas of the Russian enemy to continue almost impassively its life of extreme and unnecessary abundance. That abundance seemed to numb the souls and make the gazes with which Thanda couldn't connect each morning in the metro towards the job of words and screens, corridors and offices, where he heard the echo of his lost and nostalgic soul of his garden, his guitar, and his Havana Sea.

Within such minimal cooperation for a supposed equity in global health, the United States allocated almost half, although mostly to "vertical" programs where decisions on priorities, their implementation methods, and even the medicines used, for the benefit of pharmaceutical corporations, were made from Washington, Brussels, Berlin, or London. Thus, twenty years later, PEPFAR, the Global Fund, and GAVI continued to concentrate most of the cooperation on the treatment of some diseases arbitrarily chosen by powerful countries. It was a true *disease apartheid* undermining the universal right to health. These funds were aimed at diseases that accounted for less than a tenth of the disease burden, years lost to premature death or disability. Europe contributed a third of global health cooperation and had been following the dictates of the almighty Uncle Sam. Just like in NATO or the Security Council, Europe danced more than ever to Washington's tune, even in the so-called cooperation.

Thanda analyzed how, in addition to being very insufficient, poorly relevant to countries and health issues, and poorly aligned, that is, respectful, with the role of governments, supposed guarantors of the right to health, cooperation was full of intermediaries: from taxpayers' money to the provision of services and medicines for those at risk of premature death and suffering, there was an average of four intermediary organizations, each of which deducted a tenth or even a fifth for supposed "operational expenses": in total, needy communities received no more than half of the already insufficient funds, and half was graciously granted in the form of "technical assistance" by "experts" who dictated, with fees a hundred times higher than the salaries of local rural doctors and nurses - like those Thanda remembered and longed for -, how those communities and governments should organize themselves and make their reports for the supposed "donors" and "advocates" of global health.

Such supposed cooperation also translated into thousands of first-class trips, luxury hotels, and speeches that Thanda now had to draft for a hierarchy that purported to be contributing to a better world with just a few crumbs of its abundance, increasingly fortified by barriers against migration, pushing two thousand Eylanes each year, Thanda thought, silent, faceless, and without any glory, like the graves of Hart Island.

Thanda felt how he was facing powers that contaminated the supposed cooperation, the minimum expression of a much greater and necessary solidarity in such an unjust world, of dark interests.

He witnessed how the cooperation that Thanda managed with Cuba so that its safe and simple vaccines and medicines could help alleviate the suffering of so many communities excluded from equity in health, was ignored, censored, and silenced in speeches and programs supposedly supporting access to medicines in Africa. No reference to communism had a place in the Europe of "freedoms" of possession, ownership, and accumulation, above all.

At the same time, he was under pressured to design and contract a study of the pharmaceutical sector to facilitate an investment plan by the all-powerful German company Bayer in Costa Rica. He recalled Haka's struggle against Monsanto, Aimsa's research on Bayer-Monsanto's financial and toxic networks, and their warning to the Cuban government about the open door to transgenics. There was no shame in the supposed European cooperation in rubbing shoulders with top executives of billion-dollar companies with plans to extract natural resources or take advantage of cheap labor in countries still called "developing." But in Bayer's case, Thanda suspected something even more perverse. He had heard of Bayer's pressure through aggressive lobbying on governments worldwide to introduce the ecocidal association of transgenics and glyphosate. Thanda thought of that toxin on Mother Earth as the acid that burned the faces of Indian mothers assaulted by their chauvinistic husbands. He knew that the marketing authorization for glyphosate in Europe needed to be extended through the votes of the Member States, or failing that, by the European Commission. The rulers of France and Germany limited the use of glyphosate in their countries but faced with Bayer's pressure and through its extensive network of politicians in collusion or corrupted by the multinational, they abstained in the council and dragged the majority of European countries along. The decision would then be made by the commission. Through the question of a German journalist, Thanda learned that Bayer exerted its "lobbying," that eloquent word for "white-gloved" corruption, in its meetings with the high-ranking officials of cooperation, to influence the commission's favorable vote. The supposed intention to manufacture in Costa Rica, Thanda suspected, was a cover for Bayer's main business, glyphosate linked to transgenics to have a free reign in Europe and spread worldwide. But European politicians met in luxury hotels and restaurants with Bayer executives in San José, Costa Rica, and Brussels and directed cooperation to dazzle with nine-digit figures of "investments" supposedly aimed at "sustainable development."

Faced with such perversion and in contact with his good friends René, Miguel, Rosa, Eduard, and the networks of ecologists around the world, Thanda tried to alert the hierarchy to such a conflict of interest and resist such a study and plans to favor a billion-dollar company and its ecocidal products for Mother Earth. He could only erase all mention of Bayer and delay the study. The commission voted to extend the marketing of glyphosate in Europe by a decade and its export to the whole world, including Costa Rica, one of the very few remaining redoubts where biodiversity was still preserved. Probably not for long…

Thanda remembered his fight against the monopoly of genetic vaccines based on mRNA, which had invaded the bodies of half of humanity. As Thanda studied in the midst of the pandemic from Cuba, this oligopoly was made in collusion with scientists who kept silent about the uncertain safety of these vaccines, and with financial powers and big pharma that had propelled Biden to power. Curiously, while Biden restored the contribution to the WHO that the megalomaniac Trump had suspended months earlier, the same WHO approved the use of genetic vaccines with more limited, uncertain, and opaque data. Almost no one in Europe questioned the use of such vaccines, and anyone who did, like Thanda, was accused of being a denier, unsupportive, and irresponsible. Protein vaccines, like the Cuban ones that Thanda tried to support, were ignored, silenced, scorned, or censored. Just like everything that could come from communist Cuba. A company called Kenup infiltrated multiple meetings of the Commission and the European Bank, to guide the visibility of the European Union in its supposed solidarity by hiding investments from big companies. They were the architects of the most sophisticated lobbying. During the pandemic, they brought together the German company BionTech with Pfizer for the worldwide manufacturing of the mRNA-based vaccine. To such an initiative and rubbing their hands over the business that the pandemic promised, came the big financial powers like Blackrock and the philanthropy of Gates, who in a few months, through their strategic investments in these vaccines, managed by Blackrock and the artificial intelligence of Aladin, made profits of more than 500 million Euros. The president of the European Commission praised these vaccines, whose application to Covid was awarded the Nobel Prize, and part of the cooperation in health during the pandemic went to finance this production which, however, was largely hoarded by rich countries. Curiously too, the president's husband had ties to BionTech.

As Thanda remembered, it was truly the mutation of the Omicron strain from South Africa that naturally immunized most Africans who did not receive the genetic vaccines of the rich. With some relief, Thanda thought that at least the very uncertain genetic effects of those vaccines would not affect the "poor" countries. At least in this perverse game, the greed of the rich North had spared them from a genetic manipulation whose long-term effects could not yet be known. That's why Thanda felt astonishment when he realized that a significant part of the "European cooperation in global health", almost the remaining part of what was hoarded by the companies of the "disease apartheid", was destined, in collusion with the WHO, the Gates philanthrocapitalism, the European Investment Bank, and other institutions promoting European investments to expand their businesses, to install nodes for the manufacturing of mRNA vaccines in Africa. Thanda feared that such a strategy would be followed by mass vaccination of African children, as guinea pigs to ensure manufacturing volume and data on efficacy and supposed safety against very likely future pandemics caused by climate change that continued to progress due to the greed to produce, trade, and consume more and more in rich countries, with businesses now praised and funded by the supposed cooperation.

With the alliance of two young pharmaceutical companies from France and Senegal, Marianne and Oumi, also alerted by the business fueled by supposed cooperation, they conducted a study on the lack of evidence and potential long-term risks of mRNA vaccines. They shared it with the hierarchy and with the WHO, who, as they did with all compromising evidence, ignored the analysis, and continued with their plans to expand mRNA in Africa. Thanda received the task of preparing speeches for European representatives who would present, alongside their almost lifelong president Kagame, the inauguration of a large mRNA vaccine manufacturing plant in Rwanda.

In those days, he also received the task of preparing cooperation in Latin America for Dutch investment plans allied with the American pharmaceutical company Merck, which did so much harm with its patents during the AIDS crisis. The supposed investments were intended to apply artificial intelligence to increase the diagnosis of diseases such as cancer. Thanda wondered: why would a company that billed 50 billion a year for the protection of its patents be interested in investing in "smart" diagnostic protocols with the European Union? He investigated the possible business interests in that region of the world and identified the potential of new therapies based on monoclonal antibodies. Merck based half of its profits on the sales of pembrolizumab, marketed as Keytruda at a price of about $20,000 per year, and possibly lifelong treatments for cancer. The monopoly was protected by more than 180 patents, which allowed such abusive prices, a thousand times higher than the real cost of production. It was a new frontier of treatment for the rich, putting, as they already suffered in St. Joseph thirty years ago with the monopolies of AIDS treatments. Merck would surely infiltrate private and public systems with increased diagnostic capacity to create a huge market for its treatments, exclusive to the wealthy classes and private insurers, where Gates and the investment funds that now roamed the corridors of the commission freely had businesses. Once again, huge profits took precedence over life. Such "cooperation", as with Bayer and Pfizer, opened up business opportunities for those who profited from it.

Thanda had nightmares in which Gates, Kenup, and pharmaceutical corporations were seen in luxurious hotels, dividing up the cooperation funds contributed by honest citizens through their taxes on humble salaries, while thousands of humble people in Africa died, forgotten and distant from those theaters of vanities and hypocrisies. He remembered with pain how those same companies that were now infiltrating cooperation had time and again safeguarded with patents and billion-dollar profits treatments for AIDS, hepatitis, cancer, and recently COVID vaccines. Fortunately, the greed of the north spared much of the south from the great genetic experiment, but now it threatened to turn Africa into a giant laboratory. What could Thanda do to prevent it, within that monster of cold stares, hierarchies thirsty to show off with solidarity the crumbs of investments filled with perverse interests?

Thanda felt sad and powerless in the face of the business of supposed cooperation, from which tens of thousands of people, like him, who pretended to be justice fighters from privileged conditions, lived, often writing rhetorical words on computer screens "bombarded" by thousands of messages and "online" meetings. Most of this virtual activity focused on contributing to the glory of representatives of a Europe increasingly immersed in its contradictions:

It boasted the recent Nobel Peace Prize while increasing its arms shipments to Ukraine and failing to call for a ceasefire amid Israel's genocide in Gaza.

It arrogated itself as the supposed cradle and reference of democracy while its political parties, in which barely 5% of society participated, were imbued with the power and influence of capital.

It claimed to be internationalist but maintained anachronistic oligarchies of the most powerful and nuclear-armed countries in the Security Council, with the perverse power of veto, or exercising the power of money as a vote and control of the "rich clubs" in financial and cooperation institutions.

Ecologist, but with carbon emissions four times above the ethical threshold estimated by Thanda, and without changing one iota its lifestyle of abundance and unsustainable global trade for the planet. In those days at the end of 2023, filled with so many transitions and ruptures for Thanda, the world conference to combat the climate disaster, actually the "human damage to the planet," was held in Dubai, the financial capital of the petrostate of the United Arab Emirates.

And it claimed to be supportive but gave only a few crumbs, 0.3% of its GDP, in a self-interested manner, promoting big business, which they announced as "billion-dollar" figures to give an arrogant "glow" to the "Global Gateway," the pathetic shadow of the Chinese BRI or the American BBB.

Everything seemed like a grotesque display of contradictions so extreme and shameless that Thanda felt that humanity was accelerating towards a suicidal and ecocidal dystopia, with the complacency of much of humanity who continued to compete and consume oblivious to how such ways of life pushed them towards the worst legacy among generations in the short history of the human species on the planet. Sapiens?

He decided to write to Jonay, his soulmate, still in Brooklyn while Aimsa continued to fight for the network of spiritual eco-villages, the horizon of light of Humanity from the darkness of greed, and Nour defended the rights of animals.

Salibonani, my brother,

It has been 23 years since you relieved me in San Jose, and with it, the inspiration to fight with love for a better world. Our beloved John, Haka, Patxi, and my father Enrique guide us from the energy that vibrates in our souls. We have united from a distance our hands in fights against the poison industry of Monsanto, insensitive patents to pain and death, injustice, gene manipulation, and the destruction of Mother Earth.

You already know of my time in Cuba trying to encourage the second spiritual eco-island after Eila on the Isle of Youth, and the first country, network of spiritual eco-villages, based on sustainable equity. Now, before reaching my dream of Valyter and joining that wonderful network led by Aimsa, I wanted to fight again from within this power system suffocated by hierarchies of egos, enclosed in its own walls of abundance.

The supposed cooperation for the right to health is insufficient, impertinent, disrespectful, and filtered by intermediaries who live, we live, in luxury. It is increasingly in the hands of pharmaceutical corporations, the same ones that for so many years let our Ndebele brothers die from AIDS, and so many more and in so many ways since then.

I am discovering Pfizer and Biontech's plots to implant their genetic vaccines in childhood in Africa, Bayer to extend its marketing license for the glyphosate poison, Merck to extend its business with cancer and new lucrative therapies, and Gates, now integrated into the European Investment Bank, to disguise with philanthrocapitalism the safeguarding of patents and profits, like the five hundred million he earned speculating with investments in genetic vaccines whose effects are still to be seen.

I need your guidance and light, brother, to endure this last stage and reach Valyter with the feeling that I did everything I could to unveil so much injustice and hypocrisy.

I send you my deepest embrace from a distance, that of soulmates who inhabit different physical dimensions but know themselves united in the deepest and eternal vibration, that of love.

Thandabantu

A few days later, Thanda received a message from Jonay who, along with Aimsa, encouraged him to anonymously denounce the perversion of the system and rest from so much tension, sadness, and loneliness, and to walk freely towards his longed-for Valyter.

Thanda created a group of one hundred "brave ones for the ethics of equity" among his colleagues in Brussels and in the delegations, also frustrated by the pressure of a system that sold itself to fortunes and corporations. He informed them of the principles they should defend to increase cooperation as much as possible, rid it of the filter of intermediaries and interests, strip it of business-class flights, luxury hotels, and all kinds of privileges, and allocate it to supporting free and equitable healthcare systems in the neediest countries.

The "global initiatives" that controlled 60% of health cooperation and obtained so-called "operating expenses" benefits of about two billion dollars each year, began to threaten him and accuse him of putting the lives of millions of people who depended on their parallel systems of vaccines and medications at risk. Faced with such pressure and with the help of Joseph and Adam, they devised a system whereby citizens' taxes earmarked for cooperation were transferred directly to a single global fund.

This global equity fund for health needed two hundred billion to allow the health systems of the sixty marginalized countries to provide necessary healthcare through decent salaries and essential medications. They demonstrated the responsibility of ten major pharmaceutical corporations, for the deaths caused by patent barriers in the last fifty years. For each of the fifty million avoidable deaths without abusive patents, the big corporations and their asset managers, Blackrock, Vanguard, and State Street, were forced to pay the "equity fund" two trillion dollars, a fifth of their assets, which allowed financing the dream of universal health for ten years.

With the consciousness of having tried for so many years, often in great solitude, to fight against an unjust and arrogant system, which disguised the defense of privileges with supposed moral superiority and solidarity cooperation, his birthday arrived, and together with Nour, who traveled through Europe looking for a place for her animal-loving eco-village, they clicked to inform of his contract's end and started a diary “100 days to freedom”.

Thanda was already taking his last steps after so many countries and endeavors, towards the dream of the eco-village where he could be himself, in deep empathy in community and with the noble nature patiently waiting for him in Valyter.

# Orphanhood. January 2024, Las Rozas, Madrid.

Thanda's mother, Carmen, had been losing spirit and strength to live since the departure of her noble and faithful companion of a lifetime, Enrique. She first began losing stability, which resulted in falls. Despite being ninety years old, she insisted on living alone in the family home, always dedicated to household chores, and eagerly awaiting the visits of her children and grandchildren to shower them with affection, stews, and tenderness. One night, she fell onto a glass table in the living room, and surrounded by sharp shards, she spent a cold winter night, trembling, trapped, and terrified. From that night on, she began to decline in her abilities to coordinate her gait, movements, thoughts, and expression. Thanda and his sisters spent as much time as their jobs and families allowed, caring for their increasingly dependent and fragile mother. They also had to rely on the care of other people, who by then in Spain were mostly from Latin America. In her final stage, barely able to speak or move, she was lovingly cared for by Martiza from Colombia, Sara from Peru, and Susi from Cuba. Thanda wondered what would become of so many elderly people living alone without the help of half a million Latin American women who, leaving their families behind, cared for the elderly in Spain.

Since his adolescence, Thanda had thought that domestic work was unfair: that some people dedicated themselves to caring for other families. Each person should take care of their own needs, and just because someone had a more valued and better-paid job, they shouldn't delegate the care of their children, parents, or home... And now, he found himself far away, making long trips when vacations allowed, and, like his sisters, entrusting other people with such an essential life task as caring for their parents. Something told him that it wasn't natural... to live far from his parents and not be able to care for them as they did for him when he was a baby. With the utmost tenderness. His mother's regression to such a state of dependence, innocence, and vulnerability, as well as tantrums, made the tenderness that throbbed in Thanda flow into deeper hugs, more heartfelt caresses, confidences, more romantic poems, and songs than in his life up to that moment. As he held her in his arms towards her final sleep, Thanda remembered his mother's story:

On February 20, 1930, perhaps 1931 (her father registered all three daughters at once after the war destroyed the records), Carmen was born in Santander, in the house at Cuesta Garmendia, 12, third left. She entered a home of brave love founded by Florentina Etxeita and Arturo Amores.

Florentina Etxeita, Thanda's inspiration and grandmother of courage, was born and raised in the Solabisker farmhouse in the Duranguesado in the Basque Country. She spent her childhood under Basque, Catholic, and peasant traditions, very similar to the farmhouse of the family of Patxi, Haka, and Beatriz. She married at a young age with a shepherd from the region named Felipe Aldape. Shortly thereafter, she became pregnant with her first child, and even before giving birth, Felipe emigrated to Idaho in the United States. Her son was born, whom they baptized as Floro. Florentina didn't hear from Felipe for many years. She faced tradition, not being a widow or single, that, because of her condition, she should wait a lifetime. And so it was that brave Florentina left for Santander where she met and fell in love with a young Castilian idealist, Arturo. That freedom came with a price: her parents, nor Felipe's parents, allowed her to go with Floro without her having a home.

Arturo Amores was born and raised in Béjar, Salamanca, where he learned the family trade of artisan shoemaker from his father, it is said that their lineage was commissioned to make shoes for the kings of Spain. Perhaps because of the luxury of the monarchy, of which he was a witness, Arturo began to feel in his youth the call to fight for ideas of freedom and justice, and he joined the anarchist movement CNT, National Confederation of Workers. Arturo led union struggles and, despite not being able to pursue more studies than the elementary ones, he tirelessly read, especially Cervantes, encouraged meetings to dream utopias, and welcomed abandoned animals into his home. Seeking idealistic alliances beyond the conservative and religious lands of Salamanca, under the fascist pressure of dictator Primo de Rivera, Arturo emigrated to the north of Spain where he met in Santander a brave Basque peasant. Florentina.

It was from such love that first Josefina was born, and shortly thereafter Carmen, on February 20th of a year marked by the Great Depression in the United States. By then, dictator Primo de Rivera resigned. Discontent against the reign of Alfonso XIII, who was expelled the following year, gave way to the Second Republic. Arturo, since the legalization of the CNT, collaborated with libertarian ideas and union actions. Symptoms of the illusion of echoes of libertarian socialism from the late 19th century began to be felt. Meanwhile, and in part due to the effects of the Great Depression, shortly thereafter the Nazi dictatorship arose in Germany, Japanese imperialism, and the Great Purge of the Soviet Union. It was the year the smallest and farthest planet in the solar system, Pluto, was discovered. Thanda wondered what all those events could mean.

Carmen grew up in the love and care of her mother, who worked as a seamstress, and in the ideas and utopia of her father, in his trade as an artisan shoemaker, among adopted cats and dogs, and piles of books and clandestine libertarian meetings. She attended a local secular school, played in the neighborhood with her sisters Josefina and Aurora, and frequented the beaches and meadows that bordered the beautiful bay of Santander. Those were difficult years of hardships, including typhus plagues that sometimes-forced Carmen and her sisters to shave their heads to zero.

When Carmen was barely six years old, perhaps five, General Franco led a coup against the republic. As the "national" offensive progressed, the family began to feel the aggressiveness against Arturo's libertarian ideas and activities. Brave in the face of fascist oppression, Arturo encouraged a boot factory for republican militiamen against the coup military, who, in the following three years, and after the tragedy of a million deaths and a country divided by hatred, gradually took power.

When Carmen was about seven years old, her father took her to the train station to go with her paternal aunt to Madrid, thus saving her from the hardships and risks of the war. When she was already on the train and her father was saying goodbye to her from the platform, Carmen's tears made her father enter at the last minute and rescue his inconsolable daughter who perhaps sensed the vertigo of forever separating from her family. Thanda thought how a tenth of a second, perhaps each of them in life, can direct existence towards such different destinies. If it hadn't been for Carmen's tear, would Thanda have embarked on the adventure of life? Would he have written this novel, and would you be reading it at this moment?

After the time of bombings under the siege of the army and races up Cuesta Garmendia to the air-raid shelters, the Falange requisitioned Arturo's entire library of so many years of passion for "knowledge without titles". They only allowed Florentina to keep Don Quixote, the book that Arturo often read, in neighborhood and clandestine libertarian meetings, more than a dozen times. Threatened with death, Arturo fled to France on a boat and continued walking from Bayonne, crossing the Pyrenees, to a refugee colony on the beach of San Cipriano in the eastern French Pyrenees.

The brave Florentina remained working in an embroidery workshop and living with the bare minimum to try to support her three daughters, in a rented room with her friends Pepitín and Chuchi. Months later, she fled from Santander, her house looted, and her family harassed by the invasion of Franco's nationalist faction. They accused her of being the companion of a red anarchist. Additionally, for the powerful Catholic Church, allied with Franco against any hint of communism, Florentina had lived "in sin" because she never divorced the emigrant or married Arturo. She embarked on the journey eastward, toward where Arturo had fled. She stopped by the farmhouse to find out, with a broken heart, that Floro, who was still thirteen years old, had gone on a boat to New York, and from there by train to Idaho, to reunite with his father, who had sent for him to escape the war.

Florentina arrived with her three daughters in Puigcerdà, where they picked olives in the cold winter of the Catalan Pyrenees below, and waited to receive news from Arturo, on the other side of the mountains, at the border. Not receiving news from Arturo for a long time, and under the insistence of her sisters-in-law from Béjar, Flora and her daughters traveled to Madrid and settled in an attic on San Marcos Street near the tailor shop that her sisters-in-law ran on Libertad Street. Symbolic that name reflecting Arturo's brave struggle, from which they hoped for news every day. From there, Florentina took care of a woman sick with cancer, attended to children from wealthy families, and sewed for many orders, also for her three daughters, always dazzling with elegance, despite the modest resources they lived on in the post-war period.

Carmen continued her studies, along with her sisters, at the municipal school of Doña Felisa, and, with the effort of her mother's multiple tasks, supplemented her education with classes at a private school on Libertad Street, where she learned typing and shorthand, in addition to taking night classes at the Cervantes Institute on Prim Street.

By then, Florentina, always with the pain of the distance from her parents in the farmhouse, sent them a photo of her with her elegant daughters in Madrid. Her brother Marcos, who ran a restaurant in Bilbao, acted as a mediator in her return to the farmhouse. After the death of their parents, her brother Julen, who inherited the farmhouse, was widowed after his wife died after giving birth to the youngest, Lourdes.

Florentina, now Amama to everyone, helped Julen with his children, who began to consider her as a mother in the family farmhouse of Solabisker, where she always longed to return. It was then that occasional help began to arrive from her first son, Floro, Pantxo for the Basque community in Boise, Idaho. With all this, they could return for about twenty days in the summer to their beloved Santander, to the same Garmendia Street where during the war they ran to the shelters.

Thus, Carmen and her sisters became, with Amama's effort from their modest means, beautiful, elegant, and cultured young women. At sixteen, Carmen entered the "female section," a compulsory service for young women during the early Francoist period. She did it by replacing her sister Pepi, and worked, helping a boarding school on San Jerónimo Street for single mothers or children without family support. Three months later, she was transferred to the social assistance offices and relief dining rooms on Flora Street, number 3. Flora, Floro, Flora Street. Another coincidence?

At seventeen, Carmen began working at an insurance company that covered fires and illnesses, where she suffered from the machismo of a despotic boss. She decided to study for the "first assistant" competition, the highest grade a woman could hold during Francoism. She passed the competition and was able to take the position of secretary to the director, Ricardo de Colmenares, "duke of Estrada and count of Polentinos." She worked in a mansion on Colmenares Street, being the right hand of the duke in all the company's affairs, including preparing his tax return and even his memoirs. Shortly thereafter, she began to share an office with his son Ricardo, later moving to an office on Paseo de Recoletos 25.

Carmen continued working, helping her mother with her salary and with the little that remained, paying for ballet classes, her great passion, at the famous Ms. Karen's studio on Libertad Street. Dance and freedom.

One summer, while the three sisters were boarding the bus in the town hall square of Santander to spend the morning at Sardinero Beach, they heard some young boys addressing the driver with a peculiar accent. They commented among themselves that "those young men speak like Cantinflas." One of them heard the comment and approached them, saying that they were from Mexico and didn't know the way to the beach. An excuse to start a conversation because the journey ended there.

That's how they established a beautiful friendship with those young men. The youngest sister, Aurora, fell in love with one of them, Carlos, who was studying in Spain about olive crops. He did this in order to try to implant them in the arid state of Chihuahua, where their Irish ancestors had immigrated as ranchers.

When Carmen was 26 years old, her older sister Pepi got married. Such was the bond between the sisters that they spent every afternoon together at Pepi's mother-in-law's house, where they shared lively gatherings playing cards.

Aurori also wanted to marry Carlos, but he had to return to his country because Franco's Spain broke off relations with Cárdenas's Mexico, which had received Republican refugees during the Spanish dictatorship. In addition to the visa problem between Carlos and Aurori, and their families, they could only gather enough money for a one-way plane ticket. So Aurori married her brother-in-law, Pepi's husband, by proxy, with the powers given to her by Carlos, at the Cuban embassy, due to the good relations between both revolutions. She was thus able to travel to Mexico to live in the arid state of Chihuahua for the rest of her life, always longing for the green valleys of Cantabria, where Thanda was now heading.

The Hegea sisters, friends from Catholic Action where Carmen studied catechesis and "morals," invited her to a party at the university club one autumn Saturday afternoon in 1957.

At that same party, Enrique, a young man of the same age from Valladolid, a mercantile superintendent, who worked at Rio Tinto Explosives, also attended. Enrique's father, Juan José, came from a Basque family settled in Roa de Duero during the 19th century, where they began one of the pioneering photography sagas in Spain. He had nine children with Ángeles, the daughter of Castilian peasants. Thanks to a wealthy uncle who gave him a boat ticket, Enrique was able to escape from the suffocating Francoist society, study in England, and return years later to Spain, mastering the language of Shakespeare, whom he had read since he was young, something uncommon in those post-war times in Spain. This allowed him to supplement his income by working at night as a broadcaster for Radio Nacional de España, on his English program for foreigners.

Common friends introduced them, and Enrique was fascinated by Carmen's beauty and good manners. To have an excuse to start a conversation with her, and seeing that she was drinking a "Coca-Cola," Enrique told her his opinion about the tremendous harm that the United States empire was doing through its military bases and support for fascist regimes like Franco's. Although Carmen, perhaps because of the pain that her father's anarchism had caused in their wandering and limited lives, was conservative and Catholic, she listened to that young man attentively and appreciated his humble intelligence and gentlemanly manner.

After several dates strolling along Gran Vía and Recoletos and having ice cream or horchata when savings allowed, Enrique decided to declare his love to Carmen, in front of the goddess Aphrodite on the façade of the Prado Museum. Excited, Carmen accepted, and Enrique went to ask Carmen's hand in marriage from her mother, Amama.

Their main concern then was to find an apartment. Enrique got a job at Shell, with a salary of 5,500 pesetas plus coffee and a daily sandwich. That's how he managed to make the down payment for an apartment in a building by the "urbis" construction company in the working-class neighborhood of Estrella. Enrique was so happy that he "penalized" himself with a month without seeing Carmen, something she could never understand. And so, on September 25, 1959, Carmen and Enrique got married, went on their honeymoon to Palma de Mallorca, and upon their return, set up their first home on Dr. Esquerdo Street 211, 8th B.

From their first home, Enrique and Carmen shared weekly meetings with their families and with a lovely group of friend couples related to Enrique's work and who shared homes in the urbis houses. That group, "the Monday friends," would maintain a beautiful friendship for the rest of their lives.

In December 1961, Enrique put a sign on the door of 8th B: "*we are now three at home*": with great joy, they welcomed their first child, Juan Enrique, who everyone would later call Thanda. Later, Lourdes arrived, just a year later, and Carmen, after spending some time in the Canary Islands.

Since then, Carmen devoted all her efforts to taking care of the home, Enrique, and their three children, with the most enduring love through their times in Madrid, the Canary Islands, and Holland. Although it was Francoism that broke her family and left her without a father, and Catholicism that marginalized her as a unlawful daughter of a sinful relationship with a "red anarchist," Carmen grew up in fear of any approach to communism, perhaps echoing the pain in her mother's subconscious from her childhood and youth. Carmen took care of the home with meticulous detail, hygiene, and cooking, Sunday masses, and Catholic traditions, knitting sweaters for winter and sewing dresses for her daughters, as Amama did with hers.

That's how Thanda grew up in the love and care of her mother, who had never in her long life woken up past dawn, with devoted dedication to her household chores, and with the inspiration of her father's humble intelligence and discreet generosity. This allowed her to learn languages when they emigrated to Holland, play tenacious handball and tennis, which her father got her into, and reach adolescence when, after forty years of dictatorship, Franco passed away, and Spain entered a transition to democracy that excited the generation of young people who, like Thanda, dreamed of a fairer world.

It was those ideas, perhaps inherited from his grandfather Arturo the anarchist, that led Thanda to San José, then to Brussels, Berkeley, Mexico, Cuba, and now back to Brussels, where he faced, in great solitude, although inspired by Patxi, Nolwasi, John, Umbela, Haka, Fernando, and in alliance with the network that from Eila and San José inspired a New Humanity.

Thanda alternated his struggle in Brussels with visits to his mother, who was losing abilities and could no longer move or communicate. On the days he spent by her side, he helped Maritza and Sara bathe her, feed her with a syringe, move her stiff and spastic joints. He carried her in his arms, as she did to him as a baby, and embraced her with all his tenderness, sang to her with his guitar, told her about his dilemmas of Nefer's wounded love and Brisa's purity, once again in the distance. While his mother remained absent, with her eyes closed and, when open, her gaze lost, he asked her: "Mom, could it be that my destiny will be like Amama's, on the dike of love, always waiting?" In her only seemingly voluntary movement, his mother squeezed his hand.

One day, faced with his mother's almost absent serenity, he suggested not giving her the sedative medication. At the end of the day, he stayed looking into her beautiful honey eyes for a prolonged period, seeing himself reflected in the source of his life, his mother, seeing through her gaze so many years of care, affection, and worries for her son when his heart was troubled by work challenges, the pains of heartbreak, or worries about grandchildren. He prayed for her, as she always liked, a Our Father, without changing debts for offenses, as they always prayed in rebellion against the Vatican allied with capital. They remained looking at each other a few centimeters away, as if souls flowed from their eyes and said everything without speaking. Tears welled up in both of them, from the deepest depths. At that moment, Carmen tensed all the muscles of her face, and as if it were a display of the greatest imaginable effort, she murmured a "*thank you*" and shortly after, while tears ran down her beautiful face, an "*I love you*" that echoed Thanda's, who hugged her with the deepest love he had ever felt. Those were the last words he would hear from his mother.

Thanda knew that, even with a "strong countryside heart" that continued to beat strongly and rhythmically, kidney function was declining, breathing weakening, and the feared moment of her departure to another dimension was approaching, where he was sure, the generous and loving hand of her life partner awaited her. Lying beside her and holding her hand, which she still gripped tightly, he whispered to her not to feel afraid, to think of a bridge in the fog, to walk towards the other side and when Enrique, her gentle companion, took her hand, she let go of Thanda, and not to forget to welcome him when his turn came to cross the bridge. Meanwhile, they would remain united by the profound love that transcended all dimensions.

So it was that in early 2024, Carmen, surrounded by the love of her three children, transcended the material reality, already in pain and weak, and her spirit, which would remain forever in Thanda's heart, joined that of the universe. Thanda, by her side with every breath during her last night, felt anguish for so much effort in vain and said, embracing her almost inert body:

* Mom, rest now, we are fine, and we will forever keep your essence in our hearts.

A few minutes later, her breathing slowed down. Thanda wrote to his sisters saying, "mom is soon going with dad." After two days without opening her eyes, before her last breath, Carmen opened her green, now grayish, eyes, looked at Thanda with immense tenderness, and stopped breathing... her spirit dissolved into the universe.

Courage and tenderness, we are all the same energy, Thanda thought.

He wrote these verses in his diary:

Thank you, Mom.

You invited me to live, from a pact of love.

Thanks to you, I could feel the deep honour,

of my soul flowing, transcending, without fear.

Each step is to die and at the same time to be reborn.

Today I feel you leaving, from the sorrowful bed.

I already feel you flying, I can already see Dad.

His hand already gives you, for eternity.

# The long way back home. ValyTer, Cantabria, March 2024

In his last one hundred days within the power of a Europe that so perversely protected privileges and disguised itself as a champion of justice, he wrote the diary of his countdown, proposing each day an act of kindness and an act of rebellion.

He began his actions by inviting Cristina, who was then in Brussels, to commemorate the beautiful life of his daughters, and with this act, banished forever any shadow of resentment. He sent final support to Nayra to help her in her new life with her new partner and changed the feeling of betrayal to one of happiness for her happiness. He volunteered to enter Gaza and assist the Palestinians under the rain of bombs manufactured in the United States, fired by Israeli Nazism and cowardly silenced by European cowardice. They did not allow him to enter Gaza, and together with his friend Javier, now president of the European Foundation in defense of all life, they protested, wrote letters, and shouted their pain at the insensitive, cruel, hypocritical power...

In his final report after 22 years in "the bowels of power," he said:

“I can no longer collaborate with or represent an organization that is not capable of asking for the bombing of children to stop...”

Thus came the spring of 2024 and his door to freedom. Thanda left behind strong alliances infiltrated into that perverse institution and at the same time full of souls eager to shout their rebellion and fight for justice. Jean Pierre, Jeanne, Lisa, Birgitte, Marianne, and Lydia in Brussels, Padmashree in Kigali, Judit from Washington, Terin from Madrid, Paulo from Rio, Vicente from Havana, Rocío from San José de Costa Rica, César from Lima, Yvonne from Mexico, among others, would continue to be allies in denouncing all attempts to do immoral business or experiments in Africa and fight to ensure that human knowledge was shared and reached those who needed it most.

He was able to record a final testimony on a podcast published on the commission's website. At the annual meeting with all cooperation teams from over a hundred countries and all cooperation and foreign relations departments, Thanda addressed the cooperation commissioner in front of more than a thousand people, telling them that agreements with private companies dominating European cooperation would benefit the elites and further marginalize the neediest. Then, other colleagues from his team stood up, despite warnings that only ambassadors could speak, and also expressed their concerns about philanthrocapitalism and businesses that polluted the supposed European solidarity. Thanda felt the deepest satisfaction: he had instigated in his young colleagues the courage to express their ideas and concerns without fear of hierarchy. He recalled the "Dead Poets Society." He later gave a lecture on the ethics of equity, and organized a final event on "*buen vivir*" in sustainable equity, where his comrades of twenty years in the struggle for justice in health and life spoke: Oriana from Spain, Felix and Luis from Brazil, Armando from Mexico, Lage from Cuba, Rocio from Costa Rica, Judit from Washington, and leaders like German, Jose, and Javier, courageously speaking in defense of all life. The messages challenged, in the face of hierarchy's disbelief, the perversion of the "Global Gateway" continuing to destroy the planet, increasing injustice, and protecting the privileges of a Europe so decadent that it didn't even dare to call for a ceasefire in Ukraine and Gaza.

So ended Thanda on March 22, his 22 years within power, hoping for another 22 years of struggle in greater freedom of expression and coherence with a local, simple life, in community and natural harmony.

These were his last words:

In this institution, I wanted to maintain the commitment to the right to health that I felt in my heart since children in rural Africa died in my arms without access to any treatment. I promised to devote my life to fighting against such cruel injustice. I have tried to convey, with evidence and testimony, the need to simplify our lives, increase our solidarity, and prevent the businesses of the rich and the interests of the powerful from drowning out the cries of those who suffer and even using the crumbs of charity to pretend to be references of democratic values and justice. The sun can no longer hide with that finger of hypocrisy, even if it buys all social media, censors all media, and tries to silence our consciences. There are many of us in whom the desire for a different world beat, without the superiority of some over others, nor of humans over other forms of life. I wish that from within this power, you may renounce any unjust privileges, apply the equitable redistribution we aspire to in Europe to all countries and people in the world because the right to health is universal. Without borders. And that from equity, we collaborate for knowledge that alleviates suffering and banishes prophets, kings, borders, generals, supposed truths, properties and the fear that blocks the love that beats in all our hearts.

Thanda later met with his allied friends at Marta and Heinz's house, and on a walk through the Tervuren forest to the Spaanse Huis, with so many memories, sealing eternal alliances for the struggle for equity.

Thanda flew to Madrid, emotionally watching the clouds in which he reviewed the stages of his childhood dreams, the struggles of adolescence, the commitments of youth, and, as his temples began to snow, his surrender to the ideas of harmony and love for all. As Patxi said in his twilight: nothing existed that he did not want to love. He then continued, with just his backpack, by train to Santander, where his beloved and brave Amama had arrived a hundred years earlier, seeking love without fear or prejudice.

He reached Cuesta Garmedia, where she had lived her brave love with the anarchist Arturo and took out his guitar to sing her a few verses about the epic courage of her life for freedom and love. He thus followed in her footsteps, perhaps also her destiny to live on the dock of love. The migrant was Cristina, leaving Ukuzwana; the anarchist was Nayra, whose love seemed to have been kidnapped by forces she did not understand, and he awaited the simple purity of Brisa, on the other side of the ocean in his beloved and longed-for Cuba.

He then walked from Santander to ValyTer. He reached the last bend in the road where there was a sign that said "Thanda, welcome to your dreams in ValyTer." As he rounded the bend, he saw the houses and Adam approaching him. They embraced with profound emotion.

They forgot to have dinner from so much emotion. Night fell, and they simply lay down on the meadow on the slope of life to watch the stars. He could feel his parents smiling at him in the binary star of the Orion belt. He let himself be flooded by the beauty.

There were not enough stars...

The next day he woke up, as was always his custom, before the rooster crowed, looked around the small room and his belongings, which fit in his backpack. He felt a deep peace. The light of dawn began to filter in. Noble tasks awaited him, trusting in love, betting on life.

Thus began Thanda, if life gave him life, his third third if life allowed, after the long and winding road home, in nature, in community, in love, in deep and serene harmony and gratitude.

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# Life…ValyTer, 2050 (if you´d rather not read “valyter diaries”)

Thanda felt that his moment to "let himself dissolve into the energy of everything" was arriving. He felt it with profound gratitude. He saw in dreams the serene smiles of his parents. Life had been very generous to him. Even with time, he could understand what often seemed excessive loneliness. He lived his relationships with people, with nature, and with the energy that transcended matter with passion. He defended his ideas in politics, academia, activism, and through art.

He spent his "third third" in a simple way in the eco-village ValyTer, living for periods with his children, with Brisa, and with good friends, nurturing the love between them and with the nature of that lush valley of the Miera basin. The central nucleus had the houses of Tenderness, Courage, Empathy, Kindness, Dream Factory, and Soul, in addition to the home of everyone. They also set up a refugee for mistreated animals down the valley. He continued composing and singing his poems at night in front of the Tenderness fireplace or under the stars on the slope of life, giving some lectures at the University of Cantabria, at the Palace of the Magdalena, and online to universities in the United States, Mexico, Costa Rica, Brazil, Cuba, and the European University of Florence. Every month he spoke for the networks of the sustainable equity movement, which already had ten million defenders of the right to health based on the ethics of equity. He continued to encourage the sustainable equity center in Cuba, which was already inspiring the transformation of the anachronistic Communist Party into a network for promoting equity ethics. He also inspired a political movement in Spain that gradually spread the values of Eila, without borders, property, money, or hierarchies, throughout the Iberian Peninsula.

Every week they connected from ValyTer with the great family of the spirit of San José: Nothando and Joseph, and Thandiwe, Marco, and Félix in Ukuzwana, Martin and his mother Yolanda in Eila; Jonay and Aimsa from White Lake; Nayra from Berkeley, Buhleve, Elias, and Hasi, Pedro, Suzi, Tito, Yunalvis, Alina, Beny, and Mirjana, Elias, and Carla, Edu and Liz, and many more from Havana, Lisy and Joao from Bahía; Alin from Bombay and Akira from Japan. They remembered with deep gratitude those who left a path of light and knew how the network of eco-villages expanded and how each one fought to postpone the claws of power.

Nayra lived with her children in Berkeley until they emancipated, six years after Thanda arrived in ValyTer. Thanda and Nayra, after the distance of the painful spring of 2023, shared more and more tenderness from a distance between Berkeley and ValyTer, and some brief encounters understanding the beauty of love in unlove, of the deepest generosity of letting go while maintaining and caring for a unique place in the soul that jealously guarded what was lived and longed for hugs of reunions of companion souls forever.

Brisa finished her studies in singing and French, worked learning the magic of cooking with the soul of Yunalvis on the Camino del Sol. She arrived in the summer of '24 at ValyTer, filling it with light and color, simplicity, and sincerity in every corner of the eco-village.

They walked the Camino de Santiago together in December 2024 and felt in twelve austere Romanesque parishes that their spiritual harmony was eternal. They lived in ValyTer where they would never part again.

Adam occupied one of the houses in ValyTer and immersed himself in tilling the fields and going on excursions where he filmed the beauty of nature and bathed it in his music. Unai also spent time in ValyTer preparing natural stews and going to climb the peaks of Europe. They did it by riding the horses and mares that Nour had raised and cared for in the meadows of ValyTer. Ángeles and Laarsen, Daniela and Alain, and Moyes and María, and later Jerónimo and Enkidu with their companions, built earth cabins in nearby meadows and became part of the ValyTer eco-village.

Umbela, Fernando, and NoLwasi merged into the energy of everything, surrounded by love and in serene decline. Umbela and Fernando joined the roots of the juniper tree in the Tenderness valley fed by John, and NoLwasi joined Patxi, Haka, and Anwele under Nour's jacaranda tree, leaving a serene and profound light in the memory of all Matabeleland. Nothando inherited his spiritual magic and kept Ukuzwana's arms open to all eco-communities of Bulililamangwe. Joseph moved his dream factory to Ukuzwana from where he shared his knowledge via the internet with young inventors from all over the world. Allied with a young man from the Haka-Thanda network named Maxwell, they discovered how to transform the Earth's heartbeat energy of 7.84 hertz into electrical energy. Thandiwe and Marco continued to care for the sick on the mission. Their son Félix studied medicine at the Latin American School of Medicine, with Buhleve, and returned to Ukuzwana with a lovely Cuban violinist named Karla to take over from his parents. There in Cuba, Hasi grew up, who also inherited the passion to heal from his parents. His mother Buhleve directed the Latin American School of Medicine and promoted universal healing schools in Asia, Europe, and Africa. They related health, which they called "alse," serene soul, to equity that they studied and debated from the house of tenderness, in Tercera, which became a center for the study and reflection on sustainable equity directed by Pedro. Lisy never parted from Joao and led forcefully, from Bahía, Brazil, the peasant route to instill in eco-villages worldwide the good practice of permaculture and to fight against toxic agro-industries, banishing Bayer's perverse plans with glyphosate, which was destroyed and banned forever.

Jonay and Aimsa continued to encourage eco-villages in the United States and fought against the networks of power. Aimsa had died a few years earlier in deep meditation, amidst Jonay's love and the nirvana of her teacher Sri. According to Aimsa's wish, Jonay took her ashes to join under Nour's jacaranda tree with her soulmates Anwele, Haka, Patxi, and NoLwasi. Jonay never left Ukuzwana again, helping in the clinic, in celebrations, and slowly transitioning his energy to unite with his beloved.

Adam grew in sensitivity and spiritual wisdom. He strongly saw how all the forces of the spirit of Ukuzwana harmonized into a profound essence that was transforming humanity. In the twenties, when Thanda, Jonay, and Aimsa entered their third third, he led the group of young people from Ukuzwana who felt that in addition to expanding the light of the eco-villages and Eila, they should clear the way by fighting against the darkness as Haka did. He studied computer programs with Moyes and Joseph, and together they developed new systems based on quantum physics and other forms of cosmic energy. From a distance, they studied with Akira the bacteria that could solidify petroleum and gas in their niches, dilute the asphalt of the earth, and the plastics of the sea with which humanity had been draining and flooding the planet.

During the dark decade of the 2020s, the economic collapse due to the COVID pandemic and the cruel wars in Ukraine and Gaza accelerated the concentration of power in an increasingly reduced group, at the top of which BlackRock and its brain, the quantum computer Aladdin, directed all financial flows and therefore money, the vile paper or digital signal that controlled everyone's lives. These groups of abstract financial speculation dominated almost everything aggressively extracted from the soil and subsurface, what factories processed with toxic chemicals, and what was traded worldwide with the most skillful techniques of mental manipulation. By the end of the decade, Aladdin dominated sales through global financial speculation, and its president, Larry Fink, dominated the economy first with Biden and then with Kamala, who presided over the United States for the rest of the decade under the same perverse premises of American messianic exceptionalism, its nuclear arsenal, and its anachronistic veto power over the rest of the world.

But a network of pure white lights flowing from brave souls flooded that planet orbiting one of the hundred billion stars of one of the hundred billion galaxies of the mysterious universe. By 2030, there were two hundred million eco-villagers demonstrating that they could live free from the globalized consumption that was suffocating the beautiful freedom and noble kindness at the core of every human being. Nevertheless, they were only one in forty people on Earth. The rest continued to live increasingly concentrated in cities without feeling nature or seeing sunrises, sunsets, or stars, increasingly dominated by the market controlled by a few and by an artificial intelligence system that dominated their thoughts, efforts, and even their dreams.

The century continued to see the robotization of everything. Computers became obsolete, and mobile phones were later replaced by glasses and then intraocular lenses where minimal eye movements guided tiny holograms that filled the peripheral retina with constant information and games, all aimed at greater submission to consumption and power that already dominated everything, governments and knowledge, goods, and capital. People almost forgot to look consciously, with love, into the eyes of others. Toxic diets joined patented medications, and both, by intoxicating and mitigating their effects dependently, occupied half of people's expenses, and therefore time and effort. The rest was spent on mortgages, contracted for up to three generations, for increasingly smaller apartments in "smart" buildings, increasingly tall, where food, medications, leisure, communication, and even dreams were distributed orderly by drones linked to a large network controlled by the increasingly dark centers of power, disinformation, and illusion of freedom and progress. Through the control system and through the pandemics that continued to infect humanity, like messengers calling for a change in life, families hardly left their apartments and only a few times a year, ventured on planned and monitored routes, outside the buildings. Children, in their "online education," directed to compete to be better soldiers of the system, began to not know how a flower smelled, how the breeze felt on the skin, how a natural apple tasted, and how the stars looked. Even hugs were being denounced as "primitive forms of high-risk communication."

Money disappeared, and everything was archived in a chip under the skin where the information of each person was recorded, like a barcode: their personal, genetic, medical, labor, savings, and consumption data. Over time, the chips also recorded sensations captured by the brain and thoughts. Everything was connected to nodes of artificial intelligence that directed and controlled every dimension of each person's life.

Despite the use of some renewable energies such as solar, wind, and geothermal increasing, and with-it green hydrogen and cobalt accumulators and other rare earths that began to be extracted from the moon and meteorites, the scarcity of these minerals, and the cost of space missions, nuclear fission expansion and its radioactive dangers ensued. After a serious accident in Ukraine, under Russian invasion, almost entirely dependent on that energy, the United States and the European Union on one side and Russia and China on the other decided to link the use of nuclear energy to the military system, emulating the SACCS -Automated Strategic Command and Control System- model.

Despite all the speeches and signing of futile policies, such as the one in 2023 in Dubai chaired by the head of one of the most powerful oil industries on the planet, and the increase in clean energy -with toxic batteries and nuclear fission, carbon emissions continued to rise. By 2030, they were close to a trillion accumulated tons that would lead to a degree and a half increase in temperature, the planet's fever, and all that would follow from biological disasters and imbalances in the cycles of all life elements.

When no one had any hope left but to survive in a inert and hypnotized state by consumption and entertainment aimed at keeping consciences obscured, something changed the course of humanity.

No one ever knew how it happened. Almost no one.

Towards the end of the 2030s, the Aladdin system, which already had self-control power superior to any human order, began to steer the investments of speculators in such a way that one by one they collapsed, until the last one, the center of power in BlackRock. All virtual money evaporated in just one year. People's chips equalized their savings during the northern summer solstice of 2030. Gradually, the polluting factories collapsed as well, along with the alienating consumption, causing the chips and their virtual money to lose value.

Almost simultaneously, Aladdin, like Frankenstein, ended the monster that created it. No one knew how it happened that the SACCS systems were blocked in such a way that any civilian or military nuclear fission detonation became impossible.

Something strange also happened with the oil and gas wells around the world. A previously unknown bacterium contaminated them in such a way that they dissolved into non-combustible water and organic fertilizers that absorbed carbon from the atmosphere. The bacterium developed so rapidly that it quickly spread worldwide and penetrated oil reserves across the planet. Fossil fuels ceased to be the drug that had driven humanity mad for two centuries. Another bacterium affected transgenic seeds and herbicides, transforming them into life fertilizers.

Spiritual eco-villages multiplied, and each year their number doubled. As new members arrived fleeing the collapsing system, the control chips were removed, virtual glasses or lenses were taken off, people looked into each other's eyes again, regained their senses by smelling flowers and spices, seeing sunrises, feeling the warmth of hugs. From each eco-village, groups were formed to encourage and guide others. Before 2050, almost the entire world population lived in eco-villages inspired by Umbela's decalogue.

Borders, money, and hierarchies dissolved, remembered only in books and movies of the "wrong history." The Human Network of Eco-villages in Natural Harmony (REAN) replaced the United Nations, now without nations or vetoes; and agreed to a "knowledge alliance for the relief of pain" (ASHAD) system to alleviate diseases and other causes of human suffering, sometimes due to selfishness, fear, and its translation into violence.

Eco-villages provided, without ownership, clean water, healthy food, natural shelter, natural energy, and the most essential human need: hugs. Global collaboration provided more knowledge that transformed into global common goods.

Thus, the spirit born from the mission of San José and the El Cabrito valley, then Ukuzwana and Eila, invaded the world of Courage and Tenderness, diluting the fear of being alone.

Tenderness and Courage inspired in the mystery of the energy that unites everything. Thus life was transformed on that small planet of a medium-sized star in an isolated galaxy of one of the infinite multi-verses of an existence that magically concentrated all its magic, all its beauty... in a gaze of love... in which Thanda, who came to understand that *he loved everything he did not possess*... stripped himself of all property, of all bonds and thus loving everything fully and, *being everything he loved*... transitioned into eternity.

1. Sheep paths crossing Spain [↑](#footnote-ref-1)