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Kufamba-famba: A Walk, A Man, A Memoir

Robert Muponde

Abstract
Whenever my grandfather said, “I’ve no story to tell you now, let’s go walking-walking”, it meant he had plenty of stories to tell me. But he had to think on his feet first as a starter motor for his storytelling. As he led the way out of his homestead, I knew there was method and theory in the lurching, humped body in front, behind or beside me, for whom walking was like the ignition key he needed to restart and then let his mind run idle. Behind his need to think in motion, to marry walking limb to speaking tongue, was a clearly thought-out interactive heuristic approach to knowledge sharing while re-enacting the walk of life. This interaction with my grandfather, which he called walking-walking, inspired my own creative practice when writing *The Scandalous Times of a Book Louse: A Memoir of a Childhood* (2021). It reminded me of the many recapitulations involved in routines of walking-walking—*kufamba-famba* in the Shona language—which are rhizomatic, recursive and new at the same time. Presented in this essay memoir are snatches of thoughts on a creative practice formed from walking-walking or when recalling its motions, adventures and hurdles.

Preamble

I wrote my childhood memoir the way I walked with my grandfather along village paths, trailing behind him, walking beside or in front of him. The stories took the shape and expressions of the walk, with jolts and lurches, twists and swings. The (loco)motion of the body journeying on foot.

The wayside sights were opportunities for different kinds of story, albeit recursive. No matter how many times we passed them, they were invitations to revisioning and retelling, new stories, loud whispers, dramatic monologues and eruptions of chuckles between grandfather and grandson. The full story was told in that burst of laughter, that elongated whistling sigh, that shake of the head and that wave of the hand.

The hurdles and mishaps—intrusions that halted and altered motion of the body and of thoughts. Each interruption a prompt, a cue for change of scenario, course and pace. Here I adapt Laurence Cuelenaere’s conceptualisation of walking as a form of motion, “which involves physical displacement, knowledge of the world, and the material constrains of the body”. In this sense walking is a specific procedure and opportunity “for pointing something out, or for observing something with a peculiar sensibility”.[1]

The stories grandfather told while walking began and ended *in medias res*. They began and ended in ways that had more to do with the pace, duration and direction of the walk than with conventions that are slaves to

traditional story arcs and denouements. They had everything to do with the terrain (hilly, rocky, an endless web of pathways), vicissitudes of the road (patterns of use and social networks) and texture of the environment (hurdles included) through which the telling moved.

Nothing Stories

Grandfather started his stories with a walk. "I've no time to tell you a story now. *Ngatimbofamba*. Let's go on a walk." *Kufamba* is to walk. Those reporting on our sudden leaving on an impromptu journey on foot, in an unspecified direction, would say, "He and his grandfather have gone walking-walking." Walking-walking is a rough translation of *kufamba-famba*, which means just wandering without a specific direction or purpose except to walk, a metaphor for freestyle form and open-ended enquiry.

The answer to the question "what time will they come back?" was invariably *hameno*, meaning nobody knows. This did not call for a search party, as there was no stipulated timeframe for our return. Even if the direction of the wandering walk and tracks chosen was known in advance to others left behind, the walking-walking itself presented intimations of the proverbial wild goose chase for those intent on following our erratic course or eavesdropping on our peripatetic talk.

Our *kufamba-famba* unfolded stories in a manner not too dissimilar to Nicole Lee, Ken Morimoto, Marzieh Mosavarzadeh and Rita Irwin's concept of walking as a form of enquiry, and proceeded through "deviations, disruptions, and unsettling conversations", which led to "unexpected rhizomatic turns and the charting of new directions".[2] The yield of the walk was staggering, its strokes of insights inexpressible. So, if during our walk or upon our return one asked what it was that we were talking about, the answer would be *hapana,* meaning nothing. And this *hapana* abridged the depth and the indescribability of the range of topics covered in the unexpected rhizomatic turns and deviations rather than an empty nothing. If anyone asked what exactly we had gained from our walking-walking all day, grandfather said I had to say, *tafamba*, meaning, we have walked, we have journeyed. Enigmatic. Disarming.

Summed up in parts, as episodes, *nothing* told stories of a story—of an old man and a young boy on wandering walks. As a whole, it told a story of stories—from the wandering walks of an old man and a young boy. My memoir writing was therefore a form of séance, a feed-back conversation with my grandparent. *Takafamba*, meaning we walked, we journeyed. "I learnt the precious lesson that not knowing where one might be at sunrise is as important as getting nowhere in particular by sunset; a journey is a journey, whatever its misadventures. A point is made when a journey is made. A point can be a story."[3]

Walked Ground and the Undying Story of Footprints

But altogether, the grandfather-grandson dyad would place the stories in the long history of fathers and sons, the undying story of footprints. In her introduction to *The Walker's Anthology* (2013), Deborah Manley reminds us of the prehistoric origins and mythopoetic qualities of walking and footprint making in modern human history when she writes, "[m]any centuries ago two people—possibly an adult and a child—walked in soft, muddy ground in the Olduvai Gorge in present day Kenya. And, still walking, the descendants of these two went on to walk right across our world", and continue to do so whether for leisure, exercise or survival.[4]

So, when my grandfather said, "I've no story to tell you now, let's go walking-walking", it meant he had plenty of stories to tell me but did not know which to start with, or how to start. First, he had to think of feet and the

intentional act of renewing and firming up footprints. Walking was like the ignition key he needed to restart and let his mind run idle. Behind his need to think in motion, to tell stories while the body was moving—to marry walking limb to speaking tongue—was a clearly thought-out interactive heuristic approach to knowledge sharing.

Trudging, trotting, leaping, hobbling; the theory and method were suited to the environment and terrain, with paths through a village full of inquisitive neighbours, who would enquire after a passer-by's health, even if the answer was inconsequential and the traveller unknown to them. There were those who shook a neighbour's hands forever and turned the wayside into a layby for the telling and retelling of village goings-on. It did not matter that grandfather had heard the stories before or was the one who had first told one of the stories now being repeated back to him.

On a walk like this, stories had a way of circling back to the first mouth that uttered them and being retold as if new or a community creation. "Yes, you told us this, but you should also have told us about that one, and that day, too." It became the story of trajectories and connections. I had people I grew up with reminding me of stories I had once told, or that were told about me when I was a little boy, some of which they retold to others in my presence. They insisted that the stories that they wanted to hear recapped should appear in my childhood memoir or else it would not be complete or authentic.

If we visit Jo Lee Vergunst for a moment, and we follow and adapt his thoughts on how a lived life may be viewed as "walked ground which takes on a different character according to the patterns of use and social networks that encompass it", we can understand how "overgrown paths" are construed as a sign of "deteriorated relations between villages that were once socially close".[5] In my case, "allowing a path to fall out of use" would metaphorically speaking therefore have been viewed by my homeboys and -girls as an active avoidance or forgetting of social relations in our changing social and physical landscape.

I had experienced the same when walking with grandfather, when a villager would wave his hand frantically and shout his accusations: "You no longer use the path that passes by my home. Why? Are we no longer friends? Where you walked-walked, did someone tell you I now bewitch grandsons?" In the villager's mouth, "walked-walked" cast aspersions on grandfather's conduct. It meant he had travelled far and wide to seek information that would malign the villager. Grandfather would apologise, distance himself from such terrible insinuations and explain that he was afraid of the villager's many dogs which were never leashed. "Just shout when you pass by, and I will put them on a leash so we can talk. It is good for neighbours to talk!" So, the villager could not allow the path, and the relationships and stories it invited, to fall out of use, even though it was most desirable for grandfather to avoid it. Just as a path may be overgrown metaphorically and socially, so can memories be. In such circumstances, creative writing as walking becomes a form of returning a memory to regular or special use.

My homeboys and -girls were therefore asking me to revive and re-walk for them the paths whose stories had not vanished with my footprints. Now a man, the depluming of my mother's entire flock of live chickens right to the last feather on their skin described in a chapter I titled "Chicken Fleas and Book Lice" was something I was unhappy to recollect, although it was quite in keeping with my overdeveloped childhood curiosity. But the village wanted this footprint accorded its rightful place in their collective memory of a naughty boy who became a professor of stories in a faraway country. It helped them to story my place in their place, and their place in mine. This is perhaps what Dwayne Donald would call "an intentional act of relational renewal", an invitation to enmeshment in relationships and place-making memories.[6] It is the reason I call the place "my Rusape". I have since moved very far from Rusape, and now live and work in Johannesburg, but it makes my writing on this memory of walking-walking with my grandfather a self-reflexive realisation of the motions and connections that

launched my childhood memoir.

Stories Have Legs, Where and How We Walk Matters

With his story now in his neighbour's mouth, I listened for the first time to a story that grandfather had told others and watched him listen to his own story being told by someone else, sometimes as he had told it, to others as diverse listeners had truncated and re-versioned it. It was not the details remembered that mattered, or the mouth in which it sojourned and perchance bred its own offspring, but the retention, dispersal and renewal of a memory, however it was dressed up and transported. I learned that stories have legs to walk on. As travelling stories, they had velocity, agility, flexibility and impact that could be appreciated in different ways at destinations or various meeting points.

Telling a story and listening to it while in a chair and at a desk, is always constrained by a sense of space, time and place. One stands up to go when the telling is done or when a signal is given. Along the wayside or on the path, it requires a different practice of listening or telling while walking away or walking on. One walks with, along or around the story, circling or stretching it. Or one physically runs away, as my character does after listening to Aaron narrate on our way from school how he dealt with a villain in "The Rape of Chemwandoita". I wrote: "After escaping the telling, I felt my body burn to a smouldering stump. I had nightmares in which scars mushroomed all over my body and someone tried to wipe my backside with a burning stick. I would wake up gasping for breath."[7]

But the story told along the way was also the equivalent of a greeting, a social exchange, that can be repeated on the same day with different wayfarers or the same neighbour—like, "Ah, what you told me in the morning!" or, "I promised to tell you the rest of it on your way back…" It depended mostly on the quality and complexity of the social networks that the pathway invited or constructed. In "Taking a Trip and Taking Care in Everyday Life", Vergunst reminds us of how paths index social relations and embody the social networks that produce them. Therefore, the pace with which one walks through the village is largely dependent on the density and vitality of these social networks and the snags along the way that one must circumvent or overcome.[8]

After an exploration of the profound relationship between walking and thinking and writing, Ferris Jabr advises that, "[w]here we walk matters as well".[9] In my grandfather's case, who did not walk-walk to write but to kickstart ways of telling stories, it was not a village to pass through quickly, nor were they pathways to be traversed without encountering varying degrees of social and symbolic viscosity.

On the last point, I could not help recalling the mass of stories that feet and wheels imprinted daily on the gravel road that I walked on barefoot to and from my primary school in Rusape, to the extent that I wrote: "I was very young when this happened, but like everyone else, I caught up with the much-told story just as I caught up on the myths of the much-travelled road. Every square foot of the thoroughfare was the source of astonishing stories."[10] It was like tramping through a social maze or hiking a series of story dumps created while walking.

Hurdles, Tripping, Slipping, Epiphanous!

In The *Scandalous Times of a Book Louse*, I had to think of these kinds of experiences, and cautioned both myself and the reader: "My whole life is a series of digressions. From fate. I am not a story that you can rush through."[11] It is a metaphor available to one who has walked their thoughts and body through a variety of experiences and environments. A digression can be one way to approach hurdles and thickets, or to elaborate

on social and symbolic networks that may overflow a single path/plot.

A hurdle can be a social one in the form of neighbours or dogs that grandfather was so desperate to avoid. That could cause us to either retreat, walk home fast or take a circuitous route. On such occasions, grandfather would break the story he was telling me, which could have been about the neighbour who had just retold his story, details of which grandfather wanted to elaborate, revise or correct for me, or use to launch into the missing dimensions and contexts of other stories he had told elsewhere that had yet to reach my ears. He would then tell me about the villager he was avoiding—the one he always accused of sending the lightning bolt that killed his pregnant daughter, for example—or simply say, "remind me later about that singing, Bible-kissing man who is zigzagging behind us, I will tell you something (not everything!) about him."

A story told while the body is in motion, on an evasive trajectory, is prone to the vicissitudes of events and the vagaries of memory: it may never be returned to again, as many more veer into its place to displace, rearrange or repress it. The content of the resuscitated story—abridged, abandoned or paused in a hasty retreat—was only interesting in relation to what was picked up, discarded or deferred to the new circumstances that incited its recollection. That could be many months later, or never!

A hurdle can also be physical. Uneven surface of path or a protrusion produce a trip. When a foot hits a stump or obstacle, it causes *kugumburwa*, to stumble and fall. The experience of tripping because of *chigumbu*, a projection or stump on the path, is common and well-remembered, to the extent that the physical occurrence has found place in the Shona lexicon of pain. *Chigumbu* now describes bitterness, a grudge, resentment, heartbreak. The projection that causes tripping is now linked to an offensive action. Largely, *chigumbu* enjoys the status of a metaphor for bitter resentment, a stump lodged in the heart.

Among young children, tripping was often a result of blindingly walking into *tsinde* grass traps —strands of long green grass knotted across the path and hidden from view by naughty neighbours who enjoyed the spectacle of an unwary wayfarer suddenly meeting the ground in a dramatic way.

A hurdle can be psychological too. Here tripping can be a result of *chigumbu,* a stump in the heart, a bitterness picked up from life itself, which causes blindness or inattentiveness to one's physical environment. In this case, tripping is caused by one's state of mind that makes it difficult for the walker's feet to negotiate the textures of the path with good judgement and agility. Another example of a psychological hurdle is related to a different kind of attentiveness which is ironically distracting. One of the most frequent causes of tripping in this category of psychological hurdles is *chiringa,* the staring syndrome that I write about in my memoir.[12] Head turning sideways and backwards to stare intently at fascinating objects on the wayside as the body moves forwards, creating disorder in motion dynamics, a victim of this engrossed inquisitiveness loses sight of his way.

Like plots, pathways produce surprises and misadventures that help check the progress of a body in motion and reset the stream of its thoughts to invite a recognition of the materiality of the environment itself, which can easily be taken for granted. If this were writing, they could be called disruptive techniques and innovations that call attention to what the beaten path hides and assist in renewing perception and alertness. It produces the kind of surprise that Sun Tzu in *The Art of War* might have labelled as novel. To adapt Vergunst, the speed of the movement/attack, which takes a mere moment to occur, is a seamless and exceptional fusion of art and form, "[t]he person tripping is unaware of the technicalities and is more or less surrendered to the interaction of forces and impacts."[13]

It is an art of falling that is not performed to a gallery, rather it is personally and privately executed. It is essentially an impromptu solo act that requires no rehearsal; like life itself it must be experienced bodily in order to be appreciated. No amount of observing others' tripping or being told about it would replace performing one. It is a perfect illustration of what is meant by immersion and keeping eye contact with the realities of the environment in which one walks and thinks. Was it not Socrates who reminded us of Thales, a prototype of the contemplative walking man, who fell into a pit while studying the stars?[14]

Nowhere else is this surprise and accident produced by tripping described so dramatically as in Vergunst's "Taking a Trip and Taking Care in Everyday Life":

> Contact between an object, which becomes an obstacle, and one of the feet happens during the lifted phase of the foot's movement, when it should be travelling unhindered above the ground. The rhythm of the foot is brought to a shuddering halt, and the leg lifts and tries to hurdle the object. The other foot, meanwhile, is normally planted on the ground but may jump forward in reaction and compensation, if the obstructed foot is unable to move. The momentum of the upper body may carry the walker so far forward as to prevent the regaining of balance by either foot, and the stumble becomes a fall forwards.[15]

While one is awed by the physics of tripping in Vergunst's description, the poetics and aesthetics of it are effortless, efficient, fluent and impactful. However, where the fall is broken, which I interpret to mean when a plot is full of suspense and suggestion but does not climax, "the walker moves the arms forward to help regain balance, sometimes may trot for a pace or two to come out of the stumble, and sometimes looks down or behind" in shock or surprise.[16] This is where introspection starts; a glimpse of the world in a single stumble, reconstruction of experience, a review of walking practice and gait characteristics that would have led to such unwelcome surprises.

In another example of a tripping in which the victim breaks the fall on a hillside, Vergunst explains the unwelcome expectedness of a trip:

> On the hillsides, trips often occur when the foot moving above the ground hits against something—rock, perhaps—and knocks into the back of the standing leg. In one sense the walking rhythm is disrupted by the invasion of the obstacle into the foot's movement, but what is interesting is the readjustment of the body that allows the movement to continue. The walker skilfully rebalances: quickly lifting a foot, planting the other down in a different spot, shifting weight with the arms and the back. The trip becomes just one set of adjustments amongst others. It forms an episode of the journey rather than something outside of it.[17]

Another accident comparable to the trip is a slip. I shall sketch it as I understand it from practical experience while walking with my grandfather, as well as from Vergunst's matchless description. In slipping—the slippery "environment does not intrude enough into the movements of walking'" the result is a stumble and falling backwards, while in tripping (foot meets an obstruction)—one stumbles and falls forwards. The main difference, however, is the way a slip happens and the theatrics in the physics of falling backwards:

> The first reaction is, like the trip, an attempt to correct the situation with the free foot, which

> immediately slaps onto the ground with the impact on the ball of the foot. If the free foot is not fast enough in restoring steadiness, or cannot gain purchase and slips itself, the standing foot continues sliding forward. It either halts when it is able to grip again, or moves above the ground and causes the walker to fall backwards. Here there is an excess of movement; in the part of the step where we rely on the ground to stop the foot moving, the foot instead slips onwards, and the rhythmical rolling motion of the foot is changed to fast-forward acceleration.[18]

The performance of a trip or a slip is always very brief, a flash, but its effect is staggering—pun unavoidable! As a drama, it is equivalent to a skit, and in memoir writing a sketch. If it goes on for longer than a mere moment, it loses its punch—again, pun!—and falls into the realm of parody and hyperbole.

But the art of getting up from a trip or a slip is messy, often a scramble, a roll, which may lead to tottering, falling again, titters and tsk-tsk sounds of pitying by co-walkers and bystanders, and arms reaching out to pull the victim to their feet. In some cultures, falling (through tripping or slipping) is an example of embarrassing awkwardness. In studies that link walking, thinking and falling, it is sometimes viewed as a result of gait disorder and its associated cognitive decline.[19]

I learned while walking with my grandfather that in my culture there are ways of avoiding pity for the fallen person by describing the victim as a hero and hunter "who has touched the ground". On seeing me on all fours, scrambling up from a tumble, grandfather would shout with delight, *Wabata mbeva*!, meaning "You have caught a mouse!" Not an easy task, as it requires the agility of a cat, the ability to leap and land on hard ground without shattering one's bones. And where I come from, mice are a delicacy, which is why the bruises on the elbows, toes, knees, forehead and back of the head collected in a fall were considered no mean achievement.

In my grandfather's walking world, tripping and slipping simulated meaningful social contact with the earth, my world, rehearsals for an adult role of hunter, provider and protector. The wounds accrued from the experience were indices that separated men from boys! In my memoir, I recall writing about my ill-fated long walk to join the war of liberation in Mozambique. I was in a group of boys, all of us in our early teens. "I too had scars", I wrote, as I recalled our barefoot journey.

The scars. Boys to men! It didn't end there. So, when I tripped or slipped, I was falling into my culture, wallowing in some history, adding myself to an old story of footprints, behind or beside which we walked. Leg and footprint the very technology of dispersing the self and history in time and space. Hence the notion that stories have legs from which to unfold.

Walking Behind, Walking in Front, Walking beside Grandfather: What Is the Story!

The spot one occupies when listening to a story while walking-walking is just as important as adopting position(s) in writing or in research. In walking-walking, there is no fixed position to listen from, although status is somehow fixed.[20] In my case, the old man is my grandfather, and I am his little grandson, trotting behind him, trudging by his side and leap-walking in front of him. When I got older, close to entering my teens, I strode in front of him, plodded by his side and marched behind him. As age caught up with him, he hobbled along the path, waddled through sandy and grassy patches, slid into and crawled out of shallow gorges. But the stories he told never changed. They were always about footprints and one's relationship to them, the ones long gone and still to come.

In doing pre-publication research for my childhood memoir, which at some point I imagined as a version of autoethnography rather than creative research, and contemplating what kind of creative research *The Scandalous Times of a Book Louse* is after it was published, I appreciated that there is always a before and an after in creative writing—a process of continuous review and rewriting. I soon realised the importance of adopting revolving points of view; slipping in and out of narrating positions, quickly lifting a foot, planting the other down in a different spot, shifting weight and perspective, to depict a more complete sense of the multiple dimensions of an elephant, unlike the blind men in the ancient Indian parable. My grandfather knew how to deliver a story in the same way, and choose the type of story depending on whether I was walking behind him, in front of him or by his side.

When I was walking behind him, as happened most of the time so I could follow in his footprints, so to speak, he told stories of seed and deed, our clan and the family tree. He liked to repeat how my clan, whose totem is The Leg, *gumbo*, are born walkers and wanderers, wore paths across lands from one corner of the country (the west) to the south, and ended up in the eastern parts. Setting out from the western parts of the country where the Korekore people live, one of my ancestors called Gutu (originally Chimukutu, on account of the quiver of arrows he always carried on his back) set out towards the south of the country, present-day Masvingo Province.

Walking in front of me, leading the way, as if he was Gutu himself—long, spritely strides, shoulders slightly hunched on account of the backpack and quiver of arrows he was carrying—grandfather entered the world of wild animals, dark forests, rolling and rising mountains, sparsely populated valleys and plains, and sojourns in deep caves, until he reached the place where he was detained by transfixing stories of a huge aggressive buffalo that terrorised villagers in the area.[21] Seeing him stooping from the weight of arrows on his back, they reasoned that Gutu was a mighty hunter, whereas he was essentially a nomadic walker, a man who was wandering away from a mythic disagreement with his father.[22] When Gutu asked whether there were no men in the village who could keep the village safe from this wild animal, the answer from the women was that there were men, a lot of them, a hundred and a dozen more, but that they preferred to hide on the hut roofs or under the skirts of their women whenever they saw the buffalo approaching. Gutu then asked if there was a chief in the area. The answer was, yes, there was, but like the men he led, he too would rather be safe than sorry.

Here grandfather would slow his pace, turn around to face me, and look long and deep into my eyes, like Gutu must have done when he was studying the situation of the villagers, for him to assess the effect of his storytelling on me and to ensure that I was following.

The problem was that the presence of this marauding beast in the area interfered with important social activities; men could no longer go out to hunt or fish, women could not go out to bath in the river or fetch firewood and suitors could not tryst far from the eaves of their mothers' huts. Hunger gnawing their bellies, the children were crying, a situation that was not helped by the constant telling of sightings of the beast and the wounds it had inflicted on so-and-so. "I will slay your buffalo!", Gutu finally announced after the quailing chief had implored him to take care of himself, as the death of a stranger in their midst would not bode well for the clan and his chieftainship. "But what will you give me in return?"

Grandfather told of the intriguing deal that was cut between Gutu and the local chief: since Gutu had arrived in this area alone, just walking-walking as he had said, he could make home here, and the chief would supply him with enough women to start a family. The women were they beautiful! Ehe-e! A special breed indeed, selected to match his tall physique, they walked with the long sweeping strides of a secretary bird, and when they had children, they carried them on their high backs, which swayed in the wind like fruit-laden trees. Indeed, I saw

evidence of this beauty and graceful tallness in my great grandaunts! It is the reason the women folk in my clan are praised as *Magumbo*, bearer of the long legs! The stride. The beauty. She of the graceful walk.

The agreement witnessed, Gutu went to work. He not only slew the fierce buffalo but brought the meat and the hide to the villagers, making him an instant provider and protector. With time, the villagers started whispering about the waning influence of the chief and the rising power of Gutu, the wanderer and walker who had settled among them. To cut a long story short, the chief was finally deposed, having been put out of use by his own people whom he could not protect from the buffalo until a stranger walked by. Gutu was installed chief, and by the time the white men arrived in the area, they found him ensconced on the throne. This is how *Gumbo,* the Leg Dynasty, was founded. It has its own chieftainship and one undivided totem: the Leg, *Gumbo*. Had we had another Gutu, the Leg Dynasty could easily have ruled over Masvingo, the Shona name for Great Zimbabwe itself, which lies within the province. *Gumbo ndimarase*, the leg takes you to unknown places. *Chitsva chiri mutsoka*, new things come from walking feet, grandfather would sigh, concluding his narration with aphorisms specially tailored to suit the rhythm of the walk and the history being told, his strides firmer and surer as the story trailed in my ears, pulling my story-stoned mind from the rock-strewn path, causing me to stumble.

"*Fambisa iwe!* Move fast, you!", grandfather would cajole, when he felt my pace slacken behind him, lost as I was in the story and in my own thoughts. He would then grab me by the hand, manoeuvre me into a position beside him, his hand patting my shoulder gently, reassuringly. The story had no real conclusion, as it was continued, but with varying emphases on the goodness of feet and walking, which scattered Gutu's good seed to the east of the country, where present-day Rusape is. One of Gutu's ambitious warrior-sons, Machingauta (on account of the bow and arrows he always carried), following similar walking-walking inherited from his honourable parent, made home in the mountains and valleys of Rusape, where he bred sons and daughters taller than himself and more beautiful than those among whom his father had found a home and a chieftainship. I come from his legs, and the stories they carried.

Now walking by grandfather's side, I felt the tenor of the stories change with the terrain, from serious mythical and historical to playful banter between grandson and grandfather. He was naughty, too, treating me like a buddy with whom to share the secrets of tall and beautiful women and passing on seed and deeds. It was grandfather who taught me the meaning behind the words of praise poetry in our clan, telling me how the Leg became a synecdoche for the penis, a man's third leg, and how it is that men of the *Gumbo* totem are much sought after by good-looking, son-bearing women.

On more than one occasion, grandfather took me to beer parties. Why? As his trusted little grandson, each time a gourd of beer was passed to him, he offered it to me to take a sip first. It was meant to ensure that the beer was not poisoned. But it was not at all strange for young boys to sip a little of the potent brew, with grandfather sometimes dropping a few grains of sugar into it to nip the bite in the bud. As he trickled the sugar into my beer, or as I took a sip, he would find a way to insert the clan's praise poetry into the conversation.

I wrote:

> Grandfather told me it was a healthy morning meal for young boys and was comparable to ProNutro. He also said it gave boys the verve for hard work in the fields and the va-va-voom when they were old enough to know what to do with ripe girls. As a member of the Gumbo totem, he said, I had my work cut out for me. After a cupful of Grandfather's concoction, I felt a full member and potentially useful fellow of my clan as extolled in its praise poetry. It made sense to sing the *hotokoto* he-goat dance song with

> him on our way back home. The coveted Gumbo clan could fail dismally in other respects, but never in digging and tamping the dark and mysterious pitch between a woman's legs, Grandfather said.[23]

I wanted to sing, I wanted to shout, "I am the child that walking-walking sired, I the Leg!" He would laugh long and loud when he saw my eyes pop with anticipation of the delights promised by my totem, the Leg! He would totter out of the way, take a pee, a strategy to ensure I would not look back or fall back, but move in front of him, eyes front! He would then walk behind me, and after a long meaningful silence, introduce a different topic that suited the land features we were approaching or passing.

Most of the time, when he was walking behind me, he told stories of mystery, adventure and mischief. One day he made a comment about how one should always be wary of crossroads or a fork in the path. The fork in the path is the fulcrum upon which the final misadventures in *The Scandalous Times of a Book Louse* turn, and has the status of an existential dilemma, but what he told me about the ghost he met and shared a beer with one night is the stuff of great stories. He had to tell me at night, when we were approaching a crossroads as we walked-walked, owls hooting in the background, him shuffling behind me, his shadow shifting under my feet and my kinky hair standing on end. He had mistaken the apparition for a man he knew, he said. When it asked for a sip from the container he was carrying, he offered it:

> The man raised the *chigubu* [container of beer] to his lips and guzzled mouthfuls of the heady brew. Between breathy gulps, he threw in choice phrases from my grandfather's clan praise poetry that denoted the men as overly generous when dining as well as (*hetsu*!) in bed. That made Grandfather laugh, and the poetry continued. Then Grandfather realised that the man was drinking more than he was talking. He asked the man to stop and scolded him for abusing his generosity. Ignoring him, the man tilted his head back and grew taller and taller with each swallow. When a stream of beer missed his mouth and flowed down his chest and legs, Grandfather grabbed at the container, but it was just out of reach. With each subsequent attempt to repossess his *chigubu*, the man hoisted it higher into the sky, quaffing and belching mightily. Then he saw *it*. This was not in fact a man. No, it was a frame of bones with tiny shrubs [of] the resurrection plant growing from its sockets, crevices, and ribs. The beer was not going down a throat, but cascading over the sternum, the spinal column, the pelvis, the femurs, and tibias into the soil.[24]

Grandfather's imitation of the weird laughter that accompanied the rattling footsteps that pounded the earth behind him as he fled the scene was spinechilling. I shook to my toes and ran back to him, my shorts suddenly wet. That is when he would make me walk by his side, steadying me, changing the story to that about a lovely mother[25] and his loyal dog called Sport or Spot, which features prominently in "Spot the Difference".

But occasionally there would also be long stretches of silence between grandfather and grandson, when I would trail far behind him, or walk far ahead of him, both of us pulled from each other by the motions of our own thoughts or the need to negotiate tricky paths differently. These occasions would invite us to explore what Lee and others called "being present to interiority" while traversing the external world[26], the more dramatic expressions of which were in the form of grandfather's audible muttering and noisy monologues, which he complemented with intermittent headshaking, frenetic throwing of hands in the air and vigorous kicking out of the way of straw and loose stones.

With time, I managed to stitch together a roving narrative about what made grandfather be here, elsewhere and somewhere all at once each time his loud monologues flashed. The more frequently performed talking-to-no-one-while-walking-with-someone script was the result of a stump lodged in his heart. It was brought about by how he had lost his pregnant daughter through a lightning strike caused by a man she had jilted. But his other noisy solo talk shows held while walking-walking evidenced the knotted thoughts in his head and the uneven surfaces he needed to smoothen in his interior landscape; the pathways resembled spaces for the unfolding and untying he required. I later learned this trick myself when doing solo walks.

These interactions with my grandfather inspired my creative practice when I wrote my childhood memoir. In the context of thinking in motion, my walking-walking with my grandfather offers the potential for aesthetic practice—its episodes, surprises and accidents, its peculiar method of unfolding stories expresses what Raymond Lucas might have considered "a metaphor for creative practice itself."[27] It reminds me of the many iterations involved in routines of walking-walking, which are recursive and new at the same time.

An example of the way in which walking-walking influenced my memoir writing is captured in the interview I had with Deborah Minors in August 2021:

> **DM**: To what extent did Creative Research inform your memoir and, if it did, how?
>
> **RM**: I was not conscious that I was doing creative research. First, I had lost two versions of *The Consecutive Days Everything Went Wrong*, the nucleus of *The Scandalous Times of a Book Louse*. As time went by, I found myself having to depend on archival techniques to reconstruct my memories, and the objects and places associated with them. What was written had become oral and had to become written again. As I grew older and was seized by the impulse to look over the shoulder and gauge the distance covered, and plumb the meaning of certain pathways and digressions, I struggled with the form that the memoir would take.
>
> [...] The Creative Research that you allude to helped me to bend and reorient the conventions of both creative and academic writing. I immersed myself in the communities in which I grew up, interviewing, collecting objects and memories. There were also instances of audience participation in the reconstruction and positioning of some recollections when some people I grew up with instructed me not to exclude particular events and stories that we had co-created—or that they remembered me most for—as children playing on various sandpits and riverbanks. The plot itself is influenced by not only the glut of events and disparate episodes that make up a life, but an epiphany I had lately.
>
> I recently realized my subconscious admiration for unexpected and wandering beginnings and endings. In July 2021, when I was preparing to respond to your questions for this piece, I came across something I had published in 1999, when I was still struggling out of my academic diapers. It was a comment on one of Dambudzo Marechera's children's stories called "Fuzzy Goo's Guide to the Earth". I wrote: "Because it is a rather grim, peripatetic story with too long a tether, it wanders, uninhibited, over all places, gathering what it can, without settling into any conventional mold or committing itself to any ritual related to departure or arrival. It begins anywhere, proceeds everywhere, and ends anyhow, sending chills along the viewer's spine with each turn or footfall. In that way, Marechera forestalls that tendency of form to arrest—an ultimate rejection of rigidity through insistent dissent." If I had presented the manuscript of the memoir to a Creative Writing Department as a research proposal, I would have proffered this quotation as my "creative method".[28]

Postamble

Walking-walking, which begins anywhere, proceeds everywhere and ends anyhow, is deployed consciously as a clearly identified methodology for creative research in "Double Shuffle", a chapter in my memoir. In this chapter, my character is with an unnamed companion, "on a ramble through vanished things. Things that were here."[29] It is one of several instances of intensive thinking in motion, but on foot. Other chapters relate to thinking and talking while cycling on an old Raleigh, a Humber, or the iconic Royal Enfield bicycle "made like a gun" to shoot one into the distance.

In my case, thinking in motion while walking-walking can be revisited and applied retrospectively as creative research practice. While the village paths have long disappeared due to "progress" and "development", they have remained in my head, unaltered, rocky, winding, knotted networks.

"A foot can wear a path on a rock face", grandfather used to say after I had stumped my toe on its rough and uneven surfaces. "Hurdles propel thoughts and stories", he would say after a slip or a trip. The memoir produced from such walking and thinking is what grandfather would have considered a footprint on a rock face. *Tafamba*. We have walked. *Gumbo mutsvairo*. The foot is a broom, it clears a path for itself. And for others.

So, even today as I write about thinking in motion as a creative approach and reflect on my memoir as an example of productive connections between movement and knowing,[30] "I feel that my early childhood has always walked in front of me, like a shadow when the sun shines behind my back."[31] It makes my writing on this memory of walking-walking with my grandfather a self-reflexive study of the motions and influences that launched my memoir.

Footnotes

1. Cuelenaere, Laurence. "Aymara Forms of Walking: A Linguistic Anthropological Reflection on the Relationship Between Language and Motion". *Language Sciences*. Vol. 33. 2011. pp. 126–37.
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3. Muponde, Robert. *The Scandalous Times of a Book Louse: A Memoir of a Childhood*. Cape Town: Penguin Books. 2021. p. 8.
4. Manley, Deborah. *The Walker's Anthology*. Hindhead: Trailblazer Publications. 2013. p. 7.
5. Vergunst, Jo Lee. "Taking a trip and Taking Care in Everyday Life". In *Ways of Walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot*. Edited by Tim Ingold and Jo Lee Vergunst. London: Routledge. 2006. p. 114.
6. Donald, Dwayne. "We Need a New Story: Walking and the *Wahkohtowin* Imagination". *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies*. Vol. 18. No.2. 2021. p. 56.
7. Muponde, *Book Louse*, pp.302–14.
8. Vergunst, "Taking a Trip", p. 114.

9. Jabr, Ferris. “Why Walking Helps Us Think”. *The New Yorker*. 3 September 2014. p. 3.
10. Muponde, *Book Louse*, p. 83.
11. Muponde, *Book Louse*, p. 272.
12. Muponde, *Book Louse*, p. 371.
13. Vergunst, “Taking a Trip”, p. 109.
14. O’Sullivan, Toimothy M. “The Mind in Motion: Walking and Metaphorical Travel in the Roman Villa”. *Classical Philosophy*. Vol. 101. 2006. p. 141.
15. Vergunst, “Taking a Trip”, p. 109.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., pp. 109–10.
19. Alexander, Neil B. and Hausdorff, Jeffrey M. “Linking Thinking, Walking, and Falling”., *Journal of Gerontology*. Vol. 63A. No.12. 2008, pp. 1325–28.
20. If a happy one, the relationship between a grandfather and a grandson may be a playful but established hierarchy in which forms of respect remain fixed. Authority and authoritative accounts flow from the grandfather to the grandson, not vice versa. It is the role of the grandson to ask but not to tell, while the latter assumes possession of transmittable knowledge. How this traditional arrangement and issues around age, gender and politics of representation may be rethought or subverted is subject for a different paper altogether.
21. Some oral versions say that it was a rhinoceros. Whether buffalo or rhino, they’re fierce beasts all the same!
22. Somehow the nature of the disagreement is never explained. See Tarugarira, Gilbert. “Dimensions of Totemic History and its Related Accessories among the Gumbo-Madyirapazhe clan of Gutu, Zimbabwe”. *Dande: Journal of Social Sciences and Communication*. 2017. pp. 18–28.
23. Muponde, *Book Louse*, pp. 173–74.
24. Muponde, *Book Louse*, pp. 174–75.
25. See the chapters in my memoir titled “The Running Man” and “To Make a Feast”.
26. Lee et al., “Walking Propositions”.
27. Lucas, Ray. “‘Taking a Line for a Walk’: Walking as an Aesthetic Practice”. In *Ways of Walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot*. Edited by Tim Ingold and J. Vergunst. London: Routledge. 2006. p. 169.
28. Minors, Deborah. “The Scandalous Times of a Book Louse”. Interview 23 August 2021. Available at https://www.wits.ac.za/news/latest-news/research-news/2021/2021-08/the-scandalous-times-of-a-book-louse.html (accessed 2024-01-06).
29. Muponde, *Book Louse*, p. 267.
30. Donald, “We Need a New Story”, p. 61.
31. Muponde, *Book Louse*, p. 10.