

TRIGGER WARNING: CONTENT CONTAINS DISCUSSION OF RAPE AND TRAUMA

The Speed of Life

Now that our one-to-one TRC is done,
no cameras, counselors, note-takers, translators and the archbishop
I thank you for asking that we speak.
Now as we speed away in different directions, again
without cameras, counselors, note-takers, translators and the archbishop,
I ask for silence.
I cannot bear the piercing echoes:
I am sorry
I didn't know
I simply don't understand how I could have been so self-absorbed
It's so out of character
It feels so long ago, so unclear
I just wish to pace through my journey at the regular speed of life,
forever
with no cameras, counselors, note-takers, translators and the archbishop.

Makhosazana Xaba / from: *Tongues of their mothers* (p.8)

Makhosazana Xaba, *Tongues of their mothers* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2008)

Redi Tlhabi / from: *KHWEZI: The Remarkable Story of Fezekile Ntsukela Kuzwayo* (p.62-65)

Redi Tlhabi, *KHWEZI: The Remarkable Story of Fezekile Ntsukela Kuzwayo* (Jeppestown: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2017)

'Poet and writer Makhosazana (Xhosi) Xaba, a nurse who joined the anti-apartheid struggle after witnessing the cruelty of the apartheid state during student protests in Durban in the 1970s, relates an incident in which she was nearly raped as she got off the train while doing underground work. She was a trained soldier who would not have hesitated to use a gun, had she had one.

"I can handle an AK, make no mistake."

"An AK-47? A real gun?"

She first laughs at my shudder- silly, really, because I know I am talking to a soldier, but guns have always terrified me. I don't get to finish my question because in her loud, animated voice, she answers, "Oh yes, a man who is about to rape me? I would shoot him."

...These are the women and girls whom the old country violated and the new ones neglected. In the old country, there was no point in reporting rape in police custody.

Liberators and oppressors had something in common: their propensity for violence and demand for women's bodies. Two enemies, polarized by politics, yet in agreement that the female body was theirs to take.

Sexual violence was part of the DNA of the struggle. It is in society's DNA today. Khosi gives me food for thought and challenges my casual extrapolation of the link between healing and talking. I am particularly passionate about the absence of women's voices in the struggle narrative. So many have written about their experiences. It is time for those voices to be heard. But Khosi asks, "Heard by whom? By other women, who were victims themselves?"

"Heard from which platform, so that perpetrators know that victims are not hiding and will not give them the victory they want," I suggest.

"It is difficult for women to claim space. It is a struggle, a negotiation. And in what format are women expected to talk?"

"Well, if they don't talk, then the violence goes unmentioned, unaccounted for."

"But talking about it does not guarantee justice," she says.

I know that too well from Fezekile's journey. "True. But I cannot help believing that patriarchy and sexual violence demand our silence in order to thrive. That even when justice is denied, withheld, perpetrators must know that we know who they are and how they operate. At least some of these horrible experiences must be written about. If not to document personal pain and loss, perhaps to provide teachable moments for future generations?"

"Writing? Writing is tedious, even for me as a writer. And to whom must they talk?"

She has a valid point.

"Have you thought about the value of silence?" she continues.

"Huh?"

"Think about it. Keeping quiet in order to be secure- that was the *modus operandi*. Silence is complicated. It is negative at times, but if it keeps you alive, is it still negative? Even lying was a security measure, some form of protection. Do you know that as an activist, you lied to everyone- your friends, your family, your comrades? Little and big lies kept you alive. The less people knew about you- your weaknesses, your fears- the better. Do you know that it took me years to stop lying? I had to consciously and deliberately work at it. I had been so used to lying to stay alive. I had to unlearn that."

"So, lies kept you safe and created a layer that others do not penetrate. Lying as security, protection- I had not thought of that in relation to sexual violence."

"Okay, but going back to the justice denied aspect: isn't the problem here, that silence and walking away comes from a belief that nothing will be done? And silence and shame, while understandable, are the reasons why perpetrators entrench their power. The silence and shame are the reasons institutions do not transform and take sexual violence seriously."

"I am not sure about that."

(p.12-13)

'I recalled a late-night conversation in which I had asked Fezekile if she had come to terms with everything that had happened to her.

She paused for a long time. Then asked, "How do you define 'come to terms'?"

"I don't know. You know, like losing a limb, your eyesight. Something you cannot reverse. You wake up with it every day but are not always conscious of it? You accept it as part of your life, a chapter in your journey. Something like that."

"I wish I had lost a limb. Rape is like death."

I thought about saying, but did not: *But you did not die, Fez. They didn't destroy you.'*

(original emphasis)

Nondumiso Lwazi Msimanga / from: journal entry on 24 September 2017, written at Europa Rosebank Mall; in response to page 13, or, the above

'I am very glad you didn't say that to her, that she did not die. Because, if we are trying to find ways to define rape, and if the likeness to war is still not quite right, then as much as we don't know what death truly and definitively is but, we are able to mourn its very existence then Death is about right to me. But, because you're still here and still fighting [to live again] we want to call it something else because we don't understand it; but we won't, as with death. Yet, with death, we can call it wrong with clarity when it is a crime and understanding itself is a crime against trauma right?! If we need to understand to stop what is wrong, then something is very wrong with our humanity.

I'm glad you were silent instead of saying those words'

Paul Capretto / from: "Empathy and Silence in Pastoral Care for Traumatic Grief and Loss" (p.354)

Paul Capretto. (2014). "Empathy and Silence in Pastoral Care for Traumatic Grief and Loss". J Relig Health 54:1, 339-357

Levinas (1961/[1969](#)) notes that in the linguistic exchange, "[S]ilence is not a simple absence of speech; speech lies in the depths of silence like a laughter perfidiously held back. It is the inverse of language: the interlocutor has given a sign, but has declined every interpretation; this is the silence that terrifies" (p. 91). The "speech" that lies in the depths of silence is a poignant attunement to the intrapsychic workings that we are inclined to hold back.

Cooper-White ([2004](#)) similarly describes silence not as a practice of "'neutrality' but of profound respect for the complexity that might emerge from the not-yet-known-or-knowable"

...As opposed to indiscriminate silence or walking randomly into a patient's room to use silence as a "tool," therapeutic silence in grief and loss occurs in a space of non-abandonment, where it is clear that the silence is not a rejection or dismissal, but an honoring of what the pastoral caregiver could not possibly know about the loss. In these particularly difficult moments, silence provides a transitional medium for the spiritual and intrapsychic process of the loss, which cannot even be effected in isolation. Whereas private silence can help the griever to internalize and reflect upon the loss in isolation, the social and pastoral therapeutic use of silence makes a special claim to the griever: While neither of us understand what the world will look like after this loss, we are together in it. This is not a statement of empathy, nor even solidarity, for both of these make the claim that we are united in understanding or identity. It is a bolder statement still: Though our worlds may only become more different in this event, there is a meeting place at the boundary of our language—where difference and the heterogeneity of loss do not dissolve, but rather abide where we cannot articulate, yet can participate.

Jon Kabat-Zinn / from: *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation for Everyday Life* (p.129)

Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation for Everyday Life* (New York: Hyperion Books, 2014)

‘There is really and truly no one "right way" to practice, although there are pitfalls along this path too and they have to be looked out for. It is best to encounter each moment with freshness, its rich potential held in awareness. We look deeply into it, and then we let go into the next moment, not holding to the last one. Each moment then can be fresh, each breath a new beginning, a new letting go, a new letting be. Just as with our stepping over rocky terrain, there is no "supposed to" here. True, there is much to be seen and understood along this path; but it can't be forced, any more than you can force someone to appreciate the golden light of the low sun shining over fields of wheat or the moonrise in the mountains. Best not to speak at all in moments such as these. All you can do is be present with the enormity of it yourself and hope others see it in the silence of the moment. Sunsets and moonrises speak for themselves, in their own languages, on their own canvases. Silence at times leaves space for the untamed to speak.’

Nondumiso Msimanga / from: De-stressing race: documenting the ‘trauma of freedom’ in post-apartheid South Africa from the viewpoint of a black female born during the national state of emergency (1985–1990),

Nondumiso Msimanga (2015) De-stressing race: documenting the ‘trauma of freedom’ in post-apartheid South Africa from the viewpoint of a black female born during the national state of emergency (1985–1990), *South African Theatre Journal*, 28:1, 17-28,

‘At the end of the *D.I.D I?* encounter, when Ayanda sang: ‘Oh carry on, nothing really matters’, as the soundtrack to her own topographical critical event, I did not feel the morbidity which that song had carried for me as a young girl contemplating the end of my life. This was a version of the song *Bohemian Rhapsody* as sung by R&B black female duo, The Braids, in the 1990s. When we had tried to excavate the sound beneath the words we found a choked-up resonance that would not let us carry on (as the refrain goes). But as we closed that act in our play of life, the noise was freed up as we realized that we would carry on, could carry on, no matter how difficult. We had no choice but to act.

... The physical body as political site is loaded with stories every day. So, in this project race was only de-stressed to the extent that the encounter blurred the lines of the map of definition by emphasizing the existential nature of being. It still causes quotidian distress and continues to require further analysis in its everyday impact.

I have found it exceedingly difficult to write this account. I physically froze in time and space when I picked up a pen and had to think about what the process of the narrative inquiry had exhumed. The song I recalled was one that we were being taught at crèche when I was six. It was *The Peace Song*. It was the song I had sung in my head to shut out the pain of being raped by my neighbour. In drawing my own topography, as I completed

all the tasks I set for Ayanda, I realized that the image of the map of my life was as overpopulated with traumatic experiences as the apartheid homelands during those years of my life when South Africa went through the state of emergency and then the transition into freedom, or rather democracy. I had an unhappy childhood.

Amongst other assaults on my body, the much older boys at my primary school – some of whom were 16 and even 18 – constantly harassed me and touched my body as though it were something they were owed. My father lost his job and started working from home doing electronic repairs. He would beat my mother when she came home from work, as though she was the root of his retrenchment. Then my mother would cook and clean and comfort the baby (gestures performed by Ayanda during the encounter) until she would quietly go to bed to begin the cycle again. I sat for many hours in reflection, reading my journal and Ayanda's journal, pondering the stories we were yet to tell, stories that this process helped us to recall.

Freedom, for me, represented the ability to start again and regain all that was lost in the violence of the past. But after my mother divorced my father, he forced his way into our new home in the suburbs and eventually attempted to kill her by trying to stab her to death on a very peaceful day during our new democracy. And I was raped again as a teenager in free South Africa. The songs I sang in my mind in those days were different to *The Peace Song*. I had stopped believing in peace. I would separate from myself again during those critical events. Time would stand still, as it had felt to me on the day of the 1994 elections when I watched people queue from dawn to dusk. But whereas I remember people singing happily on that day, my inner child's song would be frantic as I felt my limbs dissociate from my body and my mind leave that body standing frozen in time and space until I returned to deal with the aftermath.

Did I experience apartheid? Did I have stories to tell? I did not see anyone like me telling their story during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission proceedings. I needed to share my narrative with someone else to better understand it. I needed to better understand how to deal with the contradictions of the 'trauma of freedom' and the fact that the traumas of my life during apartheid had not ended when my country became free. I needed to know that it was historical fact so I could begin to act, and with self-awareness begin to act or exist authentically. South Africa's story is my story and my story is not cut off from its history.

What I have discovered is not freedom itself; freedom was always there. It is the facticity of freedom that has caused the distress that has been called the 'trauma of freedom'. There is a paradoxical optimism that is inherent within the 'trauma of freedom'. We are and always have been free.'

Brenda Loukes / from: 'How Does Art Bring About Change? My Personal Experience of the SA's *Dirty Laundry* Art Initiative'

Brenda Loukes, 'How Does Art Bring About Change? My Personal Experience of the SA's *Dirty Laundry* Art Initiative' (brendaloukes.wordpress.com, 16 December 2016)

'I wrote in my journal:

"gut-wrenching, powerful, traumatising, abhorrent, authentic, haunting. I felt it rip through me – the shock, horror, torment, pain, shame, guilt, disgust, the feelings of the trauma that never really go away, and continue to affect one's life long after the event."

My Thoughts about Art for Change

I had lots of meditative time to reflect while drawing on that wall.

I also wondered if art can really make a difference and if so, how? From my immediate experience, I realised that the way it was making a difference was through healing.

The intensely intimate and deeply moving performance by Nondumiso, during which I was so deeply touched, portrayed the deepest emotions of shame and pain and guilt and destruction that a human being can experience. All of which I have experienced in myself and witnessed in others during my work and training as a Kahuna massage therapist. In any deep transformational type of healing modality, these emotions, in response to trauma are expressed through the body in similar ways for everyone. Crying, wailing, moaning, screaming, flailing about, going into a fetal position, wanting to run away, getting angry, kicking, bashing, gasping for breath, crying some more. This is the way we can let our traumas move through us, in order to heal. If we allow it.

Having an artist like Nondumiso bravely bare her soul and take us, the viewers, with her through this tormenting experience, allowed us to cry and wail with her, and in so doing, release some of the pain that we didn't even know we were holding in our bodies and in our emotional selves. The process of watching and feeling with her, felt like a form of healing.

I spoke to the facilitator of the bodymapping workshops, and she said that it was amazing to hear how these women have been through so much, and yet, they keep going forward. She said "For one lady, a light came on".

So back to the question, can art bring about change?

Perhaps it's not the kind of change we want or would like to imagine (a world where there is no violence and abuse.)

It creates awareness, brings the issue out into the light. We can hope that it affects a politician somewhere who puts something into action to change something at a causal level. (I like to believe that all things are possible).

And it brings about healing for those who have been affected. It makes people feel less isolated in their pain, and when we know we are not alone in our suffering, somehow it lightens the load and gives us strength to carry on.'

Ariella Azoulay / *The Civil Contract of Photography* 'Has Anyone Ever Seen a Photograph of a Rape' (p.231-233)

'During the years that I have worked on this book, I looked at thousands of images of horror of different kinds from all over the world: famine, disease, epidemics, terror attacks, houses torn down, butchered bodies, bombings, torture, mass death, and poverty. Time went by, and numerous images were registered in my memory, until I noticed that one image was absent from the various sites — newspapers, photo albums, television programs — in which images of horror are shown: the image of rape.

...I therefore assume there are photographs of rape that have been taken at the scene of the crime, from close quarters, uninterrupted, by a camera in the hands of an authorized spectator or by a camera mounted on a tripod and tripped automatically. Like any other still photograph — here I'm not dealing with videotapes — these photographs cannot speak by themselves, but bear traces that need be coaxed into speaking. Likely enough, these photographs, some of which are probably stored in police archives, show either sexual contact from which traces of violence or coercion can be extracted and reconstructed or scenes of violence from which traces of sexual contact can be drawn. It may be supposed that some of them are stomach-turning, others ambivalent and even seemingly innocent. In some of them, by their very nature, people will be seen having sexual relations without any traces of violence. Others will resemble pornographic photographs involving some or other degree of violence. Still others will show violent scenes without any traces of a sexual connection. In any event, they are all partial, insufficient to tell the entire story, and certainly not sufficient to show what rape looks like at a glance. Rape "itself" cannot be photographed except in part, and in such a way that an active gaze is required to reconstruct the event and acknowledge it as rape.'

Meg Samuelson / from: *Remembering the Nation, Dismembering Women?* 'Unspeakable Acts (Un)spoken: Disfigured Bodies in *David's Story* and *Disgrace*' (p.120-122)

Meg Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation, Dismembering Women? Stories of the South African Transition*. 'Unspeakable Acts (Un)spoken: Disfigured Bodies in *David's Story* and *Disgrace*' (Scottsville: University of Kwa-Zulu Natal Press, 2007)

'While only 40 percent of the TRC's cases of sexual abuse, where the victim's sex was specified, concerned women, "Sexual Abuse" is a central category in the final Report (See TRC 1998, 4.10 par 44-69). Sexual violence is thus produced as an experience peculiar to women.

...In his post-TRC novel, *Bitter Fruit* (2001), Achmat Danghor grapples with precisely this problematic, showing how rape, when spoken by women may be appropriated by a hegemonic discourse of male dishonor, or figured as a metaphor of male conquest. His character Lydia, articulates this discourse, speaking rape, as I have argued elsewhere, “like a man”, and then refusing to testify within the TRC, which named the violence performed on men’s bodies “torture”, and that enacted-on women “rape”. Lydia’s refusal to testify thus stems from her recognition that to do so as a victim of rape within this forum would be to confirm its production of women as victims of sexual violence, rather than to enter a therapeutic venue for self-restoration.

One of the silences “nurtured” (Sielke 2002, 4) in efforts to give voice to rape is thus the gendering of rape as something that happens only to women, which, in turn, produces women as victims of a special kind. If a failure to speak rape is a matter of concern, perhaps so too are attempts to speak the raped body within these discursive constraints.

...Without disputing the need for new discourse on rape, my readings of *David’s Story* and *Disgrace* explore contexts in which to speak rape would be as problematic as the failure to speak of it. For the characters of these novels, entering language to speak rape may entail being weighed down with the rhetoric that has been spun around rape.

...it is therefore necessary to deconstruct the binary of voice and silence (or visibility and invisibility), which proposes that the movement from silence to voice is a liberatory one.

...Those who speak may thus be silenced by language itself’

Pumla Dineo Gqola / from: *Rape: A South African Nightmare*. (p.178)

Pumla Dineo Gqola, *Rape: A South African Nightmare* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media (Pty) Ltd, 2015)

It is imperative to create the kinds of realities that give survivors healthier choices to make sense of surviving rape, to look at the ways in which our tools have not only stopped working, but the many ways in which their co-option enables them to work in anti-feminist ways.’

Nthabiseng Motsemme / from: ‘The mute Always Speak: on Women’s Silences at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’

Nthabiseng Motsemme, ‘The mute Always Speak: on Women’s Silences at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’ (Current Sociology Vol. 52 No. 5, 2004)

The central argument put forward is that evidence of [the] processes of fragmentation and agency can also be located in expressions of silence embodied and narrated by women during the TRC hearings. The article proposes that we begin to read these silences, just as we invest in reading speech and action in the social sciences. Reinterpreting silence as

another language through which women speak volumes, allows us to then explore other, perhaps hidden meanings regarding the struggle to live under apartheid.

The article also highlights how these moments of silence form part of a collective 'narrative' of how many of the testimonies became less about nation, and more to do with 'a wholeness of self, body, the family, the home, that had been breached in ways that left victims bereft of something precious' (Bozzoli, 1998: 181). It recommends that women's silences uttered at the TRC should then be viewed as part of a range of 'languages of pain and grief' to narrate often hidden but troubled elements of their recent past. In expanding our conceptual tools to understand the workings of silences, I show how this also reveals the invisible but agentic work of the imagination to reconfigure our social worlds. Finally, the article highlights how introducing more nuanced interpretations of silence adds to growing attempts to elaborate on notions of South African women's subjectivities and forms of agency with living in urban ghettos during the height of apartheid. Overall, what the article demonstrates is that when we reject dominant western oppositional hierarchies of silence and speech, and instead adopt frameworks where words, silence, dreams, gestures, tears all exist interdependently and within the same interpretive field, we find that the mute always speak.