

IMAGES OF THE WOUNDED MOUTH:
DISSONANT APPROACHES TO TRAUMA IN
GLOBAL SOUTH LITERARY, VISUAL AND PERFORMANCE
CULTURES

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Dear Dad, I finally managed. I wish you could be here to see it. This is for you and me. I love you.

DECLARATION

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Degree / Qualification:

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Title of Thesis:

*Images of the Wounded Mouth: Dissonant Approaches to Trauma in Global South
Literary, Visual and Performance Cultures*

I declare that this thesis is my own original work. Where secondary material is used, this has been carefully acknowledged and referenced in accordance with university requirements.

I understand what plagiarism is and am aware of the university policy and implications in this regard.



06 December 2018

SIGNATURE

DATE

ABSTRACT

The image of the wounded mouth is a recurring motif in cultural works both from the Global North and the Global South where it often points at the loss of verbal language in relation to some form of associated trauma. However, there is a decisive difference between language-loss as a symptomatic reaction towards a single traumatic event as explained by Western trauma theorists, and the loss of language as part of an insidious trauma, caused and perpetuated by continuing forms of structural discrimination. Classical trauma theory with its focus on individual events is often not sufficient to explain the various forms of language loss, especially those caused by the insidious trauma of slavery, colonization and other on-going forms of discrimination. This thesis examines literary and visual images primarily from the Global South to understand strategies of trauma confrontation within the ambit of what I term Global South trauma theory.

In order to exemplify this paradigm shift between ‘classical’, postcolonial and alternative Global South trauma studies and its relation to language, my project will review a cluster of images around what I call ‘the wounded mouth’. These images may include visual and textual instances of mouths that are distorted, mutilated, elided, erased, or obstructed in such a way as to hint at the violent processes of silencing that go hand in hand with, indeed underpin the colonial and neo-colonial oppression of groups and cultures over long periods of time.

In part I of the study, the insidious trauma of displacement and the loss of indigenous languages (tongues) are exemplified with reference to a number of works where language loss *as* insidious trauma is implicitly contrasted to individual traumas that *have led to* the ‘wounding of the mouth’. In part 2 of the study, the focus shifts to works of literature and art that focus upon insidious trauma, and teases out the ways in which such works may unintentionally perpetrate the victimization caused by insidious trauma, or conversely, may create empowering affiliations and coalitions that foster resilience.

Part I consists of three chapters. **Chapter 1** focuses on **vitiating voices**. It takes the Australian novel *Sorry* (2007) by Gail Jones as a basis for exploring different forms of language loss with regard to the two opposed concepts of trauma theory. The chapter then scrutinizes how, between these two contrasting theoretical poles, affective ties occur that may offer the possibility of empowerment. **Chapter 2** concentrates on

audible crying during the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and analyses how the three aspects mentioned above (Western trauma, insidious trauma, affective ties) are dealt with in Philip Miller's multimedial cantata *REwind* (2011) with regard to the wailing sounds that were heard from those testifying about human rights abuses when language failed to produce speech. **Chapter 3** then looks, following the same three-fold structure, at **silent weeping** in *Mute*, a video installation by South African Berni Searle, laying bare the ways it links the insidious trauma of apartheid to the xenophobic violence in post-apartheid South Africa.

Part II reviews literary and visual texts that perpetuate rather than alleviate victimization, thereby cementing insidious trauma, contrasting them to empowering examples that may evoke the connective ties that oppose such perpetuation. **Chapter 4** contrasts a tableau vivant from a performance installation called *Exhibit B* by South African artist Brett Bailey (Example 1) with a performance installation entitled *Iron Mask, White Torture* by Brazilian/German Marissa Lôbo and her collective of women of colour (Example 2), showing that Bailey, in contrast to Lôbo, tends to perpetuate victimization rather than offering effective empowerment. A similar phenomenon is presented in **chapter 5**, entitled "**Sealed Lips**", where another tableau vivant from Bailey's *Exhibit A* and *B* displaying an asylum-seeker whose lips are taped (thereby alluding to the suffocation of deported asylum-seekers in contemporary Europe) is contrasted with two artistic works from Australia that are concerned with lip-sewing. Both these pieces, Iranian Mehmed Al Assad's poem "Asylum" (2002) and Australian Mike Parr's performance installation *Close the Concentration Camps* (2002), employ the motif of lip-sewing as an empowering form to protest against current migration policies. The final **chapter 6**, "**Suffocating Silence**", looks at the wounding of the mouth by so-called "waterboarding". Used as an interrogation method since the Spanish Inquisition, waterboarding was also practised during apartheid in South Africa, and is currently used in the Global War on Terror. In this final chapter, I discuss the perpetuation of victimization on the one hand, and empowerment on the other hand with reference to examples of waterboarding in the context of the Jeffrey Benzien case at the South African TRC and in the US-led Global War on Terror.

KEY TERMS

Wounded mouth, Western trauma theory, postcolonial trauma, Global South, multidirectional trauma, loss, absence, entanglement, affect, resilience, apartheid, Truth and Reconciliation Commission, xenophobia, slavery, state of exception, bare life, muzzle, lip sewing, waterboarding, Global War on Terror, asylum, refugee camp, zone of indistinction, resistance.

INTRODUCTION: Images of the Wounded Mouth

1) Concept and Purpose

I have crossed an ocean
I have lost my tongue
from the root of the old one
a new one has sprung.

In this brief poem entitled “Epilogue” (1984) by Guyanese-British author Grace Nichols, the speaker tells the reader of the loss of her/his “tongue” (line 2). The double structure of anaphora and parallel syntax, and the internal rhyme “crossed”/“lost”, make the experience of the destruction of language analogous to the slave trade, epitomized by the infamous ‘Middle Passage’, the ocean crossing referred to in the first line of the poem. The slave trade displaced six million Africans, forcefully removed them from their homes and families and took them to a foreign country where they had to endure physical and psychological injuries on a daily basis. The effects of the slave trade are not over: the triple use of the present perfect in the poem suggests that the past still affects the present. The traumatic experience of the slave trade is not a single traumatic event experienced by an individual but an ongoing ‘insidious’ trauma borne by a whole community. However, a new language “has sprung” (line 4) “from the root of the old one” (line 3). The native language is thus not entirely lost, as the echoes contained within “new one”, “old one” and “sprung” suggest, but somehow persists – as creole, as song, as narrative, and here as poetry. It has left its marks on and in the language of the ‘master’, thereby forging connections as a means of sustaining a cultural heritage and of surviving in the diaspora. The new language and the poem that instantiates it are not a fixed restoration of identity, but as the final use of the present perfect suggests, an ongoing process, a sign of resistance and resilience, a way of living (in an organic, ‘rooted’ sense) in an empowered fashion with the wounds of trauma.

The loss of language described in Nichols’s poem is not a psychosomatic reaction towards a single traumatic event as in many other trauma narratives but it is itself part of a larger collective trauma that cannot be sufficiently explained or approached in terms of classical Western trauma theory. The latter idea of trauma is manifest, for instance, in Gail Jones’s Australian novel *Sorry* (2007). In her novel, the teenage

protagonist Perdita, after stabbing her rapist father to death, immediately loses the memory of this horrific incident and, as a concomitant psychogenetic reaction, her fluent speech. Her stuttering, which then progressively turns into a form of mutism,¹ can be seen as a shattering of the voice caused by the enormous impact of the traumatic event she experienced. A similar example of this form of language loss is given by Jonathan Safran Foer's novel *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), where the grandfather, after having witnessed the death of his pregnant fiancée during the Dresden bombing, turns mute. Tongue-tied, these characters instantiate the profound impact traumatic experiences can have on verbal language. These two novels belong to a whole range of texts that circle around the absence of speech, either partially or totally, temporarily or permanently, thus indicating some sort of associated trauma and a deeper-seated failure of representation to which the loss of speech points. They instantiate a Western theory of trauma that understands the *individual's loss* of speech as a reaction to and as a symptom of a single traumatic event that can be restored by some form of 'language therapy'. In contrast to such a notion I will investigate a non-Western trauma concept, epitomized by Nichols's poem quoted above, where the *absence of speech is the trauma itself* and constitutes a *long-term, often ongoing trauma* of a *whole community*. Rather than restoration, forms of *resilience* are manifest in *organic 'affective ties'* that hold the community together despite the ongoing trauma.

As Bessel van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart note: "When people are exposed to trauma [...] they experience 'speechless terror'. The experience cannot be organized on a 'linguistic level' " (1995: 172). Van der Kolk and Van der Hart explain the psychosomatic effect isolated traumatic events can have on individuals' capacity to speak. However, in a culturally symptomatic but nevertheless highly problematic manner their observation excludes other forms of language losses of a more collective and chronic nature as indexed, for instance, in Nichols's poem about the slave trade and its present-day aftermath. There are numerous such texts, either visual or narrative/linguistic (or both), which provide examples of language loss that are not necessarily the consequence of a specific traumatic event but are rather connected to an

¹ Mutism, or more specifically selective mutism, was first defined by the American Psychiatrist Association in *DSMIV* as a rare type of anxiety disorder (often a social phobia) whose main distinguishing feature is the persistent failure to speak in specific social situations where speaking is expected, despite speaking in other situations. In Jones's *Sorry* the mother's disapproving reaction towards Perdita's stuttering leads Perdita to her mutism. Being silent prevents her from further humiliating embarrassment she experiences with her disrupted speech (see: American Psychiatric Association 1994).

ongoing insidious trauma that concerns whole groups of people. The Native American character Chief Bromden in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962), for instance, is perceived by his WASP American environment as being mute and is consequently detained in a psychiatric institution for the treatment of his apparent pathological disorder. A number of personal traumatic incidents (e.g. witnessing his father's humiliation by his Anglo-American mother) are mentioned in the text as perhaps having caused the loss of his speech, but these individual experiences are embedded in a larger collective traumatic history that is linked to the silencing of Native Americans in general. As it turns out later in the narrative, his silence is self-chosen and linked to a whole set of issues regarding the imposed silencing of his tribe and the destruction of his indigenous culture. Thus, collective trauma may be experienced by individuals, just as individual reactions may index collective traumas. The obvious overlapping of collective and individual aspects of trauma does not preclude however, the differing emphases and tendencies of the two models I am heuristically contrasting to one another.

Classical Western trauma theory with its focus on event-based trauma may thus not be sufficient to approach and explain the various forms of language loss caused by the insidious trauma of slavery, colonization and other ongoing forms of discrimination. This is a decisive difference that needs to be addressed as part of the larger recent project to "decolonize trauma theory" (see Rothberg 2008). It is my aim to fill this important gap in trauma studies by looking at long-term absences of speech in connection with the perpetuation of forms of traumatic discrimination in a selection of textual and visual narratives produced by artists and writers predominantly coming from the Global South and the diaspora that employ the image of the wounded mouth. The wounded mouth is thus a term I use to describe visual and textual images that are employed to express different forms of language loss in relation to trauma. This study contributes to the new shift in trauma studies from "trauma theory's Eurocentric, event-based conception of trauma; its too-narrow focus on Freudian psychoanalysis; and its deconstructionist approach" (Visser 2015: 252) towards what I believe to be a necessary attention to ongoing forms of violence and oppression affecting marginalized groups of people and their relation to language.

In this thesis, I will be working with the notions of "classical" Western trauma theory, "postcolonial" trauma, which replicates to a certain extent the terms of classical trauma theory but applies them to a non-European context, and an alternative model that

I call “Global South” trauma theory, which fundamentally restructures the first two terms in the ways I elucidate in this introduction. My use of the recent concept of the “Global South” rather than the standard term of “postcolonial” is deliberate here. The notion of the “postcolonial”, though enormously influential, tends to imply that all phenomena of the “postcolony” (Mbembe 2001) are dictated by the legacy of colonial power. This of course does continue to be true to a large extent, even in a neo-colonial age. But “postcolonial” may, paradoxically, cement residual colonial power in a symbolic sense by fixing scholarly attention on “the relationship of European self and other, of colonizer and colonized” (Boehmer 2002: 1). This single axis of historical entanglements may neglect more complex and broader issues that perhaps play an equally significant role. Especially significant in recent years are the burgeoning relations between the cultures of the South. These long-existing and increasingly emergent connections and relations allow “a lateral or reoriented world picture of political and discursive relations” (ibid: 5), so that the “ ‘contact zone’ of cultural political exchange conventionally located between the European colonial centre and its periphery will instead be positioned *between* peripheries” (ibid: 2, italics in original). The “Global South” is a fluid term that does not necessarily map onto geographical hemispheres, allowing a multitude of dispersed and decentred cultural relations, influences, affiliations and dialogues, sometimes with a long historical tradition, to come into view - without forgetting those pertaining between the colonizer and the colonized, and the neo-colonizer and the neo-colonized (see West-Pavlov, ed. 2018).

In connection with my usage of the ideas of “classical” Western and “Global South” trauma theory, these terms allow me to tease out often blurred distinctions between versions of trauma theory informing the texts and works of art I analyse. Gail Jones’s *Sorry*, discussed in my inaugural chapter, exemplifies such overlaps in a particularly obvious manner. The text appears to implement a version of “classical” trauma theory transported to the semi-colonial white settler Australia of the late 1930s and 1940s, thus employing “postcolonial” trauma theory to depict the white character Perdita. By contrast, however, a significantly different notion of trauma and resilience that could be explained by a “Global South” trauma theory inhabits the same text when it presents the character Mary as a representative of Indigenous Australia.

In order to exemplify this paradigm shift between ‘classical’, postcolonial and alternative Global South trauma studies and its relation to language, my project will review a cluster of images around what I call ‘the wounded mouth’. These images may

include visual and textual instances of mouths that are distorted, mutilated, elided, erased, or obstructed in such a way as to hint at the violent processes of silencing that go hand in hand with, indeed underpin, the colonial and neo-colonial oppression of groups and cultures over long periods of time.

Images of the wounded mouth in narratives from the Global South are often closely linked to the history of slavery and colonisation and allude to various forms of erasure of indigenous languages and cultural identities. These traumatic experiences cannot easily be worked through since other forms of discrimination, originating in these histories of the past, still continue to haunt whole communities in the present. As Bill Ashcroft notes: “The control over language by the imperial ‘centre’ – whether by displacing native languages, by installing the imperial language as ‘standard’ against other variants denigrated as ‘impurities’, or by planting the language of the empire in a new place – remains a potent instrument of cultural control” (2009: 1). The image of the wounded mouth reflects in part the ambivalent and fragile nature of language while simultaneously questioning its hegemonic power. This is by no means an indicator of melancholic stasis, as healing in the selected narratives I discuss in this thesis is nonetheless desired and is sometimes depicted. The focus, however, is different: whereas in classical trauma narratives healing the wounds of trauma is mostly achieved by reconstructing individual subjectivity and regaining some form of verbal expression (for instance via the so-called “talking cure”²), the focus in these Global South narratives lies in the recovery of the collective, allowing different possibilities of becoming where voicing resilience and resistance is not restricted to Symbolic language³. In fact, language, in works that employ the image of the wounded mouth, is paradoxically made visible by silencing the organ which is responsible for speech, either literally or metaphorically.

In both classical trauma texts and narratives that are more concerned with insidious trauma we frequently find figurations of vitiated voices or tongue-tied speech, instantiated for instance in the mutism of Chief Bromden in Kesey’s novel. Alongside such examples, there are also more concrete and focussed images of the mouth itself:

² See for instance Judith Herman’s *Trauma and Recovery*. Herman argues that by reporting their stories, survivors transform pathogenic memories into accessible, articulate renderings, a written or verbal speech act that engenders “relief of many of the major symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder” (1992: 83).

³ I use the term Symbolic in the Lacanian sense as the social world of linguistic communication, inter-subjective relations, and knowledge of ideological conventions.

muzzled mouths, stitched and taped lips, stuffed oral cavities and cut-out tongues are frequently found in visual and textual narratives coming from the Global South.

The most radical image pointing to the theft of peoples' voice and agency is probably that of the cut-off tongue. The absence of speech in the form of the brutal excision of the tongue is, in contrast to the other manifestations of language loss, irreversible. The physical wound that has been caused here is not visible to the outside world and cannot be healed in any possible way. Nonetheless, this image, similar to the other ones, *affects* us in a language that goes beyond the restrictions of the Symbolic to express resilience and a call for active resistance. Affect, understood here as a bodily reaction and a response to an aesthetic experience, can lead to insightful critical investigations since art, as Jill Bennett points out,

by virtue of its affective capacities, is able to exploit forms of embodied perception in order to promote forms of critical inquiry. This conjunction of affect and critical awareness may be understood to constitute the basis of empathy grounded not in affinity (feeling for another insofar as we can imagine being that other) but on feeling for another that entails an encounter with something irreducible and different, often inaccessible. (2005: 10)

In the selected works that I will analyse in this project, affect is potentially achieved by the active practices of reading and viewing literary and visual images of the wounded mouth that are linked to the collective insidious trauma of slavery, colonization and neo-colonialism. I am aware of the fact that in writing about affective phenomena, I cannot entirely escape the realm of representation myself. I will try, however, to look beyond mere narrative interpretations in order to “touch”, as Griselda Pollock phrases it, the “voidness [of artworking] with a virtual presence in some form that is not a representation of a knowable content, but is the after-affect of representational *work* [...]” (2013: 3, italics in original). According to Pollock, “trauma cannot be represented. But it can be approached, moved and *transformed*. This is not cure; it is *poiesis*: making” (2013: 4, italics in original). It is exactly in “poiesis” where the potential of “artworking” is revealed as a powerful life-affirming force that makes living *with* the wounds of trauma possible. In the particular cases that I will analyse in this thesis, the visual and formal components of the works seem to emphasize multiple possibilities of engaging with the absence of speech in relation to ongoing forms of discrimination. The more concrete instantiations of the wounded mouth, such as muzzled and stuffed mouths or sealed lips, may force us, by virtue of their horrific brutality, to think beyond

the individual case, towards the processes that have caused them – in contrast to the less specific examples, such as mutism or stuttering, which tend to be interpreted mostly according to the conventions of classical trauma theory. There is no inherent binarized difference between these examples, or the models of trauma theory they rely upon. Nonetheless, they can be located on a spectrum of gradual degrees of concreteness and severity, which may trigger differences of interpretation, perhaps even a paradigm shift, at the level of reception.

This paradigm shift between narrative interpretation (as in Freudian analysis, which assumes that knowledge will effect change) and affect-based ‘experience’ or ‘sensation’ is central to the new approach in understanding the image of the wounded mouth in the context of Global South trauma narratives. Often the images of the wounded mouth do not signify anything directly, for the very process of signification breaks down with the concomitant destruction of the capacity to speak, indeed of language itself. Rather, they may ‘affect’ the reader or viewer in such a way as to experience (*not* share, nor cognitively understand, nor articulate linguistically) the pain, suffering and silencing of the ‘Other’ on the level of bodily sensations. Like other modes of sensory and perceptual encounters, pain and suffering undermine representation by insisting on the affect of bodily processes that are too overpowering to be defined – or contained – by language. As Eric Shouse notes:

An affect is a non-conscious experience of intensity; it is a moment of unformed and unstructured potential [...]. Affect cannot be fully realized in language [...] because affect is always prior to and/or outside consciousness [...]. Affect is the body’s way of preparing itself for action in a given circumstance by adding a quantitative dimension of intensity to the quality of an experience. The body has a grammar of its own that cannot be fully captured in language. (2005: para. 5)

Affects are an action and reaction in/on the body, but also beyond the body that may nonetheless resonate with linguistic expression. Both literary and visual language, I will argue, have the potential to work ‘around’ the absence of speech and the gap in representation to participate in ecologies of life-affirming extra-discursive affects, which may help the traumatised subjects to live somehow ‘empowered’ with the wounds of trauma. Such an approach would emphatically not take place simply on the symbolic level as in psychoanalysis – rather, affective healing would relink the subject to the world in material, processual, connective ways. For both Brian Massumi (2015) and Simon O’Sullivan, “approaches to the image in its relation to language are incomplete if they operate only on the semantic or semiotic level, however that level is

defined (linguistically, logically, narratologically, ideologically, or all of these combinations, as a Symbolic)” (2001: 131). It is consequently necessary “to move the register away from deconstruction and away from representation” (ibid: 126) and acknowledge the fact that representation is indeed not the only purpose of art. As O’Sullivan further explains, “art also operates as a *fissure* in representation” (ibid; italics in original)⁴ and it is precisely this *rupturing* quality of art that according to Jean-François Lyotard “calls for a practice of patience, of listening - a kind of meditative state that allows for, produces an opening for, an experience of the event, precisely, as the affect” (Lyotard qtd. in O’Sullivan 2001: 128). To this extent, it can be argued that Global South trauma art, either visual or textual, performs a very specific political role. “In relation to aesthetics and affects”, as O’Sullivan states, “this function might be summed up as the making visible of the invisible, of the making perceptible of the imperceptible” (2001: 130). It is hence our task to *listen otherwise* to what the wounded mouth has to tell, despite the absence of speech. Where speech is absent, a whole range of other aspects such as bodily language, sounds and colour become the focus of attention. Affects reconnect the subject to the world, and therefore listening attentively to the embodied language, as I suggest, would be one mode of participating in that economy of affective connection.

Despite the consensus among trauma theorists about the ‘unrepresentability’ of trauma, there is still a tendency in classical trauma studies to try to make sense of trauma by explaining how the artwork gives the trauma meaning. O’Sullivan argues, however, that

[a]rt is less involved in making sense of the world and more involved in exploring the possibilities of being, of becoming, in the world. Less involved in knowledge and more involved in experience, in pushing forward the boundaries of what can be experienced. Finally, less involved in shielding us from death, but indeed precisely involved in actualising the possibilities of life. (2001: 130)

This is exactly what I am interested in: moving away from theories centred merely on the representation of experiences, history, and social formations, towards those that stress that which exceeds or underpins representation, namely, the realm of affect. Such

⁴ O’Sullivan refers here to Deleuze and Guattari’s terms as explained in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1986) [1980].

a shift enables us to examine the wounded mouth in Global South trauma narratives to explore “the boundaries of what can be experienced” *and* “the possibilities of life”.⁵

In what follows, I will compare two images of the wounded mouth in order to explain the difference between classical Western and alternative Global South trauma theory in terms of representation and affect and their relation to language. One of the images is by American-based artist and educator Viktor Koen and shows an untitled puzzle image of a doll’s head where the ‘mouth-piece’ at the centre is missing (2011). The other one is called *Echoing the Mood* (2003) by German-Kenyan artist Ingrid Mwangi, and is a digitally manipulated photograph of a person’s face without a mouth. I will use these two images as heuristic exemplifications of Dominick LaCapra’s distinction between *loss* and *absence* – that is between singular, individually suffered traumatic events, and more profound, embedded, long-term structural trauma. LaCapra regards loss as more concrete and particular, “situated on a historical level [as] the consequence of particular events” (2001: 64), and absence as structural and causally intangible, and thus associated with a more universal and foundational sense of traumatic experience. This differentiation between loss and absence is not entirely unproblematic, especially in the context of trauma in relation to discrimination, as I will explain in the following section, but the two concepts are useful in illustrating contrasting tendencies towards understanding the difference between *language loss* as a consequence of a singular traumatic event and reading *absence of speech* as an insidious form of collective trauma.

2) The loss of language and the absence of speech: Western vs. Global South Trauma Theory?

In order to contrast language-loss as a consequence of a singular traumatic event and the collective experience of the absence of speech as a phenomenon linked to the trauma of colonization, I will compare two images, both showing frontal views of faces where the mouth at the centre is significantly missing.

⁵ My project is thus part of a general trend within the humanities at the current time. See for instance Nigel Thrift’s *Non-Representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect* (2007).

The first image by Viktor Koen shows a picture in the form of a puzzle of a somewhat



Fig. 1 Viktor Koen, untitled
(n.d.)

battered doll's head with numerous visible stains and fissures. As opposed to the eyes, which are still indicated in the form of two black holes, the *mouthpiece* at the centre of the image is entirely lost: not only in the doll's face but also in the whole structure of the puzzle. The other image, part one of an artwork called *Echoing the Mood*⁶, is by Ingrid Mwangi, a German-Kenyan artist based in Germany, whose work predominantly deals with identity issues in a neo-colonial context (see Schwartz 2010:1). Her image depicts a framed photograph of the

lower half of a human face, which is digitally manipulated in such a way as to erase the mouth. The image cuts off the upper part of the face, showing only two dark shadows below the eyes. The lower part of the photograph stops just below the neckline. The ears are invisible. Only the nose, the prominent chin and the shape of the face are clearly marked but they too offer only minimal distinguishing features. Despite the fact that Mwangi has inserted herself into this work (Schwartz *ibid.*), the image does not represent a portrait of the artist, nor of anyone else in particular. This image does not *represent* but *presents* instead something that is made visible by its very absence: the mouth that cannot speak. Whereas Koen's image shows an identifiably missing piece with clear boundaries, Mwangi's photograph erases all traces of the contours of a mouth. The total absence of the mouth of an anonymous face is much more uncanny than the lost mouthpiece of the non-human object in Koen's picture. Something *lost* may be found again but something *absent* may never have been there in the first place. There are virtually no traces in Mwangi's image providing evidence that a mouth has ever been there. There are no scars, nor any other obvious marks – only some slight differences in pigmentation, where the slightly mottled tone gives an impression of a less yielding consistency and a rougher texture to the skin.



Fig.2 Ingrid Mwangi *Echoing the Mood*, Part I (2003)

⁶ Part 2 of *Echoing the Mood* shows the profile of a face with an overgrown ear. Both images are framed photographs and are obviously digitally manipulated, and both focus on the absence of sensory organs.

In terms of trauma theory these two images provide us with a number of elements that can be used to explain two different trauma concepts: the classical Western trauma approach that is based on Freudian psychoanalysis, focussing more on the pathological effect of a single traumatic event experienced by an individual⁷, and the more recent concept that tries to include more insidious forms of trauma such as the experience of slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism and their effects on whole communities.

Looking at **Viktor Koen's image**, one could find several elements associated with the effects of a single traumatic event on an individual as described by Western trauma theorists:

a) The loss of memory or the impossibility of registering the traumatic event at the moment of its occurrence. Cathy Caruth, whose work is based on Freud's psychoanalytic studies, explains that trauma victims do not immediately realize what has happened to them, because the extent of the "violence has not yet been fully known" (1996: 6). What the mind cannot grasp can also not be "integrated into memory" (Radstone 2003: 117; see also Vickroy 2002: 12). The traumatic event is too overwhelming and stands outside the parameters of common experiences - as such it is a 'non-experience', a gap in one's memory. This kind of amnesia may be indicated in Koen's image in form of the black or blank eyes of the doll's head; the absence of the eyes indexes the failure of representation and its underlying visual paradigm.

b) A loss of humanity is felt in the face of trauma. The traumatic event leaves the survivors emotionally and intellectually divided between what they felt or believed before the event and what they now believe, thus causing a psychic separation in identity and consciousness which often leaves the survivor profoundly confused, frightened and disturbed. The traumatic event is so disruptive that it cannot be fitted into an existing referential framework. As Judith Herman states: "Trauma dehumanizes the victim" (1992: 214). It is significant that Koen uses a doll and not a human image to convey the force of trauma. The subject experiences itself as an other, and thus as an object, a state mirrored here in the depiction of an immobile doll rather than a human being.

⁷ It is important to note that later editions of the *DSM* (*DSM-IV* from 2000 and *DSM-V* from 2013) have also broadened their definition of trauma to include vicarious forms of trauma that are not exclusively focussed on individual traumatisations. The critique expressed here goes hand in hand with the recent decolonising trauma theory project which addresses the cultural trauma theory developed by Cathy Caruth et al. in the early 1990s. There, the focus was still on an American and Eurocentric, event-based, individualistic orientation.

c) The **fragmentation of the self** and thus the **loss of a unified singular identity** may be identified in Koen's picture in the whole puzzle concept with the missing mouthpiece at the centre of the doll's face. Furthermore, there are a number of fissures on the surface of the doll's head. The use of these fissures highlights more starkly the fragility of the subject whose protective shield has been breached by trauma. Caruth explains that a traumatic experience causes a "breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world" (1996: 4). It is not open to a clear, rational understanding of the source of trauma, and is not a "simple and healable event" (ibid). In Koen's artwork the metaphorical incursion of the psyche is given concrete expression in the visible fractures that rend the doll's skull.

d) **The loss of language** is pointed out by means of the lost puzzle piece at the centre of the face, significantly the piece depicting the mouth, thereby alluding to the loss of speech in the face of trauma and to the impossibility of verbally articulating the traumatic event.

e) The clear contours of the missing puzzle piece, however, assume the possibility of reassembling the fragments which – if put back together – may reconstruct a complete image of the face, a reunified Self that may **recover** to some extent from the traumatic experience. The subject may be able to find a way to "talk" about the aporia in the sense of Herman's 'talking cure' that I have already mentioned above. According to Herman, transforming pathogenic memories into accessible, verbal articulations may bring "relief of many of the major symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder" (Herman 1992: 83) in order to work through an individual's traumatic experience. This aspect of **recovery** is not clearly visible in Koen's image but may nonetheless be implied.

All these elements, although spelled out here in a deliberately schematic manner, have been identified as belonging to the range of psychogenic symptoms known as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)⁸ experienced by trauma victims. The traumatic event that cannot be registered at the moment of its occurrence is repressed and remains hidden in the unconscious. Nonetheless, it still continues to exist in the unconscious, haunting and gradually taking possession of the victim's subjectivity. The repressed

⁸ PTSD was first diagnosed in the 1970s by the American Psychiatric Association in order to support former US military veterans who fought in the Vietnam War and consequently suffered these severe traumatic symptoms. The diagnosis of PTSD has then been broadened to include mental disorder following other threats to a person's life, such as sexual assault or traffic collisions and other war experiences.

traumatic memory eventually re-emerges at some later point in the form of further symptoms of PTSD, such as “intrusive flashbacks, recurring dreams, or later situations that repeat or echo the original” (see Luckhurst 2008: 1). This postponed, deferred and already altered memory can resurge through visual, olfactory, or auditory triggers, exposing the wound which has not been assimilated into our language or understanding of reality. Caruth calls it “a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth [...] cannot be linked to what is known, but also to what is unknown in our own actions and our language” (1996: 4). Since trauma defies linguistic processing, she explains, the language that tries to articulate the traumatic event can only be figural. For this reason Caruth privileges experimental artistic narrative forms as a means of representing the otherwise ‘unclaimed’ experience of trauma (1996).

The kind of writing that is particularly apt to approach the traumatic event is characterised by the attributes that resemble the symptoms of PTSD described above:⁹

a) The absence of memory of the traumatic event is frequently marked in trauma fiction by recurring metaphors such as ‘void’ and ‘hole.’

b) The loss of humanity is indicated by the numbness of the protagonists who tend to repeat certain actions compulsively as if not in control of themselves. The repetition of certain words, phrases and events and the depiction of flashbacks mark the repetition compulsion and unexpected intrusion of the unprocessed traumatic experience. Hauntings and ghosts are also among the recurrent motifs found in trauma fiction to represent these phenomena (see Del Pilar Blanco & Peeren, eds. 2013).

c) The fragmentation of the self and thus **the loss of a unified self** are often reflected in a fragmented narrative, with shifts in the narrating voice, thereby mirroring the confusing and disoriented experience of trauma.

d) Finally, the loss of language is often shown in characters’ frequent inability to speak. Their silence is often used to emblemize the limits of language and narrative in the face of trauma.

e) The recovery of the traumatised subject refers to all the other elements mentioned above and presents the next important step in Western trauma theory: the attempt to heal the wounds of trauma.

In order to overcome the loss of speech and to reconstruct subjectivity so as to regain a sense of selfhood, characters in trauma fiction often undergo therapy whereby a

⁹ For a detailed description see Roger Luckhurst’s *Trauma Question* (2008).

psychotherapist or another professional counsellor attempts to help the victim to translate the repressed traumatic memory into a narrative memory, either in visual or linguistic form, so as to work through the past traumatic incident.¹⁰ Sometimes the process of curing or “working through” trauma is carried out within the narrative structure itself, which step by step, even if the narrative is fragmented, re-creates an explanatory plot once the diverse puzzle pieces are reassembled. The Western need to transform traumatic memories into narrative memories by trying to explore the source of the symptoms of PTSD and the desire to cure the victim of her/his pathological melancholic suffering as best as possible encompass a “working through” the unbearable experience, a process in which the subject attempts to gain a critical distance from the past event to make a life in the present possible. Drawing upon Freud’s psychoanalytic concepts of “acting out” and “working through”, LaCapra explains that “working through” implies an attempt to move from the state of melancholia, often manifest as a “compulsive repetition of acting-out [...] a traumatic past” (2001: 184) to a form of mourning, which in contrast involves finding a way to live with the experiences by “transforming the understanding of them” (“working through”) (2001: 148). Although the “working through” process is never entirely complete, it enables the victim to distinguish between the traumatic experience that overwhelmed him/her in the past and his/her life in the present. Those who cannot let go of the past, however, end up reliving their trauma, by acting it out in the present. These “melancholic minds”, as LaCapra calls them, do not retain any notion of tenses: past, present and future become indistinguishable (LaCapra 2001: 21). “Working through”, on the other hand, would allow mourners to remember and consider what happened to them with a sense of distance (thus consigning it to the preterity of the past), knowing that they live in the present.

It is important to note that these two concepts, “working through” and “acting out”, should not be considered independently from each other. “Acting out” is always a necessary part of the “working through” process (see LaCapra 2001: 150). I stress this ambivalence within the theory of trauma proposed by LaCapra because it is analogous to a structurally parallel ambivalence to which I now turn: the difference between Western trauma theories (which include LaCapra’s) and emergent theories of trauma that have arisen in recent years from the context of the once colonized world. These

¹⁰ See for instance Perdita in Jones’s *Sorry*, or Agu in Nigerian-American Uzodinma Iweala’s novel *Beasts of No Nation* (2005).

emergent theories tend to stress a dynamic and resilient *survival* rather than a once-and-for-all *healing*, just as Western theories had stressed a processual working through rather than a frozen and repetitive acting out. Western trauma theories, however, also acknowledge the blurred boundaries between acting out and working through, just as non-Western theories also suggest overlaps between *resilience* and *healing*. Indeed, as many theorists have started from the former body of research and have gradually moved towards the latter, these blurred borders can often also be found within the work of trauma theorists themselves. Thus what will be presented as a binarized opposition between Western and Global South trauma theories is in fact a heuristic device that I will set up to demonstrate and clarify contrasting emphases while bearing in mind the complexity shown in the works I discuss. In what follows I begin by moving, little by little, across this ambivalent space towards a more detailed consideration of non-Western ideas of trauma work, which I illustrate with reference to a second work of art.

The concepts of melancholia and mourning and their temporal concomitants are crucial to understanding the contrast between Western and Global South trauma theory, as well as the difference between loss and absence. The idea of healing the wounds of trauma is tantamount to the idea of being able to move on from loss in ways “that foreclose opportunities for continual, productive attention to the past that melancholia would ostensibly permit”, as Sarah Senk suggests (2011: 70). According to David Lloyd, “it is [thus] crucial to discern in those ‘melancholy survivals’ complex forms of *living on* that do not simply preserve belated and dysfunctional practices, but potentialities for producing and reproducing a life athwart modernity” (2003: 217, italics in original). He further argues that a “nontherapeutic relation to the past, structured around the notion of survival or living on rather than recovery, is what should guide our critique of modernity and ground a different mode of historicization” (ibid.). Global South trauma theory thus posits a different notion of temporality, of temporal segmentation (past-present-future) and the ways the subject is positioned within these tenses and the temporal brackets to which they refer. The crucial point here is that temporalities are blurred and overlap as stressed by Achille Mbembe in his description of the postcolonial era as “an age [that] encloses multiple *durées* made up of discontinuities, reversals, inertias, and swings that overlay one another, interpenetrate one another, and envelope one another: an *entanglement*” (2001: 14, italics in original). Insidious trauma is an entanglement of past colonial forms of oppression and present neo-colonial oppression. What has been “routinely ignored or dismissed in trauma

research [is] the chronic psychic suffering produced by the structural violence of racial, gender, sexual, class, or other inequities” (Craps and Buelens 2008: 3). The experience of racism, which lies at the centre of slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism, and the more complex multipolar structures of oppression of the Global South context, cannot be explained by the paradigmatic event-based model of trauma because “unlike historical trauma, it is not related to a particular event, with a before and after. Understanding racism as a historical trauma, which can be worked through, would be to obscure the fact that it continues to cause damage in the present” (Craps 2013: 32). Colonial trauma does not merely return in memories of violence but is constantly repeated in contemporary neo-colonial practices that need to be addressed with social and political changes. Conversely, however, the responses of Global South subjects when confronting these insidious, ongoing traumas, reveal different resources (whence the importance of the notion of *resilience*) and a palette of healing measures that are not encompassed merely by the notion of “working through”. For these reasons, as Anne Whitehead suggests, the sort of texts currently emerging from the Global South demand alternative approaches to deal adequately with “non-western concepts of suffering, loss, and bereavement or alternatively of recovery and healing” (2008: 14).

I wish to stress, however, that Western trauma theory provides us with useful impulses that are still relevant when looking at trauma narratives including Global South trauma texts. As the analysis of my primary texts from the Global South will show, many of the symptoms of PTSD mentioned above and the attempt to work through them can be detected in some of these texts, too. However, looking at these works merely through the lenses of Western trauma theory would be inadequate and insufficient. PTSD, described as a melancholic pathology, has often been criticised as being a product of a Western psychiatry with all the problems and biases that this involves, including the highly individualist approaches to trauma and a ‘universalising’ gesture by which the methods of Western therapy are imposed onto non-Western societies. Theorists such as Craps (2013), Buelens, Durrant & Eaglestone, eds. (2014), Rothberg (2008), Lloyd (2000), Visser (2015) and many others have therefore expressed the need to extend the definition of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to

approach more insidious forms of trauma¹¹ that are not as easily identifiable within a Euro/American frame of reference.

I now turn to Mwangi's photograph to exemplify this paradigm shift in trauma theory that has emerged in recent years.

In **Mwangi's *Echoing the Mood*** the focus is also on the missing mouth at the centre of the image but this time it is not an obviously lost piece as in Koen's image of the doll. As discussed earlier, there are **no visible contours** indicating any previous existence of a mouth. This absence of contours may be taken as an underlying structural index of the blurred boundaries I mentioned above: those missing in the ongoing traumas of the 'colonial/postcolonial/neo-colonial continuum'; and those missing in notions of resilience (which assumes a continuity of ongoing forms of everyday existence which may never leave behind the traumatic experience; see Luckhurst 2008: 210-214) as opposed to working through (which suggests the possibility of leaving behind, at some point, the compulsive repetitions of acting-out; see LaCapra 1998: 3). In what follows, I contrast, for provisional heuristic purposes, the five characteristics of trauma theory listed above with alternatives that are salient within what I am calling a "Global South" trauma theory.

a) The absence of the mouth at the core of Mwangi's image remains inscrutable. Although this may seem to be a purely aesthetic, or visual effect, it may also refer to the aspect of temporality, and as such it would provide a riposte to the notion of the **loss of memory**. The mouth that was once there is gone, but its erasure itself is erased. What the image shows in the present of the viewer is not the loss of a site, for instance, of the oral archives that make up collective memory; rather, it is the absence even of a trace of that loss (which would, one could imagine, have left, say, some sort of scar). To be sure, colonization involved an attack on the collective memory of the colonized. Colonizers attempted to eradicate the past of the colonized to ensure their hold on their present and future. In *The Wretched of the Earth* Frantz Fanon argues that a consequence of

¹¹ In the late 1980s, the feminist psychotherapist Maria Root was already working on the concept of "insidious trauma" (1989; 1992) in order to refer to the cumulative degradation directed toward individuals or whole communities whose identities, based on factors such as gender, colour, and class, differ from what is valued by the hegemony. Though not always openly violent, these effects threaten the basic wellbeing of the person who suffers them. Root's conceptualization provides a useful framework for understanding certain long-term consequences of the institutionalized sexism, racism, and classism that systematically denigrate the self-worth of the socially othered, who are rendered voiceless.

colonization is that the past, as well as the culture of the colonized people, is destroyed: “Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it” (1990 [1961]: 169). But whether this onslaught on **collective memory** involved a *loss* is a rather different question.

According to LaCapra (1999) loss involves the bereavement of something that was originally in one’s possession. By contrast, absence points to something that one never had: “one may recognize that one cannot lose what one never had” (LaCapra 1999: 701). Mwangi’s photograph gives one the impression that there *never has been* a mouth on this face. Hence, this image does not refer to a particular loss but to a generalized absence that is much more difficult to grasp. Whereas losses are verifiable and can be particularized, enumerated, and then mourned and worked through (to a certain extent), absence has a status akin to myth and can only be lived with. The ongoing damage of racism cannot easily be conceptualized in terms of loss and mourning. For LaCapra absence “is not an event and does not imply tenses (past, present or future)” (2001: 39) but an “anxiety-producing condition of possibility” (2001: 82). LaCapra’s distinctions between loss and absence take on a concrete meaning in the colonial/ postcolonial and Global South contexts when one examines Fanon’s ground-breaking theories of the 1950s and early 1960s. Fanon did not think of racism as an event but as part of the colonial environment. As he noted in *Black Skin, White Masks*, when soldiers and resistance fighters in the Algerian war were treated, their post-traumatic disorders did not stem from a single event; they were produced by the events of war, which were exacerbated by “the arsenal of complexes that has been developed by the colonial environment” (1986 [1952]: 30). Here, it is not the sudden aspect of trauma that dehumanizes the subject, but “the prolonged, cumulative hurt of long years of repression” (Visser 2015: 252) that produces not loss, but absence.

Rosanne Kennedy claims that “[a]lthough traumatic memory is atemporal in its structure, the concept of ‘event’ presumes a temporality of ‘before’ and ‘after’” (2008: 104). The “atemporality” of trauma, almost a canonical element of trauma theory, silently posits a stable temporal background without which its atemporal transgression would make no sense. Atemporality presupposes a sequentially coherent before/after binary that has to be there in the first place to be subsequently erased by the traumatic event. That very temporality of “before” and “after”, that lurks on even in trauma

theory, precisely because its influence is ignored, tends to obscure all the more effectively this ongoing involvement in racialized discourses and positions that are constitutive also of a postcolonial subject and of a neo-colonial social and political environment. In a neo-colonial Global South, an “after” of true emancipation is often difficult to detect. Kennedy notes that colonial wars may have ended but “racism continues to shape the present and the future in damaging ways” (2008: 104). In the context of the insidious racist trauma, the past intrudes on the present not as psychological impulse that suddenly occurs in the brain as a re-enactment of the shattered past memory, as was the case in classical trauma studies. Instead, the past intrudes on the present by continuing racist attitudes in which the object of racism, discrimination, violence and torture is still treated as the ‘Other’. The notion of loss that underpins classical trauma studies has little traction within a long-term history of oppression, so that the very model of temporality applied needs to be recalibrated for a Global South context.

b) Trauma causes “a sense of utter objectification that annihilates the person as subject or agent” (Lloyd 2000: 214). It is so disturbing that the subject experiences itself as an other, an object rather than a human being. This **loss of humanity** is emblemized in Koen’s image via the form of the immobile doll. The person in Mwangi’s photograph, although not fully shown, is evidently a human being with all the appearance of being still alive.

Indisputably, slavery and colonization denied the humanity of their objects of subjugation: colonizers and slave owners dehumanized the colonized subjects by treating them like inferior objects rather than subjects with agency. As David Lloyd explains, “in most colonized societies coercive violence is a constant presence [...] producing its antagonists as objects of a biological and cultural judgement of inferiority” (2003: 216). Colonial dehumanization went much further, however, reducing the colonized to the status of ‘animal’ (Mbembe 2001: 188, 193), or even of ‘thing’ (Mbembe 2001: 188).¹² Giorgio Agamben’s famous category of ‘bare life’ (1998) – that is, of humankind stripped of its humanity to the point of reduction to brute biological existence – invented to describe the Holocaust, elides its own historical

¹² In *On the Postcolony* Mbembe explains that in a colonialist environment “the native as nothing, as thing, as an animal is a creation of the colonizer. It is the colonizer who summons this nothing into existence, creates it as a thing and domesticates it as an animal. This nothing, this thing, and this animal are a creation and object of the colonizer’s imagination, the supreme example of the power of his/her arbitrariness” (2001: 188).

origins in colonization; the colonies, like the concentration camps, were spaces where a total dehumanization of the victims was permissible. The idea of ‘bare life’ is picked up by Alexander G. Weheliye in *Habeas Viscus* (2014), where he suggests that even within such a dehumanizing environment there is still space for humanity, agency and resilience. Bare life as such never loses its humanity. This is what Mwangi’s picture mutely suggests.

The blurring of the boundaries may, indeed, even intimate an expansion of the boundaries of the human, in accord with a recent animist paradigm that allows agency to animals and natural features.¹³ What allows such entities on this animist continuum is not so much speech as affect, a connectivity that spills over the individualist idea of emotion, allowing visceral connectedness between entities that otherwise might be labelled as non-human. Affect is coeval with the connective dynamism of life itself. Mwangi’s image affects one with its powerful life-affirming force that may imply that living *with* the wounds of trauma may be possible. This is an important point as it signals a significant paradigm shift within trauma studies. Craps stresses the importance of a critical commitment in postcolonial trauma studies “to make visible the creative and political – rather than the pathological and negative” (2013: 127). Mwangi’s image conveys the impetus driving such conceptual imperatives.

c) Although the face in this photograph is **not fragmented** as in Koen’s image of the doll, the head of the depicted person is only **partly shown**. As mentioned earlier, only the shape of the face, the chin, the neck and the breastbone of the upper torso are visible. The forehead, including the eyes, is cut off; only the very lower outlines of the eyes are visible but not identifiable, and the ears are entirely absent. In this way, the photograph becomes not an image of a particular individual but possibly of a shared experience of structural trauma caused by racism and other forms of discrimination. The blurred contours of the face mean that the loss of a unified self is not a caesura or break that is construed as negative, but rather, a continuum that has positive connotations: it becomes an opening-up of the boundaries of Western individualism in productive ways. The wounds of colonialism were not merely inflicted upon individuals but also on **the collective** psyche of the colonized peoples. By acknowledging outside environmental

¹³ For more information on this topic see Caroline Rooney’ *African Literature, Animism and Politics* (2006) and Harry Garuba’s article “Explorations in Animist Materialism: Notes on Reading/Writing African Literature, Culture, and Society” (2003: 261-85).

factors as contributors to psychological distress, we move away from locating the pathology of abuse within the individual's psyche and start to position correctly the problem within society. According to Whitehead, the emphasis upon the **notion of the self**, central to Western trauma theory, "may not be valid in many non-western cultures which are predicated on alternative notions of the self and its relationship to others" (2008: 15). If absence is a product of structural trauma such as the experience of colonialism and its aftermath, then "the relation to the past is strictly not a relation to one's own past but to a social history and its material and institutional effects and in no simple way a matter of internal psychic dynamics" (Lloyd 2000: 216). Mwangi's photograph is not a representation of a particular person whose **unified self** has been fragmented by the enormous impact of a singular traumatic event; it is rather an opaque presentation of a shared embodied experience of a **whole community**: the experience of structural trauma.

d) One of the major aspects of structural trauma is the experience of being neither fully visible nor audible as a collective in the dominant discourses of art, literature, politics, history and theory (as Western trauma theory has also shown). Mwangi's artwork embodies this invisibility or absence of the subaltern's voice in the dominant discourse of the Western world by digitally manipulating the photograph in such a manner as to erase purposely the organ that allows the subject to speak. Whereas in Koen's image the element where the mouth ought to be is obviously lost, the mouth in Mwangi's photograph is entirely absent. This difference can be seen as a visual figuration of the way in which the **loss of language** in Western trauma theory cannot be compared to the **absence of speech** experienced in a colonial and neo-colonial context. The absence of speech here may in fact allude to one of the major strategies of colonisation: the forceful and violent theft or *erasure* of indigenous voice and agency. The control over language is regarded as one of the major weapons of imperial oppression where it "becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of 'truth', 'order', and 'reality' become established" (Ashcroft et al. 1989: 7). Grada Kilomba states that "[w]ithin colonialism, the mouth becomes the organ of oppression par excellence, it represents the organ whites want – and need – to control. [T]he mouth is a metaphor to (sic) possession and acquisition" (2009: 80). Thus, the absence of the mouth in Mwangi's photograph can be said to mirror the fact that indigenous peoples and other minority groups have been deprived of their own voices and have never been

sufficiently and adequately represented in Western discourses. The traumatic histories of slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialist experiences were (and still are) largely eliminated in the dominant discourse of imperial, economic, and civilizational progress.

Although the absence of the mouth in Mwangi's work clearly points to this forceful dispossession of the subaltern's voice (and her/his indigenous languages) – undeniably a 'loss' of voice, to which I will return below - her work simultaneously foregrounds a blurring of boundaries that bespeaks a diffuse and *longue-durée* absence that is important to address. Mwangi's anonymous subject is deprived of almost all its sensory organs. It can neither talk, hear nor see – one might thus suppose that it has no agency of its own and can only be spoken for or talked about. Mwangi's image thus points to a condition that oppressed people experience all too often. In her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak explores the problematic search for the subaltern, who has been written out of the record by colonial historiography, and the impossible attempt to construct a 'speaking position' for those who have been erased from historical speech. She comes to the conclusion that the subaltern is not able to speak for her- or himself and that those who appear to have gained their own voice are very likely to have been silenced in more insidious ways: "[I]n the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (1988: 287). Spivak explains that any representation of the subaltern by the hegemonic group is always inaccurate, since it inevitably 'speaks for' those of whom no records whatsoever exist. Colonial misrepresentation (via linguistic and visual discourses) or "power of language" as Ashcroft et al. call it, can nonetheless be "rejected in the emergence of an effective post-colonial voice" (1989: 7). This, however, comes very close to producing a re-constructed subaltern "curiously sewn together into transparency by denegation" (Spivak 1988: 280), that is, deprived of agency in the very act of being given back her/his voice – having it imposed upon her/him – by the well-meaning postcolonial historian. In contrast to such liberal imposition of voice, which continues the theft of agency at the very moment of claiming to restore it, Mwangi's artwork succeeds in rejecting the power of the dominant discourse by making the invisibility of the subaltern voice visible. It does not make any claims to regain the voice that has been taken away (there is no mouth). Rather, it speaks with its own voice which is that of affect. The "conjunction of affect and critical awareness" that this artwork triggers, "may be understood to constitute the basis of empathy grounded not in affinity (feeling for

another insofar as we can imagine being that other) but on feeling for another that entails an encounter with something irreducible and different, often inaccessible” (Bennett 2005: 10).

The main index for this alternative mode of communication may also be displayed in Mwangi’s image. If, as I said above, almost all sensory organs are absent, this is not true for one central organ of perception: the skin. Drawing upon Charlotte Delbo’s definition of “sense memory” (or “deep memory”) which is located in the body (as opposed to the “ordinary memory” out of which stories are made), Bennett explains that “[i]t is precisely through the breached boundaries of skin in such imagery that memory continues to be felt as a wound rather than seen as contained other” (2003: 36). Bennett describes sense memory as being something “nameless” that exists “outside memory proper” (2003: 28) and which registers the unspeakable, affective response that bears the psychosomatic imprint of a traumatic experience. It is via sense memory as a means of gaining access to the traumatic insidious experiences of racism, particularly those ones that have been silenced by the dominant discourses, “that the past seeps back into the present, becoming sensation rather than representation” (Bennett 2003: 36). Sense memory implies sensory communication, that is, affect. If postcolonial denegation ‘imagines’ a voice for the subaltern, as Spivak’s critique claims, Mwangi’s image triggers an affective dialogue whose ‘mouthlessness’ remains, as Bennett states about trauma art, “irreducible and different, often inaccessible” (Bennett 2005: 10). Mwangi’s artwork speaks to us affectively despite its physical absence and thereby connects up with forms of resilience that in turn call for critical thinking and hence for political and social activism.

e) If a **recovery** from postcolonial trauma, as a form of damage that is on-going and deeply ingrained in social and economic structures, is not feasible, then we need to reconsider alternative ways of **living on with** the wounds of trauma that are empowering rather than destructive. Mwangi’s photograph, I argue, heuristically exemplifies such a possibility. The image depicts a human being with a coppery skin colour who seems to be alive despite the impossible absence of a mouth, the organ that makes us breathe, eat, drink and *speak*. It is precisely here that we can locate another major difference between Western trauma studies and Global South trauma: the recovery of the traumatised subject vs. a possibility of living with the wounds of trauma in a productive way (**resilience** as seen, for instance, in forms of social and political

activism). If the focus of trauma therapy remains fixed on overcoming melancholia¹⁴, expressed by the symptoms of PTSD, which are merely considered as damaging effects, memory will be situated “entirely under the sign of post-traumatic melancholia” (Luckhurst 2008: 210). The result of this fixation is that central themes of social activism, recuperation, and psychic resilience are obscured. A certain melancholic attachment to a traumatic past is by no means destructive, as David Eng and David Kazanjian explain: “While mourning abandons lost objects by laying their histories to rest, melancholia’s continued and open relation to the past finally allows us to gain new perspectives on and new understandings of lost objects” (2003: 4). Similarly, Sarah Senk insists on keeping the wounds of trauma open and opts for “a melancholic relationship with the past in which a traumatic history has never been put to rest” (2011: 2). The artworks discussed in this project propose new ways of relating to and engaging with past events, in which a melancholic attachment to the past is refigured as ultimately dynamic and productive as embodied in Mwangi’s image. As long as racism and other forms of discrimination continue to exist (as evinced by the paradigm of *absence*), the healing of such wounds can never be attained. Yet it is precisely this absence of healing that becomes, here, the motor and the condition of possibility for a resilient practice of unfinished liberation. Critics like Craps therefore demand that we shift the attention to “the specific social and historical contexts in which trauma narratives are produced and received, and be open and attentive to the diverse strategies of representation and resistance which these contexts invite or necessitate” (2013: 43). These may involve indigenous mourning rituals, alternative knowledge systems and ways of perceiving the world, including spirituality and other forms of storytelling traditions (see Visser 2015: 259) that lie beyond Western rationality. The focus in postcolonial trauma works, as Senk points out, is “on a new ethics of relational mourning which establishes lines of connectivity between individuals and cultures without slipping into what LaCapra has criticized as a decontextualized ‘discourse of absence’ in which loss is misconstrued as lack and the possibility of working through specific losses is closed down” (2011: 11). The idea of relational mourning that connects individuals and cultures in affective ways (as I wish to add) is a crucial point for my thesis because it impacts upon a larger politics of collaborative, ‘entangled’

¹⁴ Melancholia as explained by Freud and later by LaCapra is a form of “acting out”, expressed as a pathological behaviour that resists change.

modes of cultural work with trauma which is best expressed in Michael Rothberg's concept of "multidirectional memory" (2009) to which I turn now.

First, however, let me pay attention to a major caveat to the paradigm shift that I have been proposing in the above. Via the contrast of Koen's and Mwangi's images, I have been suggesting the necessity of a shift from Western to Global South trauma theories, from individual to collective, from recovery to resilience, from narrativization to affect respectively, all of which I have been gathering up under the shift from loss to absence. In all the remarks above, I have tried to show that Western and Global South notions of trauma, based on ideas of loss and absence, are not entirely oppositional terms, even though I have heuristically contrasted them to one another. Rather, they are overlapping, interconnected, constantly shifting, and always running into one another. However, this blurring of the boundaries between the two concepts may not be without dangers. LaCapra himself confirms a constant overlapping between the two concepts (1999: 699), which he refers to elsewhere as a "conflation" (2001: 46).

This 'conflation' however - and this is the core of the caveat I wish to confront - is not meant by LaCapra in a positive sense, but is understood as harbouring a danger:

When absence is converted into loss, one increases the likelihood of misplaced nostalgia or utopian politics in quest of a new totality or fully unified community. When loss is converted into (or encrypted in an indiscriminately generalized rhetoric of) absence, one faces the impasse of endless melancholy, impossible mourning, and interminable aporia in which any process of working through the past and its historical losses is foreclosed or prematurely aborted. (2001: 46)

For LaCapra here, 'conflation' means an 'elision' of 'loss' under an excessively optimistic 'absence' which may mean that "one remains possessed or haunted by the past" (LaCapra 2001: 46). In other words, while the current popular reasons for valorising a melancholic attachment to the past – community, creativity, ethics – are immensely appealing, they should be used with caution, as he warns.

In slightly different terms, Senk sees the necessity to ensure that such an elision does not take place: she claims that in bearing witness to the traumatic atrocities of colonialism – including "the centuries-long histories of violence perpetuated by the transatlantic slave trade, the erasure of indigenous ways of life, the desecration of land inscribed indelibly in each locale, and the general psychological damage caused by

racism, dispossession, exclusion, exile” – one would have to acknowledge and recuperate “these losses *as* losses and writing into global public memory a story which has been effaced” (2011: 2, italics in original). Both LaCapra and Senk point to the potential danger of shifting the centre of gravity so far from ‘loss’ to ‘absence’ that real political damages are forgotten and thus remain potent, continuing to do damage. How might one reconcile these two apparently incommensurable perspectives on the positive benefits of the discourse of absence and its possible risks?

A possible resolution for this conundrum is offered by the work of Michael Rothberg, who suggests that one may read these two forms of trauma in relation to each other, almost in a spatial sense. Rothberg’s work can be approached via the issue of trauma hierarchies as explicated by Walter Benn Michaels, who, in *The Trouble with Diversity* (2007), explores the question of why certain collective traumas are made explicitly visible in the Western world while the experiences of suffering of the victims from the Global South and other marginalized spaces of neoliberal capitalism are simultaneously kept invisible. As an example, Michaels mentions the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum on the Mall in Washington D.C. He wonders why the Holocaust is treated as a crucial event in American history given the absence of any commemoration of American racism on the Mall (2007: 53). What, Michaels asks, about mourning slaves’ suffering at the hands of White Americans? The absence or invisibility of an appropriate remembrance of the suffering of African slaves at the hands of white Americans in comparison to the commemoration of other historical events such as the Holocaust (which took place outside the States) or more recently the 9/11 attacks, is quite telling. In 2006 (five years after 9/11), New York eventually commemorated the forgotten history of African slaves and built the African Burial Ground National Monument on the terrain where African slaves, and later African-American people were buried.¹⁵ Once again, the focus tends to be on European and North-American traumas, and within that focus, the commemoration of the Nazi genocide of European Jews has a predominant place.

However, instead of reinforcing a competitive incommensurability of traumatic memories, Rothberg offers a theory of multidirectional memory¹⁶, in some ways

¹⁵ Teju Cole refers to these incommensurable and dissonant forms of remembrance in his novel *Open City* (2011: 220-221).

¹⁶ In *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (2009) Rothberg explores specifically the relations between Holocaust memory and decolonization struggles to illustrate his ideas.

reminiscent of Sarah Nuttall (2009) and Mbembe's (2001) idea of interconnective entanglement as a complementary model of thinking about how different historical legacies intersect in the public sphere. Such interaction is "the productive, intercultural dynamic that I call multidirectional memory" as Rothberg explains (2009: 3). Multidirectional memory attempts to challenge the hierarchical and exclusivist approach to chronicling traumas. Rothberg importantly emphasizes that "[t]he dangers of the uniqueness discourse are that it potentially creates a hierarchy of suffering (which is morally offensive) and removes that suffering from the field of historical agency (which is both morally and intellectually suspect)" (Rothberg 2009: 9). His concept of multidirectional memory understands "collective memory as partially disengaged from exclusive versions of cultural identity and acknowledges how remembrance both cuts across and binds together diverse spatial, temporal, and cultural sites" (2009: 11). Rothberg explains: "Against the framework that understands collective memory as competitive memory [...] I suggest that we consider memory as multidirectional: as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not private" (2009: 3). Multidirectional memory provides a model of transcultural remembrance whereby one cannot draw clear boundaries between identities and traumatic histories as they overlap in our attempt to recollect and understand them. It allows us to understand how we can imagine different sites of violence together without reducing them to either the same type of suffering or to utterly separate events. This approach opens up the creation of new possibilities – it can act as a bridge between different discourses and regimes of memory in mutually productive ways and lead towards new forms of solidarity among traumatised groups and new visions of justice.

Most of the artists whose works are presented in this thesis seem to have somehow recognized what is at stake in these perceived distinctions, providing us with more fluid non-boundaries between the individual and the collective, between specific losses and transhistorical absences.

I am particularly interested in the ways that these art works propose models of temporality and community that both acknowledge but also exceed the model of healing in terms of reconstructing the old Self. These works suggest modes of mourning that are aware of but simultaneously challenge the stereotypical understanding of mourning as closure, and hence problematize the recent critical advocacy of a melancholic relationship to the past. It is precisely by dramatizing an interplay of absence and loss that these works open up a space for reading and perceiving things that is outside the

boundaries of an essentializing identity politics, and ultimately posits entangled cross-cultural relation and multidirectional memory as new possibilities for working through. Central to this programme of asking how the application of trauma studies to Global South studies might reframe literary, visual, and geopolitical understandings of colonial violence is the issue of the way markers of sense memory in texts from the Global South affect and challenge our codified understandings of trauma. Affect, in the last analysis, is the key to modes of mediation and communication that eschew established but unproductive boundaries.

3) Outline of chapters

The thesis consists of two parts, the first entitled “Tongue-Tied” and the second “Muted Mouths”. **PART I, “Tongue-Tied”**, comprises three chapters that explore via three different forms of tongue-tiedness the relationship between traumatic experiences and the capacity for and fluency of verbal language. This part enquires whether tongue-tiedness in the selected works examined can be considered a symptomatic reaction towards a single traumatic event or whether it is related to a more insidious trauma embedded in ongoing forms of structural racism. To this end, each chapter is divided into three major aspects: a) Western trauma theory, b) Insidious Trauma, and c) the creation of affective ties, which, I demonstrate, are needed to live in an empowered manner with the wounds of trauma. **Chapter 1** focuses on **vitiating voices**. It takes the Australian novel *Sorry* (2007) by Gail Jones as a basis for exploring different forms of language loss with regard to the two opposed concepts of trauma theory. The chapter then scrutinizes how, between these two contrasting theoretical poles, affective ties occur that may offer the possibility of empowerment. **Chapter 2** concentrates on **audible crying** during the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and analyses how the three aspects mentioned above (Western trauma, insidious trauma, affective ties) are dealt with in Philip Miller’s multimedial cantata *REwind* (2011) with regard to the wailing sounds that were heard from those testifying about human rights abuses when language failed to produce speech. **Chapter 3** then looks, following the same three-fold structure, at **silent weeping** in *Mute*, a video installation by South African Berni Searle, laying bare the ways it links the insidious trauma of apartheid to the xenophobic violence in post-apartheid South Africa.

PART II, entitled “**Muted Mouths**”, shifts its focus towards examples of wounding that are forcibly inflicted upon the subjects’ mouths (mostly) by an outsider. Nonetheless, it is less single events that are scrutinized here than incidents embedded in a larger structure of ongoing discrimination that can be seen as both cause and effect of insidious trauma. It is hence no longer a question of whether these examples oscillate between Western trauma theory and insidious trauma; instead, they are all clearly concerned with the insidious trauma of the Global South. In opposition to the three-fold structure of PART I, the three chapters in PART II follow a two-fold structure in which examples that perpetuate rather than alleviate victimization, thereby cementing insidious trauma, are contrasted to empowering examples that may evoke the connective ties which oppose such perpetuation. **Chapter 4** contrasts a tableau vivant from a performance installation called *Exhibit B* by South African artist Brett Bailey (Example 1) with a performance installation entitled *Iron Mask, White Torture* by Brazilian/German Marissa Lôbo and her collective of women of colour (Example 2). Both these pieces are concerned with the iron mask or muzzle used as an instrument of humiliation and torture during the period of slavery and both works comment on the ongoing insidious trauma. I demonstrate in the first example how Bailey, in contrast to Lôbo, tends to perpetuate victimization rather than offering any effective empowerment. A similar phenomenon is presented in chapter 5, entitled “**Sealed Lips**”, where another tableau vivant from Bailey’s *Exhibit A* and *B* displaying an asylum-seeker whose lips are taped (thereby alluding to the suffocation of deported asylum-seekers in contemporary Europe) is contrasted with two artistic works from Australia that are concerned with lip-sewing. Both these pieces, Iranian Mehmed Al Assad’s poem *Asylum* (2002) and Australian Mike Parr’s performance installation *Close the Concentration Camps* (2002), employ the motif of lip-sewing as an empowering form to protest against current migration policies. Building upon recent analyses of slavery as a biopolitical regime, this chapter discusses the works of art according to the biopolitical facets of a) the state of exception, b) threat, and c) denial and loss of humanity.

Chapter 6, the final chapter “**Suffocating Silence**”, looks at the wounding of the mouth by so-called “waterboarding”. Used as an interrogation method since the Spanish Inquisition, waterboarding was also practised during apartheid in South Africa, and is currently used in the Global War on Terror. In this final chapter, I discuss the perpetuation of victimization on the one hand, and empowerment on the other hand with

reference to examples of waterboarding in the context of the Jeffrey Benzien case at the South African TRC and in the US-led Global War on Terror. I will contrast disempowering and empowering examples of both instances by returning to the biopolitical aspects of a) the state of exception, b) threat, and c) denial and loss of humanity.

The conclusion will then refer to the image of the cut-off tongue to reflect upon the findings of this thesis.

PART I: TONGUE-TIED

TONGUE-TIED: INTRODUCTION

Tongue-tiedness is certainly the least obvious wounding of the mouth that I will discuss in this project, and I do not intend to treat this phenomenon as a concrete physical malformation of the tongue. In fact, of all the examples that I will deal with in my six chapters, the first three in PART I include those instances of trauma speech damage that are the least literal in the organic sense. By virtue of their non-literal character, however, these examples gain a sort of paradigmatic value: they epitomize in a more general sense the dynamics of a shift from one sort of trauma theory to another. This will be made evident in the way each of my discussions of the specific examples itself shifts between Western and non-Western trauma theories, between loss and absence, representation and affect.

As a starting point for my argument, I have chosen a short passage from Ingrid de Kok's poem "Tongue-Tied" (2002) which inspired my choice of the chapter title and lays bare the complexity of its meaning with regard to the shift in trauma theory.

"Tongue-Tied" belongs to a sequence of poems entitled *A Room Full of Questions*¹⁷ which all refer to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) that was established in 1995. In that enquiry, victims of gross human rights violations under apartheid were asked by a commission to reveal their sufferings and perpetrators were given the opportunity to give an account of their crimes and seek forgiveness. But if the role of the TRC was to lay bare abuses long elided in the public realm, it was hampered by the fact that trauma often destroys the language that is expected to bear witness to its cause. The following extract, taken from De Kok's "Tongue-tied" (2002: 24), which may seem to describe such an inquiry at the TRC, exemplifies the impossibility of communicating those unspeakable experiences.¹⁸ The poem opens with the typical legal question at court hearings: "'Do you promise to tell the truth, / the whole truth and nothing but the truth?'" (lines 1-2). However, as the following lines illustrate, first no word comes out of the witness's mouth:

3	Someone's been hurt.
4	But she can't speak.
5	They say she's 'tongue-tied'. (lines 3-5)

¹⁷ *A Room Full of Questions* is the second part of four poem sequences that constitute De Kok's collection *Terrestrial Things* (2002).

¹⁸ For the whole poem see appendix 1.

Apart from the volley of unidentified subjects, the most striking element in these three lines is the metaphor ‘tongue-tied’. The adjective is itself ‘tied’ within inverted commas so that one begins to wonder what the intention behind this punctuation may be. Evidently it marks a non-literal meaning of the expression. If the inverted commas imply that ‘tongue-tied’ is not meant literally, what then exactly is ‘tongue-tied’ supposed to mean in this context and what is the literal meaning hidden behind the term?

At first glance it seems as if the tongue-tiedness described in De Kok’s poem (and in the other texts that will be treated in PART I) is a form of **language loss, a typical psychosomatic reaction**, triggered by a traumatic experience in terms of Western trauma theory where the talking cure is offered as a method of overcoming the loss of language and other symptoms of PTSD. Following Western trauma treatment and its desire to heal the wounds of trauma, the TRC used the format of the talking cure to excavate the core of individual victims’ traumatic experiences in order to work through the nation’s trauma of apartheid and to reconcile former victims and perpetrators so as to make a peaceful ‘living together’ in a new democratic South Africa possible.

To the trauma phenomena pointed to in the extract from De Kok’s poem may be added a secondary, more **insidious form of trauma**, indexed in the phrase “They say she’s ‘tongue-tied’ ” (line 5). Does ‘their’ ‘saying’ perhaps render ‘her’ ‘tongue-tied’? Possibly, this “saying” prevents speech by imputing speechlessness. Tongue-tiedness may be the effect of trauma, inherent to its structure, but it may also be read here as an **imposed silence**. In other words, does ‘tongue-tied’ in De Kok’s poem stand itself in for or silence something else that thereby becomes inaccessible - or is that something perhaps even suppressed by the metaphorical usage? Is the scare-quoted term not merely ‘tied’, but itself ‘ties’, via the way it tried to bring to speech something that cannot speak itself? Secondary trauma here might be induced not merely by the atrocities of the apartheid period, but by the therapeutic model itself. Does Western trauma theory actually perpetuate the silence it tries to break, because it asks the wrong questions? We cannot know why *she* is unable to speak because of her inability to speak (the cause, whatever it is, appears to replicate itself via its effect, producing question after question). Thus, being ‘tongue-tied’ may also be an index of an imposed silence executed by a dominant group, however well-meaning, and its discourse, however cathartic its intent, that nonetheless constantly tries to speak on behalf of the voiceless – even in the very act of trying, compassionately, to help them.

How then should we read tongue-tiedness if the very act of reading ‘therapeutically’, that is, of laying bare the elided trauma, may itself be a form of trauma? The extract from De Kok’s poem suggests a possible answer to this question. As my analysis will show, the tongue-tiedness indicated in the poem (and in the other works examined in PART I) may refer not only to individual experiences brought into focus by personalized therapies. Rather, the ‘tongue-tiedness’ may index more insidious traumas that concern whole communities, and which thus perhaps cannot be easily pinpointed in terms of Western trauma theory. This shift of focus is suggested by the barrage of unspecified markers of identity. De Kok announces: “Someone’s been hurt” (line 3) but who is this someone who has been hurt? Is it the female figure (“she”) mentioned in the fourth and fifth line? Is she a victim herself or a witness to someone else’s suffering? Or does the vagueness of this statement, and the multiple speaking positions it potentially offers, imply that we should move away from individual categories and focus more on the shared experience of the insidious trauma of apartheid, the brutal long-term, everyday discrimination in terms of race, gender and class? Tongue-tiedness here, I argue, goes beyond the “tied” restrictions of Western trauma theoretical approaches and opens up to new affective readings of the image that acknowledge its potential to resist any clear interpretative access to something lying behind or beneath the traumatic symptom. Instead, De Kok’s questions imply that another form of ‘therapy’ may be possible – one that works less according to the logic of ‘metaphorical’ excavation (to find out what lies under or behind the symptom) than according to the ‘metonymic’ logic of contiguity, association and community.¹⁹ At this point I would like to give De Kok’s ‘tongue-tied’ a further twist: the ‘ties’ she refers to may in fact be metonymies (emphatically NOT metaphors!) for the **affective ties** that link the members of a community to each other, and whose cohesive force has the power to enable sufferers to live with the wounds of trauma, empowered by living with one another.

¹⁹ Freud (2010: 296-325) himself identifies both metaphor and metonymy, or condensation and displacement, as the two central operations of dream language, but this therapeutic method relies upon a one-to-one correspondence inherent in the “interpretation” of that language: “There cannot be the faintest doubt what the apple-tree and the apples stood for” (Freud 2010: 305).

a) Methodology

Despite their diversity, all the examples that I will examine in this chapter deal with the complex topoi of truth and reconciliation, forgetting and remembering, and the blurring boundaries between loss and absence. By toying with the opaque affective reading possibilities of the image of tongue-tiedness, each of them may be read as performing the shift in trauma studies within their own work.

This chapter displays parallels to other aesthetic examples of ‘tongue-tiedness’ in two major cultural instances of trauma-commemoration in the recent past: the memory of apartheid atrocities in South Africa and the Stolen Generations in Australia. Both these countries are settler colonies founded upon acts of genocide: that of the San and Khoi people from the 17th century onwards in the case of South Africa (see for instance Adhikari 2010), and that of 90% of the Indigenous population in the 19th century in Australia (see Day 2005: 113, 160; Rowley 1974: 383-384; Welsh 2004: 490). Both countries subsequently enforced various forms of segregation, and both only began towards the end of the twentieth century to officially acknowledge the atrocities done to Black South Africans via the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa, and to the Indigenous peoples in the *Bringing them Home Report* in Australia. The complexity of such acknowledgements in the form of oral and written testimonies lies at the core of the textual, musical, and visual productions that I will discuss in this chapter.

Within this broad analogical structure of the chapter (Australian Stolen Generations/South African TRC) it will become evident that all the works are ‘tied together’ not only via their exploration of the complex multi-layered meaning of tongue-tiedness but also via their progressive order of speechlessness: from ‘vitiated speech’ (which one might describe as the inability to use language, but not its utter absence); via something that steps in once language is genuinely (if perhaps only temporarily) eradicated, ‘weeping’; towards, finally, an aesthetic manifestation of this absence of speech, ‘silent crying’. There is no essential ‘cause’ that links these various degrees of ‘gravity’ of language loss. Rather, I will proceed in a more associative manner, from symptom to symptom. This may appear random, but it is true to the logic of the paradigm shift that I am tracking in this thesis: from metaphorical representation to metonymic affect - from cause to symptom. Metonymy, based on association and contiguity, is the trope, I argue, that one might most closely link to affect. Of most

relevance here is the work of Freud on condensation and association as the two central operations used by dream language, followed by Jakobson (1960) on the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes of linguistic utterances, and on metaphor and metonymy as the two basic operations of all semiotic creativity and also of linguistic disturbance (Jakobson and Halle 1956: 55-82). Freud and Jakobson discover that the principles of similarity (i.e. metaphor) and contiguity (i.e. metonymy) underpin linguistic production, as becomes evident in aphasia, where either of these two operations of speech production may be disturbed, leading to a loss of language (ibid: 63-75). Far from being merely two poetic devices among others, metaphor and metonymy become in twentieth-century structuralist and poststructuralist theory a shorthand for two fundamental operations of language, thought and aesthetic creativity. Metaphor stands for the principle of identity, which increasingly becomes suspect in the wake of the Modernist suspicion of subjective integrity and nationalist rhetoric, while metonymy appears to propose a looser and thus more fluid and flexible version of identity formation and aesthetic creation. Unsurprisingly, especially given Freud's interest in trauma during the First World War (Freud (1981 [1915])) and Jakobson's interest in speech disturbances in aphasia (Jakobson and Halle 1956: 55-82), the axes of metaphor and metonymy would appear to be central in the discussion of various approaches to trauma and its processing via aesthetic creation.

Thus, all the works examined in this chapter accordingly follow a logic of metonymic, associative sliding across a continuum of symptoms of trauma, rather than seeking to get 'behind' the symptom to excavate its cause, as the talking cure might seek to do. By exposing the *ties* that link these various images and topoi metonymically to one another I am seeking to perform in my own work the paradigm shift that I am trying to point out.

b) Structure

In the first part of this chapter I will begin with the Australian novel *Sorry* (2007) by Gail Jones. At first glance, *Sorry* seems to foreground the **vitiating voices** of its characters as a psychosomatic reaction in terms of Western trauma theory but it also takes into account a much more subtle and opaque 'shattering' of voice that escapes Western explanatory concepts of trauma. This form of tongue-tiedness deals with the insidious trauma of the Stolen Generations and the imposed silences it refers to. In order

to reconcile the two trauma concepts and the different tongue-tied characters, Jones picks up the idea of entangled “ties” to create empowered new communities.

From *Sorry*, I will move on to South African performance pieces that are also concerned with the complexity of coming to terms with a traumatic past, this time however, within the context of the South African TRC. Philip Miller’s *REwind: A Cantata for Voice, Tape, and Testimony* (2006), a musical art installation, engages - similarly to De Kok’s poem sequence - with oral testimony from the TRC. I will focus particularly on those segments of the cantata that are concerned with **weeping and crying** as sensory reactions towards trauma that cannot be expressed in words but are nevertheless audible.

From the discussion of the audible weeping in the context of the TRC, I will move on to the video installation *Mute* (2008) by South African artist Berni Searle. Although *Mute* is more distantly concerned with the TRC, it exemplifies the ties between apartheid atrocities and post-apartheid xenophobia by affecting the viewer with a **soundless crying**, thus visualizing the phenomena of speechlessness and weeping and the complexity of multidirectional trauma.

In the final section of this chapter, I will briefly return to De Kok’s poem sequence *A Room Full of Questions* to frame the chapter with a concluding summary. De Kok’s poems cover the different forms of tongue-tiedness discussed in the respective works and perform the progressive crumbling of the machinery of representation - from vitiated voices, to audible weeping, and silent crying – within the affective language of poetry.

CHAPTER ONE: Vitiated Voices in Gail Jones's *Sorry*

Sorry by Gail Jones (2007) was published ten years after the appearance of the *Bringing Them Home Report* (1997), which documented the long-silenced history of 'half-caste' Indigenous children who were forcibly taken away from their families in order to assimilate them to white society, not only culturally but also eugenically with the intention of achieving the progressive 'erasure', generation by generation, of their residual 'blackness'. This discriminatory policy was initiated in the late nineteenth century and continued throughout the twentieth century until the 1970s²⁰. For many years, prime minister John Howard had refused to issue a public apology for these atrocities, claiming that later Australian generations should not be made responsible for past events in which they had not been directly involved. This, of course, is a statement that attempts to erase once again the evidence of suffering by Indigenous people at the hands of the white settlers and ignores the still prevalent racist power-imbalances in Australian society. Only in 2008, a year after the publication of *Sorry*, did the then prime minister Kevin Rudd finally issue an official apology for these atrocities and admit that the white settlers had subjected Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal people for centuries to repressive, inhumane and discriminatory measures.

Set in the late 1930s and 1940s in Western Australia, *Sorry* illustrates how in 2007, the then still unacknowledged suppressed traumatic history of the Stolen Generations could possibly be remembered by a privileged Australian author without slipping into the danger of speaking on behalf of the subaltern. The danger of appropriating the Other's voice is a major concern in Global South trauma theory, and one that I have already mentioned in reference to De Kok's short abstract of her "Tongue-Tied" poem (indicated in her phrasing "*They* say she is 'tongue-tied'"; line 5, my emphasis), and to which I will return later on.

Jones' *Sorry* successfully exemplifies how the current paradigm shift in trauma studies can be performed within a literary work where different traumas, both personal and collective, are linked with one another in complex entanglements.

²⁰ The practice of removing children from their homes "officially ceased by the 1970s, but [its] legacy remains" (Briskman 2003: 7). As Stuart Rintoul notes: "There was no more evil policy in this century than the taking away of Aboriginal children from their families, and the wounds that left in Aboriginal society – both the wounds for individual people and the collective scarring for the Aboriginal people – that's something which has flowed through into all the social problems we see now" (1993: 21).

The novel has two protagonists who broadly stand, almost in allegorical fashion, for two varieties of trauma: on the one hand, the white settler girl Perdita, who, after killing her father Nicholas as she finds him raping her closest friend, loses the memory of the event and her fluent speech (individual trauma); and Mary, the ‘half-caste’ Indigenous girl whom Nicholas molests, and who is made responsible for the death of Perdita’s father and thus goes to prison for Perdita’s crime (the insidious, long-term, collective trauma of oppression of Indigenous people in Australia). Correspondingly, the novel has at least two types of trauma at its core, although, within the textual fabric, they are always interconnected and overlaid, ‘tied’ to one another. Individual traumatic experiences - such as the rape of an Indigenous girl, the displacement and subsequent “migrant sadness” (*Sorry* 60) of Perdita’s mother Stella, Nicholas’ psychological and physical wounding during the First World War – are linked to the broader historical traumas of the First and Second World Wars, the Stolen Generations, and other discriminatory measures to dispossess and humiliate Indigenous peoples. In this way, Jones seems to narrativize Rothberg’s idea of multidirectional memory, where different sites of violence are hinted at “without reducing either of them to the same type of suffering or to utterly separate events” (Rothberg 2009: 5). This approach may serve as a bridge between different discourses and regimes of memory in mutually productive ways and may lead towards new forms of solidarity among traumatised groups and to hopeful new visions of justice for the future.

Although the novel seems to foreground the individual trauma and the consequent loss of language of its white settler protagonist, its title as well as the author’s postscript to the novel make clear that another concern of the book is the collective insidious trauma of the Stolen Generations and the Australian government’s refusal to articulate an apology for past wrongdoings. Thus, it can be argued that against the first form of ‘tongue-tiedness’ that can be explained in terms of Western trauma theory, the novel exposes a much more opaque tongue-tiedness of the ‘Other’, as exemplified by the character of the Aboriginal girl Mary, which cannot be explained according to Western trauma theory. This form of tongue-tiedness refers to a much more insidious trauma: the impossibility of articulating, in any coherent manner, the collective trauma of two hundred years of genocide perpetrated against the entire Indigenous population of a continent via massacres, expulsions, disease, child removal, and other forms of oppression. This is, in turn, perhaps exacerbated by another more toxic kind of tongue-tiedness, that of the Australian government which – via its refusal to *say* the ‘truth’ (as

in a Truth and Reconciliation Commission) and to apologize for it – continued up until 2008 to render the subaltern silent.

Alongside these complex associations of the image of tongue-tiedness, Jones seems to pick up the idea of entangled “ties” in positive and productive ways: the marginalized characters, who are linked to one another via their various degrees of tongue-tiedness, manage to live empowered with their wounds of trauma by forming their own communities (“ties”). In this way, it seems that Jones succeeds – to a certain degree – in reconciling the two different trauma concepts, and what is more, she might appear to subscribe to the hope of a positive future where indigenous peoples and white settlers can be reconciled.

a) Western Trauma

At first glance *Sorry* seems to follow the typical narrative structure of trauma fiction with all the characteristics discussed in the introduction to this project: Perdita, the young protagonist, witnesses how her closest friend – the aboriginal girl Mary – is raped by her father Nicholas, whom she then stabs to death. At the very moment of this traumatic event, Perdita is unable to register what has happened and represses this unbearable memory. As a psychosomatic reaction she not only loses the memory of the incident but also her fluent speech: “In my mouth syllables cracked open and shattered, my tongue became a heavy, resistant thing, words dissociated, halted and stuck” (*Sorry* 10). Her ‘tongue-tiedness’ is described several times in the course of the plot: sometimes this is done retrospectively from her own view as an already grown-up homodiegetic narrator, looking back at the events with an almost fluent, ‘reconstructed’ voice as the latter example has shown. At other times, however, ‘tongue-tiedness’ is described from the perspective of a heterodiegetic narrator who explains that from the moment of murder, “she found herself stuttering. [...] Perdita did not panic; she assumed it would pass” (94). As we know, her stutter will not pass for a long time. It even worsens and since the people around her “responded with distance” (*Sorry* 100) to her speech impediment, Perdita slowly retreats into silence.

With the expert help of a speech therapist, she is eventually able to explain the cause of her damaged fluent language:

Of all the anguishing forms of stutter that torment children (mainly males, as it happens, statistically, at least), mine was one of the rarer. Called psychogenic, it is the consequence of shock, or upset or circumstantial disaster. It is infrequent in its appearance and enigmatic in its cure. Most stuttering is developmental, and fades over time; the eruption of stuttering, as it were, is a stranger thing. (*Sorry* 151)

From beginning to end it seems that the novel replicates the model of Western trauma theory with its main focus on Perdita's attempts to work through her trauma and reveal the core of this "stranger thing". The major goal of the therapy is to regain her memory of the event and a voice to recount it (as in the talking cure). Jones appears to be aware of La Capra's work, carefully following his concept of acting out and working through which, as mentioned in the introduction, are interconnected processes. In the course of the novel Perdita displays the different stages of the acting out phase before coming to terms with her past: she suffers from nightmares where the traumatic scene of murder reappears to her in the form of fragmented and incoherent flashbacks: "The day unveils itself in partial scenes and stages, as if memory-camera is fixed" (*Sorry* 91). The aporia at the centre, however, remains inaccessible until Perdita is sent to a Doctor Oblov, who helps her to work through her traumatic experience via something resembling the well-known talking cure.

Eventually, Perdita overcomes her speech impediment (although not entirely) at the moment of remembering that it is she - and not Mary - who killed her father. However, her testimony comes too late: Mary remains in prison and dies before Perdita realizes that she could at least have said sorry to her. At this point the story about Perdita's repressed trauma and her incapacity to apologize gains a much broader significance.

It is essential that Perdita's speech impediment is never fully overcome. In this way, Jones links the almost-resolved individual trauma (and tongue-tiedness) with an ongoing structural trauma (an insidious tongue-tiedness) of the Indigenous people of Australia: the assimilation policies of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries are fully in place in the 1930s and 40s of the novel's story-time, and are not dismantled until the 1970s; and the 'sorry' that Perdita fails to utter as an individual, will come, at the level of the collective, only in 2008, after Jones's novel has been published. The 'sorry' that Perdita fails to articulate indexes what Jones calls "culpability and the refusal to say 'Sorry'" (2008: 84), the characteristics, as we now know, of a "certain type of (persisting) dispossession" (ibid.), a "[f]orgetting, or guilty amnesia, [which] is

at the core of the text” (ibid). Jones focussed on more than merely the forgotten crime of an individual, or the forgotten trauma of a single victim; she is interested in the forgotten crime of a nation (represented by successive Australian governments and the people who voted them into power), and the forgotten insidious trauma of the Australian Indigenous peoples. Jones seems to be suggesting that until collective trauma is adequately acknowledged and resolved, there can be no true resolution of individual trauma either.

b) Insidious trauma

The unacknowledged insidious trauma of the Stolen Generations, and hence the forgotten crime of the successive Australian governments, are hinted at throughout the novel without going too far into the depth of the Aboriginal people’s psyche, thereby trying not to appropriate the Other’s voice, as Jones explicitly stresses: “As a white Australian, it would be presumptuous to do so and it would risk appropriation of others’ painful experience” (2008: 84).

Jones’s references to the Stolen Generations are thus woven into the plot in a highly sophisticated manner which may seem on the one hand too superficial or incomplete, thereby perhaps replicating to a certain extent the silencing of Aboriginal suffering. However, on the other hand, it may actually be exactly this style of writing that exposes the silencing structures of the dominant Western discourse, which she herself uses but, nonetheless, questions at the same time. This, of course, demands that the reader engage affectively with the text and its possible readings.

One such example can be found when the heterodiegetic narrator draws attention to the assimilation policy from a Western perspective:

There was a cook and two girls – ‘station blacks’, the whites called them – each sent by the Protector of Aborigines to learn the crafts of cooking and cleaning. These were ‘half-caste’ girls, in need of assimilation. Mrs. Trevor – Vera – thought it her duty to civilise them, and to teach them good behaviour and habits of tidiness, to induct them into submission and quiet compliance. To Stella each of these girls, Martha, the cook, and Sal and Daff, all looked desperately unhappy [...] They stood leaning together, conspiratorially, as if wishing to merge into one floral being that would conquer Vera Trevor (*Sorry* 21-22).

The shift from the more distant reporting voice at the beginning of the quotation to the internal focalization of Stella at the end deserves closer attention. In a matter-of-fact style, the reader first gains a glimpse of the assimilation policy in place at the time of the novel's plot. The presumably 'half-caste' girls were sent by the "Protector of Aborigines"²¹ to be 'civilized' and 'assimilated' into white society²² so as "to think white, act white, and in the end to be white" (Briskman 2003: 5). The Protector's role, ironically, was to protect Indigenous people from the noxious effects of their own 'primitive' ways: Jones's character Nicholas explicitly states that "kin would have to be destroyed if Aborigines were to enter the modern world" (*Sorry* 71); the effect of assimilation was in fact to destroy the fabric of the indigenous society by breaking the ties between generations. This fact, of course, is silenced here. What is emphasized instead is Mrs. Trevor's apparent good intention to teach the 'half-caste' girls Western manners and domestic tasks, ironically called the "*crafts* of cooking and cleaning" (my emphasis), which will only serve the white settlers' comfort. Resistance of any kind was unacceptable. Rather, 'half-caste' girls were instructed in "submission and quiet compliance", a form of imposed silencing that is part of the structural insidious trauma these girls had to endure. The painful experience of having been separated from their families is not mentioned here at all.

After this matter-of-fact account of the assimilation policy, which focuses on the white settlers' good intention rather than revealing the horrible truth lying behind such exploitative actions, the second part of the quotation provides us with a brief internal focalisation via the character of Perdita's mother Stella. The previously unnamed 'half-caste' girls are all of a sudden named – "Martha, the cook, and Sal and Daff" – although these may actually not be their original names (often Aboriginal children were given new Christian names). Stella observes that they "looked desperately unhappy" and notices that "[t]hey stood leaning together, conspiratorially, as if wishing to [...] conquer Vera Trevor" (*Sorry* 21-22). At first glance, it may appear as if Stella, for a short moment, shows some empathy for them: she is able to notice their sadness and despair, and what is more, perhaps even some desire for resistance. However, she is not

²¹ The Chief Protector of Aborigines was the legal guardian of every Aboriginal child in Western Australia to the age of sixteen years. He was authorized to remove Aboriginal children from their families and place them in orphanages, missions, foster families, or 'service' as illustrated in this quotation.

²² Aborigines were deemed incapable of living with modernity, and it was assumed that they would therefore 'naturally' die out. This so-called 'dying race theory' legitimized genocide that had wiped out 90 per cent of the Indigenous population by 1880.

affected by her observations: she neither bothers to find out the reason for the girls' unhappiness, nor does she try to help them out of this imposed submission.

The overwhelmingly white focalization of the whole passage which does not convey any significant sense of empathy exemplifies how discourse determines which parts of history are made visible and which ones are repressed and remain invisible.

Perdita, who *does* empathize with her 'sister' Mary, embodies this repression even more drastically when she witnesses the sexual predation that frequently went hand in hand with child removal ("All the white men did it; he [Nicholas] felt manly and justified"; *Sorry* 28). One night, for instance, Perdita wakes up hearing "strange sounds"; Mary is being raped by her father, "softly weeping" underneath his body: "Perdita was not really sure what it was that she saw, what night vision had visited, bent into shapes and sounds, a dream perhaps, uncertain, askew, incomprehensible. She retreated to her bed. She did not want to know. She turned to the wall and shut her eyes tight" (*Sorry* 60-61). First, a number of adjectives ("uncertain, askew, incomprehensible") are mentioned to reassure Perdita that it is not clear what she had just witnessed, perhaps it was only "a dream", but when she retreats to her bed it becomes evident that she simply represses the unpleasant 'truth' ("She did not want to know"). However, shutting "her eyes tight" does not undo the deed, neither her father's crime nor her refusal to acknowledge this crime. This "guilty amnesia" (Jones 2008: 84) makes her (and in a broader sense those who wield political power) an accomplice in a much larger crime against Aboriginal peoples.

It was only in 1995 that the Australian government launched an inquiry into the policy of forced child removal. The resulting *Bringing Them Home Report*, which proved via written and oral testimonies that this policy breached fundamental human rights, was delivered to Parliament on 26 May 1997. It estimated that from the nineteenth century to roughly 1970, between twenty-five and fifty per cent of all Indigenous children were separated from their families (see HREOC 1997: 36-37). Howard's government at that time was, nonetheless, sceptical of the report's findings, even issuing a rebuttal (Herron 1997), and ignored its recommendation to issue a public apology. This refusal to apologize – this "guilty amnesia" as Jones phrases it – is embodied in the white characters' tendency to repress unpleasant truths. Stella's decision not to intervene despite being aware of the injustices done to the 'half-caste' girls is one of the many examples in the novel illustrating this "guilty amnesia". Perdita's memory loss may erase her recollection of her own murder of her father, but it

also erases the more generalized memory of sexual violence against Indigenous children removed from their families. In a manner not dissimilar to Nicholas's preventing Martha the cook from telling anyone about his raping her, by "put[ting] his hand over her mouth", and threatening her so he can be sure she will forever "remain silent" (*Sorry* 28), this progressive imposed silencing is part of "the chronic psychic suffering produced by the structural violence of racial, gender, sexual, class, and other inequities [that have been] routinely ignored or dismissed in trauma research" as Stef Craps and Gert Buelens assert (2008: 2-3). Indeed, such silence is structural to institutional memory across white society: Mary explains to Perdita why she did not tell the police that she had not killed Nicholas: "'No one will believe the word of a bush blackfella. Unless,'" she added, 'they're confessing a crime'" (*Sorry* 203). Until 1841 in Western Australia, 1843 in South Australia, 1854 in Victoria, 1876 in New South Wales, and 1884 in Queensland, Indigenous people were forbidden to give evidence before the courts (Rowley 1974: 127-128). Even a century after these dates, however, the predominantly white legal system continues to erase the voices of Indigenous peoples (see Watson 2009). As Spivak notes, "in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (1988: 287).

Jones realizes that individual therapy, as applicable to Perdita, does not apply to the insidious trauma of the Stolen Generations. Although *Sorry*, as Jones notes, "has a political-allegorical aspect – as one would expect, claiming such a title – it is not centrally concerned with representing the Stolen Generations" (2008: 84). Trying to represent this trauma would be a bit like the work done by the TRC to make known, in public, the gross human right abuses committed under the apartheid regime. The *Bringing Them Home* report did this work, and Jones does not need to replicate it. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, she is, in fact, very careful not to speak on behalf of the 'Other'. Allegory of course is a form of metaphor. Interpreting allegory could be compared to the talking cure, which lays bare the cause of trauma. However, Jones refuses to take metaphor any further. As she says, the novel "is not centrally concerned with *representing* the Stolen Generations" (ibid, my emphasis); instead she opts for something that resembles metonymy: the affective ties that the text finds, for instance, in "a loving friendship between an Aboriginal girl and a white girl, one which intimates a kind of ideal of community and reconciliation" (Jones 2008: 84).

c) *Affective Ties*

Affective ties can be found throughout the novel in various forms. Linked by their respective marginalized position in society (in terms of gender, ethnicity, and age) and their various forms of tongue-tiedness, the different characters create their own little communities where they feel understood, loved and cared for. These communities, above all those based on Indigenous social structures of kinship, implicitly offer a counterweight to trauma, and an alternative model of healing. These ‘ties’ follow the patterns given by the Indigenous worldview, where people think of themselves in terms first and foremost of their affiliation with their natural environment, out of which flows the relationship with other people and their community (see Yeo 2003).

This structure is instantiated in the novel specifically via Perdita and Mary’s friendship. When Perdita is “given a skin group”²³ by Mary’s community, “she knew herself suddenly implicated in a wider pattern, where there would always be someone, somewhere, to know of and look after her” (*Sorry* 72). From the very first day the two girls met, “Mary took her hand and stayed close, instantly affectionate, in an implicit companionship” and “[t]his was the moment [...] that Perdita began to love Mary” (*Sorry* 48). This however is not primarily a human relationship. Mary introduces Perdita to an “entire universe” (*Sorry* 60), ‘assimilating’ her to the Indigenous world, as evinced in Mary’s gesture of holding out her hand to Perdita. This is a universe that consists of “touchings not of the skin” - that is, touchings that include but also exceed and transcend the human touch and the clan “skin-groups”, thereby creating a web of cosmic “apparitional convergences” (*Sorry* 73). Touch, in its tangible and non-tangible forms, is the marker of both affect (trans-individual, corporeal linkages that may be crystallized into perceived emotion) and of association – or contiguity – based on metonymy.

Mary invites Perdita to see in the beauty of the landscape, “the visible and invisible, the unconcealed and the concealed, some fundamental hinge to all this hotch-potch, disorderly life, this swooning confusion” (*Sorry* 60). The previously bare-looking natural environment suddenly reveals its aliveness and its powerful secrets, which can be appreciated but neither controlled nor entirely understood. Perdita realizes that some things remain “concealed”, but what is more important than trying to explore the core of

²³ The so-called skin group system is a method of subdividing the Aboriginal society into named categories, which are related to one another through the kinship system (see Graham 2008).

the invisible is to realize how, as mentioned in the quotation above, some “fundamental hinge” (*Sorry* 60) holds the “entire universe” (*Sorry* 60) together. The “hinge” concretely instantiates metonymy, the trope of association and contiguity. This observation shifts the focus from metaphor, the trope of substitution and identity, which underlies attempts to decode the “signs”, towards the metonymic ties that hold everything and everyone together. It is also this sense of being part of a community that enables people to live empowered even with their wounds of trauma.

Emblematic of these enlivening ties are, literally, forms of filiation that create a fabric, a further instantiation of metonymy. This begins with the micro-level of a game played by Mary, the cat’s cradle: “It was elaborate and complicated. She held up her design, her fingers widespread, and looked pleased with herself. Nets, webs, cords intertwining. There was no beginning or end. It might have been the design of a universe” (*Sorry* 207). The references to the macro-level of the universe, of the stars and the desert, are linked to Aboriginal cosmology that regards the entirety of the natural world as sacred, imbued with life, often coeval with the dreaming ancestors for whom Indigenous people are responsible in a custodial role. The universe from this perspective is a fabric that works in line with the rules of metonymy, which also functions according to the indexical logic of causality: “every mark in the wind-scalloped dirt betokened liveliness and activity. Even the glass-clear sky was a fabric of signs” (*Sorry* 55). Where there is metaphor (“Every bird had a true name”; *Sorry* 55), it is devolved from a metonymic web of life-giving linkages. In the same way, the individual practice of reading, and by association the process of Jones’s text itself, is assimilated to a cosmic fabric of metonymic connections: “When people read the same words, they were imperceptibly knitted” by “touchings [...] imperceptible convergences” (*Sorry* 73). The manner in which everything is connected to everything else via relationships of interdependence, ecological co-responsibility (documented in story, song and ritual) (see Rose 1996) suggests the affective ties that help people such as Mary to live with the wounds of trauma.

Because this world functions according to metonymic connections, the revelation of individual traumas according to the logic of metaphor may fall under the notion of taboo. This is suggested when Perdita asks Mary about the cat’s cradle’s meaning, “‘What’s it called?’ [...] ‘What does it mean?’” Mary replies: “‘My secret’ [...] ‘My secret secret.’ She was adamant and stubborn; she would not tell” (*Sorry* 207). Not everything can be explained in simple words and particularly not via the voice of a

white author. It can merely be gestured at because it cannot speak of that to which it refers. The problem of representing something that cannot in any easy way be represented is certainly one of the “difficult forms of knowing” (*Sorry* 3) that the narrator speaks of in the inaugural phases of the novel. In this way, the novel eschews any metaphoric retrieval or restoration of traumatic loss.

This becomes particularly clear in Mary’s mourning for her mother, whose loss is part of the larger structural trauma of child removal. In Jones’s text, Aboriginal mourning rites which highlight their strong connection to their ancestors are empowering rather than pathological and therefore cannot be compared to the debilitating melancholic reliving of the past as described in the Western concept of traumatic acting out, just as they cannot easily be aligned with the therapeutic process of working through.

When Mary, Perdita, and the neighbour’s deaf-mute son Billy create necklaces out of coloured seeds, which they plan to wear “as a sign of their bond, their own little tribe” (*Sorry* 65, another bonding activity!), Mary sings a lamentation “in her own language” (ibid). The only words Perdita understands, “‘wind’, ‘mother’, ‘fire’ ” (ibid), seem to refer to the death of Mary’s mother, who “had rolled into a campfire one night and was too tired, or too sad, maybe, to roll out again” (*Sorry* 56). The adverb “maybe” indicates that the heterodiegetic narrator does not entirely understand why Mary’s mother has thrown herself into the fire. Metaphorical access is withdrawn. Furthermore, the narrator is unable to fathom the meaning of Mary’s lamentation song: “Lamentation was like this, a falling thing, something in the air itself, something flighty and incalculable” (*Sorry* 65). Obviously, the trauma Mary laments is something “incalculable”, something “in the air” that can neither be represented by the homodiegetic nor by the heterodiegetic narrator, whose apparent omniscience seems to be restricted to the representation of the white settlers’ thoughts. Her lamentation nonetheless demonstrates how she is able to hold on to her mother’s spirit, which provides her with strength and the capacity to build new ties with other people, for instance by creating the necklaces with Perdita and Billy.

As we have seen, the white Australian colonial policy of assimilation via child removal, deemed a form of genocide by the *Bringing Them Home Report*, is countered, in Jones’s text, by an inverse form of assimilation. White characters and white literary production are assimilated, in parallel with an Indigenous tradition of generous

welcome (see Yunupingu 1997), to the larger structure of a cosmos in which everything is connected to everything else by a fabric of enlivening ties.

In fact, these enlivening ties are relevant for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people if they intend to live peacefully together. Music is certainly one element that can embody these ties. As Cynthia Cohen states, “music is well-suited to the work of building peace, because it can facilitate communication, understanding and empathy across differences of all kinds” (qtd. in Gray 2015: 76). In 1998, a year after the publication of the *Bringing Them Home Report*, Australian musician and songwriter Kerry Fletcher wrote a song called *Sorry Song*, on behalf of those white Australians who felt like her the urge to apologize for the pain, grief and loss inflicted on “the people from this land” (1998, line 2) by forcibly taking their children away from their families.²⁴ The song expresses the need to *untie* the tongue-tiedness of a nation, reluctant to articulate an official apology for its wrongdoings, so that a process of healing and reconciliation could be initiated. Since 1998, the song has been performed regularly across Australia, especially on National Sorry Day (26 May), which since 2005 is also known as the National Day of Healing²⁵. After Kevin Rudd’s official apology to the Stolen Generations in 2008, Fletcher added a new and significant final couplet:

- 11 Sing, sing loud, we’ve broken the silence,
12 Let ‘sorry’ start healing our land. (lines 11-12)

Whereas the previous verses of the song distinguished between non-Indigenous and Indigenous people (“we” and “they”), the pronoun “we” in this new verse unifies both parties and expresses the need for reconciliation and a desire for creating new and enlivening ties among the different groups. The song has since then been performed together by non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples across the country so as to signal the tie that is needed to heal the wounds of a nation even if the process has not yet ended.

²⁴ For the full lyrics see appendix 4.

²⁵ In 2005 the National Sorry Day Committee renamed Sorry Day as a National Day of Healing for all Australians: “The Day will focus on the healing needed throughout Australian society if we are to achieve reconciliation” (Justice and Peace Office, 2005).

CHAPTER TWO: Audible Crying in Philip Miller's *REwind*²⁶

Indeed, music may be a recurrent element that allows comparisons, and historically may even create and express ties, across the separate traumas of the Global South itself. All across the Global South - in Latin America from the mid-1970s on, in Africa and Asia somewhat later (Hayner 2010) - efforts were made to reconcile previously antagonistic social groups by establishing Truth Commissions to make the silenced histories of the oppressed people finally known to the public and to prepare the long-divided nations to live peacefully with one another on the basis of equality. South Africa is one of those countries which – after the demise of apartheid – had to reconcile different groups of citizens torn apart by approximately 350 years of colonial and almost fifty years of apartheid rule so as to make sure that the past would not ‘rewind’. Music was a central element in this process of reconciliation.

Typifying the centrality of music to the process of national reconciliation in South Africa was the nation's post-apartheid national anthem. In 1997, three years after the official end of apartheid, a ‘new’ national anthem was composed, combining elements of the old African hymn “Nkosi Sikilel’ iAfrika” (God Bless Africa), composed by Enoch Sontonga in 1897, with an altered form of the old Afrikaans national anthem “Die Stem van Suid Afrika” (The Call - literally the Voice - of South Africa).²⁷ As Anne-Marie Gray asserts, “[a]lthough music played a different role for these polarized societies it still tells the story of a shared past” (2015: 65). The anthem is sung in five of the eleven national languages, starting with three African languages, isiXhosa, isiZulu and Sesotho, followed by the languages of the colonisers, Afrikaans and English. Michela E. Vershbow writes that “[t]he combining of the two songs [...] was a political act that actively contributed to the construction of a community that is the new South Africa” (qtd. in Nicholas Cook 1998: 75-76). Whereas “Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika” was a central symbol of the Struggle, it now served to unite the former opponents and signalled the desire for peaceful co-existence. It is therefore not surprising that music was also an important component during the victim hearings of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), where especially at moments of tension or crisis, when language reached its limits, hymns, including the new national anthem,

²⁶ Exerpts from this audio-visual cantata can be accessed on YouTube and the musical version of the cantata (without images) can be purchased on iTunes.

²⁷ For the full lyrics see appendix 5.

were sung. At moments of ‘tongue-tiedness’, it seemed, music intervened as a mode of release.

The limits of language in the process of reconciliation are epitomized by the frequently repeated idea of the inadequacy of ‘forensic facts’ (see for instance Deborah Posel & Graeme Simpson 2002). To reconcile a country with such a long history of brutal oppression was patently no easy task and could not be done by merely recording ‘historical facts’²⁸. That is why the media coverage of the TRC proceedings played such an essential role. Whereas the print media documenting the TRC proceedings has often been harshly criticized (in particular for its exorbitant price and therefore inaccessibility for the majority of the population), the performative character of the broadcast media was welcomed and praised. According to Catherine Cole, this was due to the broadcast media’s capacity to “convey the affective and narrative richness of the live hearings in a way that neither the print media nor the TRC’s own written report could” (2014: 398). She explains further that in contrast to the matter-of-fact-style of the TRC’s written report, the broadcast coverage focussed “more on the human element” (ibid) of individual hearings. Within the framework of trauma, the ‘fact’ that tends to be severed “from its more human element” is always the site of an absence and therefore cannot provide a platform for reconciliation. Cathy Caruth’s claim that trauma “is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available” (1996: 4) is reiterated by Charles Villa-Vicencio who argues that “[m]emory is perhaps always incomplete. Its very incompleteness is what cries out to be heard. There is the testimony of silence. There is body language. There is fear, anger and confusion. There is a struggle between telling what happened and explaining it away” (1999: 201). The constitutive inadequacy of memory within the context of trauma demands, then, a “difficult process of moving beyond testimony” (Villa-Vicencio 1999: 202). Between the “testimony of silence” and “body language”, there may be not merely the absence of something that “cries out to be heard”, but more significantly various forms of “cries” that *are* “heard”, qualities and textures of voicing of bodies that are present and powerfully transmitted, albeit in another semiotic mode than that of “forensic fact”, or even of the “narrative truth” (TRC Report, Vol. 1 1998: 110-114) evoked by the final volume of the TRC report. It is here where we can find a shift away from the individual case to an embodied experience of pain that may affect

²⁸ The TRC focussed on the examination of single human rights violations committed between 21 March 1960 (the day of the Sharpeville massacre) and 10 May 1994 (the first day of Mandela’s presidency).

whole communities. It is also at this juncture that music reveals its power to work in the service of reconciliation. Villa-Vicencio suggests that similarly to poetry, “music [...] can contribute more to the healing than any attempt to explain in some rigid forensic way ‘who did what to whom’” (1999: 203). According to Gray, “[t]his is mainly due to the fact that affect and meaning through music are derived from the social, historical and cultural contexts in which the music is situated” (2015: 64). Such aesthetic form, particularly because it carries with it a history of community-making and affective cohesion forged in traditional culture and during the Struggle period, activates powerful affective forces and thus may interact with and influence differently the wounded memories of the insidious trauma of apartheid. The ties that are needed to gain a sense of a new community may come to life in living forms such as music and art. It is consequently not surprising that ever since the TRC began its work artists working in different genres made use of the sources available and created artistic memorials to keep the ongoing process of reconciliation alive.²⁹

This recourse to the powerful affective resources of musical culture is what is mobilized in Philip Miller’s *REwind*, subtitled *A Cantata for Voice, Tape, and Testimony*. As indicated in the subtitle, the cantata makes use of the audio archives of TRC testimonies and builds them into a synaesthetic audio-visual installation. The cantata works with the spoken and written accounts of the testifiers. It focuses specifically on the textures of their voices and the non-verbal utterances of the testimonies and interweaves them with operatic music and other musical genres: “once I could free myself from being concerned with telling everyone’s story, what became significant was working with the sounds – the vocal cadences, the shards, the sobs, the silences” (Miller 2015: 6). This is what is heard when language fails to bear witness to the unbearable content of traumatic memories and what affects a broader community. Acknowledging the necessarily incomplete nature of these testimonies, Miller abandoned the project of “telling everyone’s story” and made space instead for the texture of tongues - including, indeed, the moment when language ceased: the silences, sobs and cries.

Miller’s work was inspired by poet, writer and journalist Antjie Krog, whose well-known *Country of My Skull* (1998) also draws upon the TRC hearings which she covered as a journalist for the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). Krog

²⁹ See for example Jane Taylor’s play *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (1998), Sindiwe Magona’s novel *Mother to Mother* (1998), and Sue Williamson’s artwork *Truth Games* (1998).

suggested to Miller that he compose a cantata on the basis of TRC testimonies in order to honour the tenth anniversary of the inauguration of the South African TRC. Miller took up her suggestion, and *REwind* was first performed in St. George's Cathedral in Cape Town on 16 December 2006, the National Day of Reconciliation.³⁰ The cantata then travelled to New York, Massachusetts and London before coming back to South Africa, and was subsequently transformed into an art installation by Gerhard and Maja Marx for the Venice Biennale in 2013.³¹

In my reading of Miller's *REwind* I will replicate the conceptual structure used above: Western trauma, insidious trauma, and affective ties. These elements of my argument can be very briefly previewed by attending to Miller's title *REwind* that encapsulates the central recurring motif of his cantata. The title is taken from Eunice Miya's recorded testimony, in which she reports between crying and sighing how she came to know about the death of her son Jabulani on television and wished to 'rewind' the news.³² Miller plays with the notion of rewinding not only conceptually, but also in concretely audible and visual terms: on numerous occasions in the cantata we hear the screeching sound of a tape being rewound and moved forwards at varying speeds. Miya's prominent phrase "I wish the news would just rewind" or merely the word "rewind" as well as segments of other testimonies are also repetitively reproduced via different voices (the testifiers' voices from the recording, or when they are sung and spoken by soloists and/or the choir) or visually as written words on a large gauze screen on stage. This textual complex contains in itself the three main elements of the argument that follows.

First, it illustrates a stock notion of Western trauma theory, the idea that it is possible to return to and recuperate the past by retelling what has happened. Following this idea, my argument begins by interrogating Western trauma theory, which was mainly used by the TRC to reveal single human rights violations committed between 1960 and 1994. The notion of retrospective recuperation, however, is predicated upon the availability of past events for the retrospective gaze to fasten upon, which leads this

³⁰ The National Day of Reconciliation was introduced in 1995 in order "to affirm our solemn constitutional compact to live together on the basis of equality and mutual respect" (see Mandela 1995, n.p.).

³¹ At the Venice Biennale *REwind* was part of an exhibition called *Imaginary Fact: Contemporary South African Art and the Archive* (2013) curated by Brenton Maart. Miller's live performance of the cantata was transformed in the exhibition space into an interactive installation, showing different images of the cantata on television screens while playing the accompanying music through speakers and headphones.

³² Jabulani was one of the so-called Gugulethu Seven, young anti-apartheid activists, who were killed on 3 March 1986 by the South African Police Force.

approach to trauma to focus on individual cases. In this way, however, the TRC's 'rewinding' appears to have neglected the question of everyday violence in terms of race and gender under the legalised discriminating system of apartheid which caused insidious trauma not easily healed by Western psychoanalysis.

Second, however, the repetition of these motifs in the Eunice Miya complex can, by contrast, allude to the infinitely repeated moments of everyday trauma, ongoing in fact even after the demise of apartheid, that constituted the quotidian experience of the large majority of South Africans (those designated Native, Coloured or Asian) for decades on end. Stef Craps, referring to Mahmood Mamdani, points out that the event-based trauma approach of the TRC was highly problematic since it "sits uneasily with its formal acknowledgment of apartheid as a 'crime against humanity'" (2010: 56). According to Mamdani, "the TRC individualized the victims of apartheid. Though it acknowledged apartheid as a 'crime against humanity' that targeted entire communities for ethnic and racial policing and cleansing, the Commission was reluctant to go beyond a formal acknowledgement" (2002: 33). Furthermore, by considering only "those whose rights had been violated through acts of killing, torture, abduction and severe ill treatment" (*TRC Final Report* 1997: 63) as victims, Craps notes, "the TRC failed to adequately address the injustices of apartheid as a legalized system of oppression" (2010: 56) traumatizing millions of South Africans on a daily basis. I discuss the 'insidious' (ongoing, repeated, endless) traumatic nature of the apartheid system in the second part of my reading of Miller.

I show how Miller, by using a large repertoire of different musical styles, non-verbal utterances of the testifiers and metonymic images, partly overlaid with fragments of written testimonies, is sensitive to these two specific aporia in the work of the TRC and actively responds to them in an attempt to effect a sense of connection.

Third (and this constitutes Miller's creative response to these aporia), since the rewinding motif recurs again and again, it thus takes on the function of a sort of 'anchor' that 'ties' the various sections of the cantata, all of them fragmented and decontextualized, together. This aesthetic functioning is made concrete by the gauze screen that Miller sometimes uses as a projection backdrop for disparate images and sometimes as a partially transparent screen that allows the audience to glimpse the choir behind it. Following this concrete figure of thought that Miller employs within the performance, one might say that together, this ensemble of disparate but disparately linked images constitutes a fabric that makes no claim to represent a coherent narrative

or cognitive totality, but rather asserts the aesthetic and affective agency of the work of art as a cohesive force. To that extent it functions in a similar manner to the cat's cradle in Jones's *Sorry*, indexing ties but refusing to divulge any inherent meaning.

Thus, in the final part of my reading of Miller's artistic reworking of the TRC hearings I will discuss how he utilizes other media than the spoken word and the recorded fact to confront the insidious traumas of the past in a more appropriate way by shifting the focus from the individual to the collective. I will look at a few pieces in Miller's cantata and its visual transformation by Gerhard and Maja Marx more closely, so as to show how they try to capture "the sounds – the vocal cadences, the shards, the sobs" (Miller 2015: 3) of those testifying in musical and visual forms that may succeed in producing affective ties that suture the wounds of trauma.

a) Western Trauma Theory

The transition from an authoritarian government to a democratic state was a highly fraught undertaking and to avoid a violent revolution the interests of all stakeholders had to be taken into account. For this reason, South Africa opted for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which provided both survivors of human rights violations and perpetrators with a space to tell their stories from their own perspective. These so-called 'truths' were broadcasted via radio and television all over the country and internationally so that some of the hidden histories of apartheid atrocities were finally made known to the public. The TRC was underpinned by a notion of trauma and recuperation that contained interlinked ideas, all of which were at odds with the actual situation of those testifying about the human rights abuses of the apartheid era. *Truth* was predicated upon *facts* about *events* that occurred to *individuals* who would convey those events in *verbal* testimonies. Such individual verbal testimonies of individual experience could only provide a partial glimpse of what it was like to live under an apartheid regime that gained its purchase on the majority as a systemic phenomenon of banal everyday discrimination; to that extent they failed genuinely to offer healing to the victims.

The TRC evinced three serious flaws related to its strong conceptual affiliations with a predominantly Western model of trauma treatment. In what follows, I shall show how Miller's work takes account of and replies to each of these flaws.

First, the TRC attempted to heal the still festering wounds of the past and reconcile the country by focussing mainly on verbal testimonies derived conceptually from Western psychoanalysis and “the theological discourse of redemption through forgiving” (Field 2011: 151) that was predicated upon the verbal notion of ‘confession’. Survivors of human rights violations were invited to act out and work through their traumatic experiences via the ‘talking cure’, in which they were obliged, whether intentionally or not, to re-live their painful traumatic memories in public.³³ To this extent, the TRC worked with a model of testimonial truth that reposed upon Western models of the true word as “logos”. Thus the TRC, in the *Final Report*, decided to differentiate between different forms of truth, defining, for instance, the survivors’ truths as “personal and narrative” (*TRC Final Report* 1997: Vol. I, 112) whereas the perpetrators’ testimonies were described as “forensic and factual truths” (*ibid.*). As Mark Sanders points out: “Although [the TRC] declares itself hospitable to storytelling, it proves to be more at ease with statements that can be forensically verified or falsified” (2000: 20). This paradoxical approach shows how despite the TRC’s attempt to provide the previous ‘subaltern’ with a voice and acknowledge the importance of orality in South African culture, it still appears to doubt the so-called ‘truth’ of such “narrative” testimonies. Shane Graham explains furthermore that “narrat[ing] a story requires an agent”, but Western trauma theory assumes that a traumatic experience destroys subjective agency, and that the narrative itself “describes the destruction of the author’s agency” (2003: 14). Thus, he concludes, “the true agent of a torture victim’s story is the torturer, a fact that threatens to exile the victim to the margins of his or her own tale” (*ibid.*). The logic of the word tends to skew the testimony towards the one who demands a word, the analyst (and in a shadowy fashion, the interrogator).

Michela Borzaga (2012) illustrates this problematic phenomenon by looking at Antjie Krog, Nosisi Mpolweni and Kopano Ratele’s *There is this Goat*³⁴, which circles around Notrose Nobomvu Konile’s testimony at the TRC. Mrs. Konile’s son Zabonke John Konile, an anti-apartheid activist known as one of the Gugulethu Seven, was brutally murdered by the apartheid police force in 1986. Instead of reporting ‘facts’ about the death of her son, Mrs. Konile started her testimony with the phrase “There

³³ What helped the testifiers most in these situations was the company of friends or family members who sat next to them, sometimes holding their hands or offering other forms of consolation when necessary.

³⁴ *There is this Goat* (2009) combines investigative journalism, fictional fragments, and interviews and explores Mrs. Konile’s testimony from different fictional perspectives so as to reveal the pitfalls of interpretation.

was this goat” and continued to describe the conversation she had with her friend Heather about her dream in which she was buried beneath coals. According to the event-based Western trauma concept, the TRC took her incomprehensible testimony as evidence of a psychic trauma and failed, as both Borzaga (2012: 71) and Jay Ravija (2017: 75-77) note, to see Mrs. Konile as an individual belonging to a specific Xhosa community, which often, similarly to the worldview of indigenous peoples in Australia, uses dreams as a real and tangible frame of reference (see Rajiva 2017: 76). Apparently the translators in the Commission left out her place of origin in their transcription, assuming she came from Cape Town, and thus taking her reference to being buried beneath coal, which cannot be found in Cape Town, as a sign of psychological disturbance. Mrs. Konile, however, comes from Indwe, an Eastern Cape village surrounded by coal (Borzaga 2012: 73). This essential knowledge about her cultural and social background was entirely erased within the TRC record, made *absent* by a typically Western trauma diagnosis. In other words, the TRC’s limiting focus upon ‘factual truth’ led to a witness’s words being consigned to the dustbin of ‘untruth’, with little space for alternative modes of truthfulness.

Miller directly approached such aporia in the TRC by ‘retelling’ Mrs. Konile’s repeatedly discussed testimony once again, this time though in the form of a distorted musical piece entitled “REwind: The Goat.” As the title indicates, the piece combines the screeching sound of the rewinding tape known from Eunice Miya’s testimony with a very shortened and fragmented segment of Mrs. Konile’s testimony within a song whose content becomes even more incomprehensible for people without any prior knowledge of the case. After her dream about the goat has been mentioned, decontextualized phrases such as “say it”, “say it to me”, “say it to me now”, “so Heather said” are repeated several times. What is foregrounded here is the word not as a token of truth as in the Western logos, but as a marker of communication. Words do not signify, they connect. Their function in this context is not metaphorical (i.e. as in truth-telling referentiality) but rather metonymic, making up the linkages in the communicative processes that join individuals and communities to one another, even across the boundaries of past and present, life and death. In this way, Miller’s cantata detours around questions of interpretation, misunderstanding, translation, all raised by the notion of the word as true logos, foregrounding instead the word as element in a cultural matrix.

Second, the TRC's concentration on verbal testimony meant that it unintentionally re-inscribed a problematic relationship between absence and loss, one that I have explored above. In the name of Christianity survivors were expected to experience a cathartic closure by telling their stories and by forgiving their perpetrators, while perpetrators who were willing to testify were given the opportunity to apply for amnesty so that they could continue to live their privileged lives as if nothing had happened.³⁵ Significantly, according to Ron Krabill, "the vast majority of victims and their families oppos[ed] the amnesty of their perpetrators, and the vast majority of perpetrators offer[ed] little or no remorse, regret or apology, even when they did apply for amnesty" (2001: 2). As Graham points out:

[T]o the extent that the victim hearings have failed to balance the perpetrator-oriented amnesty process, the Commission's work has not only failed to restore the "human and civil dignity" of the victims of apartheid-era violence, but it actually threatens to reproduce the symbolic erasure of the impoverished black and coloured masses. (2003: 12)

Thus, while the testimonies on the one hand did of course successfully reveal the individual **losses** of those who suffered under apartheid, the insidious traumatic experience of everyday legalized discrimination, which still continues to affect post-apartheid South Africa, remained largely **absent**. Furthermore, the perpetrators' option of gaining amnesty, meaning *amnesia* in Greek, involved a form of redemption that allowed them first to remember the crimes they committed and then to forget them. Such an approach may in fact turn the Other's **losses** into **absences**, thereby seemingly erasing a history that was supposed to be remembered.

Miller's cantata deliberately reverses this problematic relationship between absence and loss. His composition acknowledges "the fragmentary nature of memory" (Hutchison 2015: 69) and conveys the inability to express the extent of traumatic experience by highlighting that which remains unsaid and invisible. The cantata does not claim to present coherent narratives, nor does it offer closure in the sense that the TRC claimed to do, with 'reconciliation' as the putative final destination of the process. Rather, it works with metonymy as collage principle, which joins fragments together but, unlike synecdoche, does not necessarily imply a whole. The work combines different musical genres such as protest songs and Christian and African hymns with the

³⁵ Of course, this does not apply to all perpetrators who came to testify. Some perpetrators could not cope with what they had done and even committed suicide.

traditional rhythm of the *toyi-toyi*, transforming and fusing these musical elements into a complex multi-layered sound experience. Originating in the seventeenth century, the cantata is a vocal musical genre that usually combines choral, ensemble and solo voices with instrumental accompaniment. Miller's modern cantata was written for string octet, four soloists and a large choir consisting of 80-100 members. The soloists and choir have sung and spoken parts that include the use of non-verbal utterances as a musical element, thus accompanying the fragments of spoken testimonies. Steve Biko once said that any suffering experienced was made more real by song and rhythm, which are "responsible for the restoration of our faith in ourselves and offer[s] hope in the direction we are taking from here" (1978: 60). Miller seems to pick up on this thought when claiming: "This I believe is the universal power of music and song to convey a spiritual dimension of what perhaps is sometimes too graphic and painful to fully comprehend" (Miller 2015: 10). One might wish to query the notion of universality, but certainly Miller is alert to the affective force of music. This is probably also why the images, created by the renowned artists Gerard and Maja Marx, never directly represent the testifiers or the events they describe, as would be the case in documentaries, television news or social media. Instead, fragments of written testimonies of survivors of human rights violations are projected onto video images of everyday common objects such as, for instance, a chair, a bed, a loaf of bread, a glass of milk, a house façade etc. that are loosely connected to the testimonies by means of metonymy. In this manner, as Garnsey claims, the testifiers' "presence becomes known through narration and through the ghostly embodiment of objects being moved, food being eaten. The body is withheld as a way to resist representational justice" (2016: 483). Not only the testifiers' "presence becomes known" in that way but also the absence of the murdered victim.

According to Jessica Dubow, these metonymic fragments go beyond visual referencing as they "refuse to settle [...] [and thus] speak to the incompleteness of history, to the collapse of its boundaries, its beginnings and ends" (2010: 93). To this extent, the way *REwind* reverses the relationship between absence and loss that the TRC problematically re-inscribed and installs a new version of therapy, if it can be called that, one that "exceed[s] all explanatory frames. Like the content of a traumatic dream, the literalness of his photographic images, their non-symbolic insistence [...] don't so much align the visual sign to the traumatic event, but question the nature of what this (curative) alignment might be" (ibid.). Such a notion does not abolish healing or therapy, nor absolutize trauma, but rather opens up larger understandings of the

pragmatic everyday manifestations of healing or living-on. This aspect of *REwind* orientates the discussion towards my third point.

Third, this example shows how Western psychoanalysis with its focus on the talking cure tends to ignore indigenous methods of reaching catharsis, which are concerned not only with an individual traumatic experience but, in a much more complex manner, with an individual experience embedded in an insidious trauma of a collective for whom, in a further twist of complexity, “trauma therapy’s approach to healing [...] is culturally foreign,” as Christopher Colvin (2008: 228) asserts. What falls into the invisible interstices between the TRC’s dichotomy of “personal and narrative truths” versus “forensic and factual truths” are collective indigenous cultural practices such as dreams, dream-interpretation and dream-negotiation (as in the case of Mrs. Konile’s testimony) that may play a significant role in the memory, commemoration and healing of past sufferings and their present manifestations. Miller tries to respond to this flaw by highlighting the non-verbal utterances of the testifiers that escape both categories of ‘truth’ set by the TRC and open up to other forms of mourning and remembering the past, which instead of claiming closure may express the possibility of living empowered with the wounds of trauma. Outside what may look like the implicit binary of healing and its de facto impossibility resulting from the ongoing effects of oppression and violence, there may be an alternative: one that is indexed by the notion of living-on and resilient empowerment in the everyday existence of a community. Miller’s work employs the affective resources of art to open up such modes of resilient empowerment.

b) Insidious Trauma

If, within Western notions of trauma, the word by definition is connected to an individual subject and to a singular traumatic experience, it would seem that Miller tried to shift the focus from the individual event-based trauma approach predominantly used by the TRC to the collective insidious trauma of apartheid.

Christina Buarque de Hollanda asserts that “the theme of reconciliation should not be between victims and torturers. The question is racial; it is beyond individual agents” (2013: 21). But how can the complexity of the insidious trauma of racism be treated in an appropriate manner?

The institutionalized system of apartheid lasted from 1948 to 1994. However, its racist policies were already installed, in informal and incipient form, within the context of Dutch and British colonisation between 1652 and 1919, and were slowly given a more extensive juridical structure by various segregationist governments from 1910 until 1948 (Mabin 2005; Findley & Ogbu 2011). After 1948, this process gathered momentum. As Sean Field asserts: “What made the apartheid regime so notorious was its refinement and expansion of prior racist laws into an apartheid system, where white domination was consolidated over all inhabitants designated ‘non-white’ under its ‘divide and rule’ policies” (2008: 1). The apartheid regime considered non-white people, who in fact represent the majority of the population, less than human, and kept the violations to which they had been subjected silent. Due to wide-reaching and repressive legislative measures, life under apartheid for the non-white population became a constant traumatic stress factor. Borzaga calls apartheid a “trauma-machine” (2012: 81), which produced an on-going stream of traumatic effects that disrupts and problematizes the event-driven Western concept of trauma used by the TRC.

The TRC was not able to represent the enormity of the insidious trauma of apartheid because it focussed on exceptional cases of gross abuses of human rights, thereby neglecting the majority everyday experience. It is not a matter here of encompassing some unrepresentable totality, but far more, of giving an account of the myriad everyday forms of oppression, including such banal phenomena to mention only a few examples, as the constant pressure to provide identification and thus justify one’s presence in a certain place and an unceasing accumulation of other forms of minor humiliation, the implicit invisibility of the ever-present domestic worker, the burden of hour-long commuting from remote townships to suburban workplaces, or months of separation from one’s family. Given the extent of such forms of oppression, the TRC could not offer closure, because much of the perverse ‘normality’ of apartheid, its persistent and unceasing aftermath, continues to be felt even under a black majority government. Numerous social inequities based on gender and, above all, on skin colour, were institutionalized by apartheid policies and continue to impact post-apartheid South Africa. As Dubow notes:

If this troubles the confident incantation of new nationhood or reverses the redemptive chronology of trauma, through retrieval, to repair, it also articulates that inarticulate condition: the conditions of survival, infinitely present, incessantly ‘taking-place’; of

living-on, living-after, in that time-collision, are always *presently* at stake. (2010: 92, italics in original)

This means that reparation and material repair for the community in the post-apartheid present may be of more concern than healing or forgiveness to many of the victims who testified. Closure is of little interest to those who see that apartheid (as a socio-economic effect rather than a political cause) lives on in its everyday manifestations.

Research from the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation has shown that a large number of testifiers wanted the public to hear their stories for “the common good, but none spoke [...] of their reasons for testifying as being linked to their own psychological well-being. Undoubtedly, they had more extensive expectations of how the TRC could benefit them, particularly with regard to uncovering the truth about the past and receiving adequate reparations” (Hamber et al. 2000: 36). According to Ewald Mengel and Michela Borzaga, the attempt to live with the wounds of trauma “gives many people additional strength” (2012: xiv). Colvin notes that Western trauma theorists rarely mention the possibility of growth after traumatization. They “neglect the agency, resistance, resilience and creativity of [...] individuals and communities as they work to improve their lives” (Colvin 2008: 231). In this way, via a sort of ‘sin of omission’, the TRC may even perpetuate aspects of insidious trauma.

Individual testimonies can thus not be easily assembled as if they are pieces in a puzzle that - once put together - will establish, as announced by the TRC, “as complete a picture as possible of the causes, nature and extent of the gross violations of human rights” (Justice in Transition 1995: 5-6).³⁶ Miller also acknowledges the impossibility of such an endeavour and does not make any claims to fulfil this task himself. Instead he stresses collective, connective modes where “stories of individuals [are used] to impart a larger story about humanity – a sharing of personal stories to imagine new political possibilities, a kind of ‘politics of becoming’. New shared identities are formed out of past differences” (Garnsey 2016: 481-482).

One example where this is achieved is to be found in two successive movements in the cantata, one entitled “Rewind: St. James” and the other one “No Greater Than”, which both refer to the Saint James Church massacre. The first mentioned starts with

³⁶ Despite this claim, it must be said that Desmond Tutu was also aware of these limitations as seen when he referred to the TRC in his foreword to the Final Report as one of the puzzle pieces in a “jigsaw puzzle”, in a search “for the clues that lead endlessly, to a truth that will, in the very nature of things, never be fully revealed” (see Tutu 1998: 4).

the soundtrack of Bishop Frank Retief's³⁷ voice telling the TRC how he found out what happened on 25 January 1993 when his Anglican Church was attacked by the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA), an armed wing of the Pan Africanist Congress, and eleven members of the congregation were killed and 58 wounded. We hear Retief's spoken account, replayed on tape, later accompanied by string music. The following piece "No Greater Than" is very different: it presents Retief's (and apparently the congregation's) retrospective reflection on the massacre. This time, however, his words are not replayed on a tape but (re)sung in the form of an aria by a soloist, highlighting musically the difference between the event-based trauma experienced by a group of white people during apartheid and the ongoing insidious trauma of the 'non-white' population:

[W]e recognized that our sorrow and tragedy was no greater than anyone else's and we felt a special empathy with the many-many people who had suffered so horribly during those years of violence in our land. [...] We had a one-off experience but the stories that have unfolded here are stories of years and years of being victimized by violence. (qtd. from Miller's libretto in Martin 2010: 101)

Whereas the Saint James Church massacre is described as a "one-off experience" according to the event-based model of Western trauma theory, in Miller's cantata it is sung in punctuated staccato rhythm, the phrase "years and years" repeated several times in rapid succession, thereby indexing the repetitive nature of the insidious trauma experienced by 'non-white' people who were discriminated against and violated on a daily basis. Cole points out that "while there may not be a value one can ascribe to the color of a person suffering, the song does present a comparison of duration, contrasting 'one-offs' with sustained 'years and years'" (2010: 143).

These two pieces are followed by "Rewind: Memorial" in which we can hear once again the screeching sound of a tape rewinding and Eunice Miya's voice. This time, however, the segments of her testimony are not the same as before. Significantly, the passages chosen here mark a shift from the individual loss of her son to the collective. In this piece Miya asks for compensation in the form of a memorial ("even if it is a crèche or a building or a school that could be named after our children"; qtd. in Martin, 2010: 101) in the name of *all* seven mothers who lost their sons in Gugulethu for being actively involved in the protest against apartheid oppression. Garnsey claims that this

method “gives voice to memories: the individual memory of Mrs. Miya recalling her grief when she found out her son had been killed, and a collective memory where an individual story takes the emotion of traumatic incident and expands it (at least psychologically) into a collective incident of infinite proportions” (2016: 478).

In my last section I turn to the ways in which Miller’s work carries out these ideas concretely via his recourse to the affective power of non-verbal utterances which he weaves into music: “I try to create a sound-world in which the listener can seek solace and comfort [...] which very often cannot be expressed as powerfully outside this musical realm” (Miller 2015: 1).

c) Affective Ties/Cries

What seemed to affect people most about the TRC hearings were the sudden sobs, sighs and wails that were heard when verbal language reached the limits of its capacity to bear witness to the experience of trauma. Robert Block, a reporter for the *Independent*, described the atmosphere of the hearings as such:

Witnesses, onlookers, commissioners, gophers, [and] journalists all broke down at one time or another [...] Sometimes the tears seemed to be contagious. A witness would sob and then a member of the audience would begin to cry. Soon the tears would spread like a bush fire [...] One foreign observer was overheard to remark: ‘This country is so traumatized. If one person is hurt, then so is everybody’. (1996: n.p.)

Block’s comment illustrates how different groups of people were mostly affected by the non-verbal utterances of the testifiers. It is exactly here, in the realm of the non-symbolic, that the personal trauma does not stand alone but appears to reveal the collective pain of a nation. This collective pain also points beyond individual traumas towards an insidious trauma (“ ‘If one person is hurt, then so is everybody’ ”), and thus wounds that cannot be sufficiently explained by verbal language. However, collective pain, communicated “contagiously” via bodily utterances below the threshold of verbal language, points us, *via its very medium* (body language as affect), towards the substance of positive communal solidarity. The affective medium *is* the message, or better, the affective medium *is* the connective tissue of collective solidarity. As Goodman points out, “[f]rom a theoretical perspective what we seem to be witnessing on such occasions is the production of group effervescence and communitas, a sense of

which contributes to the formation of solidaristic connections among previously segregated individuals” (2016: 49).

One of the most memorable examples of such non-verbal utterance in the TRC hearings was Nomonde Calata’s cry, which was broadcast live on radio and television throughout South Africa and internationally. When Nomonde Calata, the widow of activist Fort Calata (one of the ‘Cradock Four’³⁸) gave her testimony, she suddenly broke down and filled the room with a heart-breaking cry. This cry and other non-verbal expressions of her grief such as her body movement have become iconic, “because they express more than the transcribed narratives; they encode the unspeakable experience of the traumas behind the specific narratives, with which anyone could relate” (Hutchison 2015: 68). Deputy chairperson Alex Boraine described how, in this case, an individual account turned into the expression of a collective experience:

It was that cry from the soul that transformed the hearings from a litany of suffering and pain to an even deeper level. It caught up in a single howl all the darkness and horror of the apartheid years. It was as if she enshrined in the throwing back of her body and letting out the cry the collective horror of the thousands of people who had been trapped in racism and oppression for so long. (2001: 10)

Similarly to Block, Boraine observed how this non-verbal expression shifts from the individual event-based trauma to a collective experience, which connects people in affective ways. Rather than interpreting the silences and non-verbal utterances of the testifiers as signs of a psychic disorder in terms of Western trauma theory, we may realize how they can affect whole communities in metonymic ways and, what is more, they may also express the possibility of growth. Miller is alert to these cultural imperatives as is evident in his stressing the centrality of the collective by blending the sobs and cries of one testifier with segments of other spoken and written testimonies. This is exemplified in one of the last and longest pieces in the cantata, where he refers to “The Cry of Nomonde Calata”.

The piece begins with a soprano voice softly singing the wordless melody. The voice then becomes progressively higher-pitched and louder, before we hear the recorded voice of Nomonde Calata speaking her name. The soloist continues to sing her delicate wordless tune until we hear the sound of Calata’s howling cry accompanied by

³⁸ The ‘Cradock Four’ were four anti-apartheid activists from Cradock, Eastern Cape who were killed on 27 June 1985 by the government security police force. Their bodies were mutilated and burned. The Cradock Four were Fort Calata, Matthew Goniwe, Sparrow Mkhonto and Sicelo Mhlauli.

string music. Her cry is replayed several times and followed once again by the high-pitched voice of the soloist who seems to turn Calata's heart-breaking cry into a non-verbal aria. Calata's name is then replayed once again. Subsequently the aria and the string music continue in the background while we see and hear segments of the sound-recordings of four other testimonies in the foreground: 1) the testimony of Tony Yengeni, political activist, tortured by Jeffrey Benzien using the wet bag method which literally cuts off the victim's voice and breath (a 'wounding of the mouth' that I will get back to in chapter six); 2) the testimony of Heila Van Wyk, wife of Andrew van Wyk, survivor of a bomb blast at their restaurant in Queenstown; 3) the testimony of Lucas Baba Sikwapere, tortured in detention; and 4) testimony of Mlandeli Walter Mqikela, who was beaten and tortured by police when he was a 19-year-old student. Towards the end, when the written passages on the screen disappear, various sound fragments of testimonies blend into a cacophony of voices. The music seems to follow the same structure: the single voice of the soloist shifts towards the end of the piece to the collective voices of the choir, thereby creating a sense of connectivity, where the story of one individual is woven into a larger web of traumatizing experiences. According to Hutchison, the "move from a theatrical to a musical engagement with the TRC is significant, because it represents a shift from the individual speaking voice to multiple singing voices, exploring dialogue between individual soloists and the choir, and thus offering us ways of experiencing layers of witnessing and engaging with memory, both from the Commission and our own repertoires" (2015: 64).

The whole piece, from Calata's howling cry at the beginning that appears to signal "the collective horror of the thousands of people who had been trapped in racism and oppression for so long," as Boraine (2001: 10) phrases it, to the other testimonies that end in a cacophony of incomprehensible voices, is accompanied by blurred, unrecognizable images on an old TV screen set against a dark background on the huge gauze screen on stage. In accordance with the rhythm of the music, flickering images appear and disappear on the TV screen: some brief extracts of TV programs, or merely 'snow', or the written fragments of testimonies heard in parallel as sound recordings. Towards the end, though, a gallery of ghostly ID-photo portraits in negative appears, the images alternating in increasingly rapid succession. The inverted colour scheme makes it impossible to differentiate these faces in terms of either skin colour or gender. The pictures fade in and out of the screen "so that images of people are transformed into the shadows of ghosts. This has the effect of stripping down the individuality of the images,

dulling personal characteristics and instead emphasizing similarities in the shapes and silhouettes; the face of one becomes the face of many. The individual voice becomes implicated in a collective vision” (Garnsey 2016: 485). Whereas the written and spoken testimonies all draw attention to seeing, the images withhold any clear visual representation. In this manner, Miller (*re*)emphasizes the impossibility of conveying a complete coherent picture of the insidious trauma of apartheid, either visually or verbally, no matter how often one *rewinds* the story.

“The Cry of Nomonde Calata” eventually segues seamlessly into the last movement of the cantata, a lullaby called “Thula Sizwe” (Quiet Nation) which is meant to evoke a peaceful community. The transition from “The Cry of Nomonde Calata” to the lullaby is structurally identical with the moment of Calata’s emotional outbreak at the hearings. When she broke down, Desmond Tutu immediately called everyone in the room to join in a rendition of “Senzeni Na?” - a hymn that asks repeatedly “What have we done?” (see Cole 2010: 79). The hymn repeatedly addressed this question to the community constituted (‘we’) in the act of singing. Community emerges in music, which is affect made material, with the ‘we’ created by that affect, either in the commission hall, on television or on the radio. Similarly, Miller’s version of “Thula Sizwe” creates affective ties among different groups of people; it creates community. Julie Ann Rickwood points out that the “collective endeavour of reconciliation is explicitly articulated in the final line of the verse: ‘We sing with our hearts, respect for each and everyone, together, with hope burning strong’ ” (2013: 15).

Perhaps the indigenous concept that best expresses this function of affect not as an instrument to generate solidarity but as its very embodiment is Ubuntu. Tutu often made reference to the notion of Ubuntu, derived from the Zulu expression “Umuntu ungumuntu ngabantu” (a person is a person because of other persons). The idea that a person only achieves self-realization via other people is an identity concept “constructed [entirely] in opposition to the Western principle of the self, self-sufficient and removed from collective needs” (Buarque de Hollanda 2013: 14). Austin C. Okigbo explains that Ubuntu is also realized in the collective singing of a choir: “[T]he choir’s organization and functionality is rooted in the Zulu and Nguni social philosophy of Ubuntu, a philosophy that extolls human interdependency; the interconnectedness of person to person, and the well-being of humans to the well-being of their environment” (2016: 57). Once again this reminds one of Mary’s lamentation song in *Sorry*, somehow coeval with nature itself, “something in the air itself”, which contains the elemental

markers “wind” and fire”, as well as the marker of the matrix of maternal creativity, “mother” (*Sorry* 65). Philip Miller appears to be aware of this Ubuntu-affect aspect of singing when he says: “I believe that a collective body of people singing is [...] a deep form of identification of our humanity” (2015: 10).

The non-verbal expressions of grief embedded in music appear to dominate and frame the cantata at the beginning with Eunice Miya’s gasp for breath before her narration of her finding out about her son’s death on television (the central motif for Miller’s work) and Nomonde Calata’s cry towards the end of the cantata. It is here, in the realm of the non-symbolic, that affective connections among people occur and that change and resilience may possibly be triggered.

Miller is aware of the impossibility of representing adequately the insidious trauma of apartheid and opts instead for laying bare the complexities of such an endeavour. His composition illustrates, as Dubow phrases it, “the condition of testimony: the underside of what can be said and heard, the ordeal of agreeing and of trying to speak” which implies “the understanding that what must be transmitted is precisely the impossibility of transmission, and the listening, the witnessing, of this impossibility as a responsibility” (2010: 92). Yet Miller’s cantata acknowledges the TRC’s efforts even if it reveals its failures. He asserts that it is essential for people to remember and reflect on what happened in the past: “We have to keep this stuff alive. [...] In fact, this is part of public memory, sound memory” (qtd. in Cole 2010: 146-147). However, returning to the past to banish it may involve fatally *rewinding* it. Miller implicitly shows that by the very act of retelling the past according to Western trauma discourse, the TRC seems to replicate an imposed tongue-tiedness. But even his cantata itself is not entirely immune to these perils.

It is questionable whether Miller himself does not also (re)impose a form of tongue-tiedness by choosing a medium which denies access to all. His operatic genre stands in sharp contrast to radio, the most successful medium offering widespread access to and experience of the TRC hearings. Even those people who still lived in settlements in rural areas without access to television or permanent electricity supply could listen to the hearings. In focussing on sound recordings of the TRC, *REwind* appears to evoke, to a certain extent, the medium of the radio. However, in contrast to the radio, which reached even the poorest people in South Africa, the cantata’s performative space (including the later exhibition space of the Venice Biennale) and its predominantly operatic form were very elitist, addressing mainly the well-educated and

well-off audiences likely to be interested in opera and able to afford tickets. Although Miller invited the testifiers and their families to the premiere, the majority of the ‘non-white’ population who were and still are in fact mostly affected by the insidious trauma of apartheid were excluded; the manner in which their cries, in the opera, thus go unheard by the mass of the population, is analogous to the way their contemporary suffering continues to be ignored by the economic and political elite.

The problematic aspects of Miller’s cantata in many ways recall Jones’s *Sorry*’s sense of its own limitations as a white Australian text, while the patent strengths of the cantata resemble the Indigenous Australian creation of ties via song; the Indigenous ethos of cosmic interconnectedness is not too distant from the idea of Ubuntu that is evinced in the collective singing that spontaneously erupted at crucial moments during the TRC hearings. Perhaps the ‘we’ that emerges in the lines added to Kerry Fletcher’s *Sorry Song* (1998; 2007) may be somewhat akin to the social reconciliation that Miller also believed might be attainable through an explicitly musical re-winding of the verbal substance of the TRC hearings.

I now turn to Berni Searle’s video installation, *Mute*, as a response to this problem. Her focus on xenophobic riots shows how racist structures continue in post-apartheid South Africa where tongue-tiedness seems to be an ongoing phenomenon. As the title indicates, no sounds at all are audible in her video. Neither verbal language nor cries, sobs or sighs can be heard. Her erasure of the sound of crying shows the way ordinary people’s suffering still goes unheard in the public sphere.

CHAPTER THREE: Silent Weeping in Berni Searle's *Mute*

Berni Searle's *Mute* is quite open about what it does or rather what it does not do. Wordlessly, it tells us what it is up to and, by the same token, performs what it refuses to do. *Mute* consists of two video projections on two separate screens, running in parallel. One shows floating crosses on a screen and the artist's soundless weeping. The other one depicts a sequence of dark photographic images where the focus lies on an obscure illuminated spot on the ground that gradually seems to be examined by a small group of people. *Mute* is not about anything. It is impossible to know what the artist's alter-ego is crying about or what the event is that is shown on the other screen. In what follows, I will suggest that this is, quite literally, the message of the video. It performs the withdrawal of a message and the refusal to speak for those who experience the event that we can obscurely see on one of the screens. It performs the silence that covers the sufferings of those people, and ostentatiously refuses to offer any cheap replacements for that absent testimony. In this way, it asks us to remain with the silencing of the disadvantaged, rather than swiftly to suggest palliatives that may simply continue to silence their voices.

However, Searle's installation has always had such palliative, supplementary messages imposed upon it. Searle herself is not immune to this tendency as seen when, in her statement in the exhibition catalogue *Interlaced* (2011), she claimed that *Mute* was created as an immediate response to the xenophobic attacks of May 2008, when riots broke out in the township of Alexandra in Johannesburg and soon spread out to other parts of the country. Certainly the temporal proximity of the appearance of this work in the Michael Stevenson Gallery in Cape Town after the attacks in 2008³⁹ may have triggered associations with the images that circulated in the media at that time, especially those of burning people. The greyish ashes and debris on the illuminated ground on one of the screens recall the aftermath of something or someone burnt and the uniformed people who successively appear on the scene as if to examine what had happened resemble policemen. However, the expected victim is absent and the gestures of the examiners remain vague: the video itself, quite apart from its artistic creator, is reluctant to be pinned down to this referent.

³⁹ *Mute* was shown as part of Searle's fourth solo exhibition *Berni Searle: Recent Work* in Cape Town from 4 September – 11 October 2008.

Three years later, when *Mute* was exhibited as part of Searle's solo show entitled *Interlaced*, successively showing in Belgium, the Netherlands and eventually France, the reference to the xenophobic incidents resulted from the spatial proximity to some of Searle's other works that also deal with xenophobia but in a more obvious manner (e.g. the video trilogy *Black Smoke Rising* from 2009/2010). Here, the referent was imposed by the immediate proximity of other works by the artist; the more obvious referent of those other works whose referent could be more easily established and then transferred. In all these cases, the installation's literal, performative refusal to speak its intention is circumvented by contextual declarations of intent. But perhaps what the soundless film is articulating is, quite simply, as its title, *Mute*, suggests, its refusal to speak in a referential manner. Indeed, this is perhaps precisely what Searle means when she says:

In the context of South Africa, issues of migration and borders exploded in xenophobic attacks in May 2008. In response, I created *Mute* (2008), a double-screen video installation in which I strive to express my sadness about the attacks and my inability to voice the shame sparked by them. (2010: 545-546)

Her statement shifts from a referential explanation that the video installation itself refuses to deliver, to a recantation of that referentiality ("I strive to express [...] my inability to voice"), finally arriving at something that gestures towards a realm that is not referential at all, but rather, affective: "my sadness about the attacks and [...] the shame sparked by them". If anything, the video does not reference trauma, but rather, performs (on one screen) an affect that does not speak-for (because it does not show violence or its victims directly) and is therefore silent. In the same manner, the other screen shows affect as a mode of being-affected-by something (weeping), an event that resists conversion into a referential discourse, whence also its silence: we see the effect of traumatic events – a symptom – but not the underlying cause. *Mute* thus plays out the elements of a refusal of a customary Western approach to trauma and the concrete embodied performance of an affective connection.

In order to tease out this complex procedure, in what follows I will discuss Searle's *Mute* following the same structure as above: Western trauma, insidious trauma, and affective ties. Once again I would like to point out that Western and Global South notions of trauma, based on notions of loss and absence, are not entirely oppositional terms, even though I continue heuristically to contrast them. Rather, they are

overlapping, interconnected, constantly shifting, and always blurring into one another: *interlacing*, as Searle's exhibition title implies.

a) Western Trauma

The overall opacity of *Mute* stands in harsh contrast to the explicit sensationalism of photojournalism and other modes of representation that possess epistemic authority in their attempt to document a specific event from a particular perspective. Peggy Phelan expresses her suspicion of the manipulative power of visual representation. According to her, it is through visible representation that "contemporary culture finds a way to name and thus to arrest and fix the image of that other" (1993: 2). This fallacious and manipulative "fixing" of images thus creates stereotypes and perpetuates othering. Especially photojournalism with its very overt depiction of people's suffering, often accompanied by detailed verbal descriptions, creates a certain kind of 'truth' and 'authenticity' that people too easily take for granted without gaining more differentiated information about the incident thus depicted. 'Representation', in this context, is a highly tendentious, manipulative process.

In May 2008, photographs of gruesome xenophobic violence in the townships of South Africa were seen in the newspapers, magazines and news reports on television and social media not only nationally but also internationally. Immigrants from other African countries such as Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Malawi, Botswana, Rwanda, Nigeria, and Somalia were attacked by angry mobs, robbed, stoned, stabbed, and burned alive.⁴⁰

One of the most widely known pictures in the media was that of the so-called 'burning man', which became iconic at that time. It shows Ernesto Alfabeto Nhamuave, a thirty-five year old Mozambican working in South Africa legally, who was beaten, stabbed and set on fire during a township riot. In the photograph, Nhamuave is kneeling on the dry and dusty ground surrounded by litter and debris, his body in flames. Smoke covers the air and policemen seem to approach the crime scene. This horrific image triggered associations with similar scenarios of apartheid violence, where the practice of 'necklacing' was often used as a form of punishment for political traitors among the 'non-white' population: a rubber tyre doused with petrol would be placed around the

⁴⁰ "In May 2008, sixty-two people were killed and more than 100,000 immigrants displaced, many of whom sought refuge in police stations or left South Africa altogether" (Cole 2010: xiii).

victim's chest and arms and then set on fire. This is what happened to Nhamuave, a decade and a half after the end of apartheid.

The worldwide audience watching these scenes was shocked at the hatred of "black people against black people" (see Petkou 2005: 207; see also Abdi 2011), especially after what these perpetrators have gone through themselves due to apartheid violence. Most incidents of violent attacks were indeed carried out by black South Africans and occurred exclusively in the impoverished areas of the townships (Kalitanyi and Visser 2010; Gumede 2015). The past appears to *rewind*. However, the actors seem to have changed their roles; the oppressed have become the oppressors. What is excluded from such images of horrific xenophobic violence in South Africa, though, are the complex and various reasons for such behaviour. To spell out the complicated causal interconnections that converge in such attacks does not excuse or legitimize the horrendous brutality of these incidents, but helps the viewer to gain a much more complex engagement with the limited, even truncated visual representation. The erasure of any background information or a sufficient understanding of how apartheid left its mark on the still impoverished majority population tends to encourage the reproduction and perpetuation of old stereotypes originating in a long history of discrimination.

It is within the context of the media-driven reproduction of racist stereotypes of 'blackness' or 'African-ness' targeting new categories of 'others' (although the victims of violence in fact continue to be underprivileged black Africans) that the implicit semiotic work done by Searle's *Mute* needs to be located. By virtue of the way *Mute* implicitly reworks pre-existing mediatic images, it asks us to pose the following questions. If we wish to avoid the reinforcement of former stereotypes of the non-white 'other', we should ask ourselves how xenophobia is represented in the media and how it is made visible, and what is rendered invisible in that process? What are the reasons for such violence? What kind of 'truth' is created and for what purposes? The often one-sided representations may in fact 'tongue-tie' once again those people (who were apparently now freed from their silence) via persistent visual and textual discourses that lock them into previous forms of othering. Among the plethora of reasons for the violent assaults against black immigrants coming from other African countries, I would like to note briefly that the media itself is partly responsible for disseminating the hatred that occurred.

According to David Mario Matsinhe (2011) the media played a decisive role in encouraging prejudice and xenophobic sentiments. Proclamations from politicians

coupled with media reporting on drug syndicates, prostitution and human trafficking supported the widely held perception that particularly black migrants have a negative effect on South African society. While immigration from Western countries has generally been encouraged, limits were placed on black immigrants to South Africa – by a Black majority government that replicates an apartheid-era sense of South African exceptionalism (Morris 1998; Matsinhe 2011; Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2012). The media repetitively described black foreigners as “illegal aliens”, “illegal immigrants”, “criminals” and “drug traffickers” (see Matsinhe 2011: 298). As Alan Morris points out, “African immigrants generally are being blamed for the shortcomings of post-apartheid society, most centrally for lack of jobs” (1998: 1124). The manipulative power of media in conveying such questionable ‘truth’ should be carefully reconsidered.

It is important to register the manipulated nature of the visual media because those media are part of one mode of truth-making to which the TRC awarded considerable credence. In other words, at the level of underlying discursive assumptions, the media and the TRC were complicit with one another, thus displaying a deep continuity not just in the presentation of trauma but in its reproduction via certain mediatic instruments (though here I am anticipating the subsequent section). As we have already seen in the discussion of the TRC, mediating the ‘truth’ is a complicated undertaking and often there are many versions of the truth depending on the discourse used in the process of ‘producing’ truth. As already mentioned in the section on Miller’s *REwind*, the TRC divided truth into different categories, distinguishing, for instance, between “narrative truth” and “forensic truth”⁴¹, and implicitly attributing the former to victims’ testimonies and the latter to perpetrators’ accounts, thus endowing the perpetrators with more credibility. Photojournalism and other forms of documentary work in a similar manner to the extent that they attempt to convey a certain kind of truth that can be apparently forensically explained and thus verified.

To a certain degree the two different visual languages used by Searle on the two screens recall similarities to the two different discourses of truth employed by the TRC. What the TRC named “forensic” truth appears to be visualised on the right-hand screen of the installation where a kind of crime scene is depicted whereas the left hand screen, where we see the artist’s crying, may recall the “narrative” truth of the witnesses’

⁴¹ Apart from “narrative” and “forensic” truth, the TRC report mentions two more categories of truth: social truth and healing and restorative truth. See TRC Report (1998-2003), Vol. I, 110-114.

hearings at the TRC, especially at those moments when language failed to bear witness to the traumatic experience and nothing could be heard but the sobs and cries of the testifiers. Thus Searle's *Mute* may be read as implicitly alluding to the TRC and its mode of producing truth, even though it was made and screened a number of years after the TRC completed its work.

Significantly, however, this apparent double alignment of *Mute* with the TRC's dual categorisation of truth does not quite work in Searle's piece. What appears to be a crime scene does not unfold and the artist's crying remains silent and unexplained. There is only this speechless, 'tongue-tied' figure whose crying sound cannot be heard and an absent body – literally, we have here only a figure, not a real presence – whose history remains invisible and unheard. It is here that the critical stance mutely taken up by Searle's piece becomes evident.

Mute counters the documentary stance that presumes a transparent, objective truth or a singular, didactic representation of what an event is and means. Instead the spectator is invited to take part in a critical encounter with different modes of representations. With two separate but parallel video projections, which withdraw the possibility of constructing any clear coherent narrative, the artwork actively works against the passive consumption offered by mediatic images. Furthermore, the spatial and physical experience of standing in-between two screens and having to negotiate two seemingly disconnected narratives and temporalities that are nonetheless in dialogue with one another forces the spectator to construct her or his own meaning in ways that may implicitly lay bare the invisible but manipulative meaning-construction that is quietly done by mediatic images in their apparent transparency.

This work is done in Searle's installation by the way the images on both screens progressively change, as if a narrative is about to unfold. But instead of offering a resolution, they remain inaccessible. At this juncture it is worth describing in more detail what the spectator sees, so as to show what is not offered to her or him during the viewing.

On the left screen, animated black crosses appear against a beige background. While they continue to migrate across the screen, they leave inky-looking marks behind them which progressively cover the beige background with a brownish coloured veil. After a minute the artist's alter-ego appears on the screen. She is dressed in black and only her head and shoulders are visible. The spectator is directly confronted with her gaze. Soon she starts crying and sniffing while the inky veil of the crosses covers her

face, in particular her mouth whose sounds cannot be heard. Towards the end of the video, the crosses and their marks slowly fade and disappear. Searle's alter-ego stops weeping, looks down and disappears too. Then the sequence recommences.

The screen on the right depicts a sequence of dark photographic images, which seem 'forensically' to document an event. First, only one person can be seen from a far away distance standing sideways on an illuminated spot, surrounded by absolute darkness. The scene then transitions to a close-up on the spot of light on the ground and then to a wider shot where the person is now positioned at the far edge of the spotlight, much less visible than before. What is visible now though is the torchlight, presumably coming from the man in the background, and something on the illuminated ground that resembles ashes and debris. As the images progress, two more people can be vaguely spotted next to the man in the background. In the following images, these people become more visible as they approach the illuminated spot on the ground. They are dressed in uniforms. One of them is holding a shotgun while the other is bending over the illuminated spot as if to examine the ashes and debris on the ground for some clues.

Given the similarity of the material Searle uses on the right-hand screen to the genre of photographic documentary, the spectator may expect to be able finally to identify a particular event. However, no such coherent story or explanatory ending is offered. As we have seen, in contrast to photojournalism, documentary or even the TRC with its longing for coherence and closure, *Mute* refuses to provide transparency and resolution, objective truth or a clear representation of an event. Searle's installation, as Yvette Grèsle states, "requires another kind of engagement, a slower, more considered and intimate, mode of looking" (2015: 125) than that of photojournalism. *Mute* neither makes any claims to speak on behalf of others, nor of those who can no longer speak. Within its performance of affective tongue-tiedness, it simply registers the impossible task of speaking on behalf of others, of those tortured and killed.

After four minutes and eleven seconds both films are replayed. Sequential narrative logic is abandoned for a temporal loop. Within the psychoanalytical understanding of trauma, this endless loop seems to suggest the idea of an irresolvable repetitive return, similar to the idea of rewinding in Miller's cantata. The repetitive return of the looped video disallows the coherence promised by causality and narrative closure. It does, however, suggest an affinity to "insidious trauma", to which I now turn. Moreover, although this temporal and spatial disorientation escapes any clear

interpretations, it may still be able to create “affective links” between different spatial and temporal realms, which I will discuss in the subsequent, third part of this section.

b) Insidious Trauma

Something resembling this loop structure, not unlike a fateful “rewinding” in Miller’s terms as mentioned above, is intimated by Sindiwe Magona in her essay “It is in the Blood – Trauma and Memory in the South African Novel”, when she states that “South Africans entered their freedom, their post-apartheid space, dehumanized” (2012: 100-101). She then raises a number of questions that destabilize the good intentions of the TRC to restore humanity, heal the wounds of trauma and find closure: “Who told us we would (automatically) re-humanize? Who waved that magic wand to get us what we had lost, what we had been robbed of? What made us think that just because we could vote this meant we were well, whole, and mended?” (ibid.). What Magona expresses in these rhetorical questions is the impossibility of coming to terms with an insidious trauma that cannot be easily healed, especially not in terms of Western trauma treatment. How can people be “mended” when they continue to live in precarious conditions? What people “had lost” or “had been robbed of” during years of brutal oppression, both physically and psychologically, is a sense of humanity that is damaged by the discriminating experience of being othered. Simply because apartheid officially came to an end does not mean that all South Africans are immediately healed of their traumas. The majority of the population is still deeply wounded by the discriminating and dehumanizing system of apartheid and they have carried these wounds into the present. This ongoing traumatization shows itself in the violence that still prevails in South Africa. High rates of murder, sexual violence and aggravated robbery all testify to deep-seated patterns of violence, and it would seem that xenophobic violence is no exception to this tendency.

The xenophobic violence may be in fact a replication of apartheid’s repertoire of inhumanity, re-enacted now with a slight adjustment in the cast of characters – with “black foreigners” as the target. South Africa’s black working-class majority still lives, for the most part, either in informal settlements or townships that were built during apartheid. They remain unemployed, or earn low levels of income. Thus, the ‘internal (black) other’ is still pushed to the margins. They may appear to have gained the rights to citizenship but they are still positioned as the other, as migrants in their own native

country. The unchanged situation leaves them frustrated about what they perceive as continued disenfranchisement in favour of foreign labour. As William Gumede notes in *The Guardian*: “The apartheid system, by forcefully ghettoising ethnic groups, those with different shades of skin or languages, has left a legacy of not only interracial group and colour prejudice, but also prejudice against Africa from outside the country” (2015: n.p.). This residual prejudice now helps to create an ‘external (black) other’ who can bear the brunt of the ‘internal (black) other’s’ frustration at remaining the marginalized ‘other’ within a polity in which the elite Black political class has done little to change the realities of life in post-apartheid South Africa.

It is worth dwelling a little on this paradoxical dynamic. In fact, insidious trauma in this case is buttressed by a psychodynamic that was installed in the colonial era and continues to a century, perhaps even centuries later. From this perspective, 1994 does not represent a caesura as much as a simple gear change in modes of racialized, othering violence. Erin M. Schwartz confirms that “[t]he violence against migrants can be seen as a continuation of the process of othering that began in South Africa centuries ago, where European immigrants renegotiated paradigms of identity to recast their status as belonging and the status of Africans as other” (2014: 193-194). It was indeed the white colonisers immigrating to South Africa who redefined the rules of belonging and the rights to citizenship. Laws such as the Natives Land Act (1913) or the Group Areas Act (1950) were set to disenfranchise indigenous peoples and exclude them from their own territory. The aftermath of such laws can be still felt – not merely centuries after the onset of colonization, but also decades after the abolition of colonization and its successor apartheid. As indicated above, the facts of post-apartheid South Africa shatter the idyllic vision of the rainbow nation that has been promoted by Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela since the end of apartheid. The idea of a harmoniously unified state of many languages, religions, and ethnicities, which share the same rights and opportunities, cannot hold under such circumstances. The TRC helped to disseminate the myth of the rainbow nation but reconciling such a deeply wounded country, as discussed above, is a complicated and ongoing process. After years of promises about job creation and improving living conditions in impoverished areas, not much has changed and people are venting their frustrations. It is therefore not surprising, as Schwartz puts it, that “[t]hose who marginally belong to the nation lash out against those they feel should be excluded. Through violence the disadvantaged in South Africa claims collective authority and inclusion” (2014: 173). Instead of blaming the state for

their precarious situation, they direct their aggression at other black Africans. David Mario Matsinhe describes this phenomenon as Afrophobia, the idea of self-contempt already explored by Frantz Fanon and W.E.B. Du Bois. Whereas xenophobia is defined as the “fear of the other; Afrophobia is fear of a specific other – the black other” (Tshaka 2016: n.p.). This fear is “exemplified by the loathing of black foreign nationals in South Africa” (Matsinhe 2011: 295). Afrophobia is a concept that helps us to understand the psychic complexity of the experience of apartheid, which can be understood as a condition of insidious trauma. Referring to W.E.B. Du Bois’ theory of “double-consciousness” (see Du Bois 2015 [1903]: 5), Matsinhe states that the disadvantaged in South Africa replay past experiences where “[t]hey measure themselves with the yardstick of their oppressor [...] always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others [...]. And once the ideals of the oppressor become the aspiration of the oppressed, the oppressed has become a cultural clone of the oppressor” (2011: 302). The risk of such an unconscious behaviour, Matsinhe argues, is that the identification with the oppressor often goes hand in hand with self-hatred and self-destruction as described by Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1986 [1952]). Violence and aggression are either directed against oneself or, as in the case of the xenophobic attacks, against ‘the other’ (in fact, an other-self, a disenfranchised African like oneself). Matsinhe explains:

Aversion to those who resemble the self externalizes self-contempt, and projects negativity of self accrued through generations of vilifications to the other. From this point of view African foreign nationals are feared, hated and distrusted not because they are different, but because they resemble the former victims of apartheid. (2011: 302)

Thus the self-hatred of the ‘internal (black) other’ externalized onto the ‘external (black) other’ is merely a spatial version of a historical continuity that I have been calling insidious trauma.

Interestingly, the exhibition catalogue *Berni Searle: Interlaced* (2011) notes that the photographic images Searle chose for her video (on the right screen) are taken from work by the South African anti-apartheid activist and press and documentary photographer Benny Gool.⁴² Although Searle’s text does not explain her decision to use Gool’s photography, a link between the violent attacks is evoked. Annie Coombes

⁴² Gool’s pictures of apartheid violence were published in “Grassroots”, a banned underground newspaper.

claims, however, that “Searle’s poignant re-use of Benny Gool’s images taken during the outbreak of violence can’t help but recall Nhamwavane’s [*sic*] fate and that of others like him” (2008: 36). “Recall” is a curious turn of phrase in this context, as it suggests a present image that refers back to, or memorizes, past images: but in fact, it is the past image that refers forward to the present. Searle’s re-casting of Gool’s pictures of apartheid violence in the context of the xenophobic violence creates a connection between the events. But the connection is one that runs in both directions, backwards and forwards in time. The spectator is thus invited to participate in a critical encounter with insidious trauma and ongoing structures of violence in different temporalities - ones that run in countervailing directions. Perhaps what is necessary here is an ‘envelope’ that is capacious enough to contain such multi-directionality - something like Searle’s “sadness about the attacks” (2010: 545-546), which one might construe not merely as a negative affect, but as a space. A conceptualisation of such a space is intimated by Njabulo S. Ndebele when he observes that “the existence of [...] a collective space of anguish may have to be recognised and acknowledged as the one feature in our public and private lives that has the potential to bind us” (2009: n.p.). This “collective space of anguish” both “ties” in the sense of insidious trauma that binds subjects in a fateful historical continuity, but may also create “ties” that provide the potential to heal the community in alternative ways: the “affective ties” to which I now turn.

c) Affective Ties

The weeping female figure in the video is looking directly out of the frame. Even when she starts crying, and wipes off her tears, she does not change her candid gaze. But what exactly is she looking at? The difficulty of answering this question is perhaps the core statement of Searle’s installation. Is she looking at the spectator or is she watching the scene on the other screen? These options can be understood as incompatible alternatives, as a space of traumatic aporia, as a separation – or they can be understood as constantly oscillating positions that are joined to each other because they cannot be distinguished with any finality. In this section, I suggest that it is in the impossibility of separating clear subject positions that Searle situates affect – that which joins entities to each other in ways that may be highly uncomfortable, even disturbing, but which nonetheless offer the fabric of common agency. Affect here is not just about

feeling, but about that which ties us to each other and thus allows us to consider ways of acting together.

Affect sets up chains of connectivity that cannot be limited. The impossibility of pinning down a viewing position is an aesthetic effect that itself cannot be clearly ascribed or attributed to the figure on the screen and thus also works in a contagious manner on the viewer. In this intimate space between the two simultaneously running videos the spectator too is forced to make a number of choices between possible viewing positions: either he/she can take up the perspective of the female figure depicted on one screen upon the scene depicted on the screen opposite; or the spectator can observe that female figure's reaction towards that viewing. In addition, the viewer may also watch the scene directly and explore his/her own reaction. Finally, the spectator may also alternate between the two screens, thereby running the risk, though, of missing out on something that may explain the event and the cause of the figure's tears. At the same time, however, such an oscillation is a gain. The spectator is forced to be in several adjacent positions at once, with the possibility that because he/she migrates between them, those positions may enter into some sort of relationship. A concrete correlative of this experience may be found in the video in the migrating crosses on the left-hand screen that shift their position as if upon some sort of fluid background. These crosses may possibly be metonymies for the deaths of black subjects under apartheid and the victims of post-apartheid xenophobic violence, but also perhaps for the new-found subjects of electoral democracy as suggested by Grèsle (2015: 102). The crosses leave residual traces as they move, so that they occupy several spatial positions, with varying degrees of intensity, at any given moment.

The cross-traces put in visual form an experience that may be best described as what Griselda Pollock calls the "after-affects" of post-traumatic art, an encounter with the traces of an insidious trauma that refuses any coherent interpretative access, but by the same token, opens up communicative possibilities that are in no way guaranteed or secure in their outcomes, but full of promise and potential:

Post-traumatic art pays tribute to the shattering of existing means of comprehension and representation resulting from historical outrages [...] by working towards a phrasing – not merely linguistic, but gestural, sonic or graphic – a touching or encountering of some affective elements capable of shifting us both subjectively and collectively that do not arrive at containing the event in finite forms. (2013: 26-27)

Pollock's typology of medial manifestations of affective communication neatly coincides with the works that I have described up until now in this chapter. Whereas Jones mostly makes use of the "graphic" language for her writing and Miller predominantly the "sonic" one for his cantata to enable such an affective encounter - "both subjectively and collectively" as Pollock phrases it - Searle draws upon the power of silent gestures. Both the silent weeping and the mysterious absence of the body are affective gestures that in turn may effect, via *affect*, "a collective space of anguish" (Ndebele 2009: n.p.) where seemingly contrasting affects (understood in the limited but significant sense of 'emotion') such as **sadness** and **shame** may occur simultaneously and be communicated to others. What is relevant here is less the 'emotive' content experienced by an individual, which may tempt us in the direction of "containing the event in finite forms", as Pollock perceptively notes, than the dynamic form worked (effected) by those effects: "a touching or encountering of some affective elements capable of shifting us both subjectively and collectively", as she puts it.

At this point it is relevant to come back to Searle's comment on *Mute* mentioned above which I would like to repeat here in order to discuss it in more detail:

In the context of South Africa, issues of migration and borders exploded in xenophobic attacks in May 2008. In response, I created *Mute* (2008), a double-screen video installation in which I strive to express my sadness about the attacks and my inability to voice the shame sparked by them. (2010: 545-546)

Both sadness and shame are mentioned as affects that are difficult to articulate in verbal language. As I have suggested, this 'inarticulation' (impossibility of referential expressiveness) may actually harbour a form of 'in-articulation' as one-thing-being-in-a-state-of-connectedness-to-another-thing. In what follows, I will look at both these affects and their relevance in the context of Searle's work as the creators of ties that offer no conclusive solutions in themselves but furnish relational frameworks that are the conditions of possibility of the search for such solutions.

Sadness

Searle's comments about "sadness" may appear, at first glance, to index loss, grief, nostalgia, absence – all negative emotions. But they are inflected by the verb 'to express', which should not be understood in the sense of self-expression so much as a

mode of connectivity. Sadness is a mode of collective joining. The index of sadness in Searle's video is weeping and its physical manifestation tears. Tears are a fluid medium and fluids by definition resist rigid form, boundaries, or any other form of containment. Tears are in a sense the ultimate marker of affect as that which joins rather than separates.

Speaking specifically of tears, Grèsle emphasizes a fundamental conceptual shift that is at the core of affect theory and also embodies, performatively, the processes of which it speaks. "The act of weeping as a gesture", she notes, "[...] is not simply about the expression of grief as a subjective, private emotion. It is also a form of public, affective protest in conditions of extreme political, social and economic oppression" (2015: 128). Grèsle is not making a hard and fast distinction here, which would be to reinstate the sorts of separation that affect theory seeks to militate against. Rather, individual emotion is seen as one element, albeit a relatively minor and extremely local one, of the immense network of affect – connective and collective co-agency – that makes up the entirety of material existence. Thus Searle's performance of weeping may be seen as closely related to Judith Butler's understanding of grief as a means of furnishing "a sense of political community of a complex order" (Butler 2004: 22). Grief, instantiated here in the screen-figure's tears, "does this first of all by bringing to the fore the relational ties that have implications for theorizing fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility" (ibid.). Searle's performance of grief, expressed in her figure's gesture of crying, may thus be read as an affective expression of collective resistance and protest, "bringing to the fore the relational ties" that connect people with one another.

Shame

Shame works in similar ways, but with a degree of complexity that is even more profound. Shame, in this context, is primarily understood in negative terms. "Shame", as Timothy Bewes explains, "results from an experience of incommensurability, between the I as experienced by the self and the self as it appears to and is reflected in the eyes of the other" (2011: 24). This definition, however, effectively ignores the core of shame, which is not just about a split between selves, but also between a blurring of selves. As Sanders notes, shame "resists interpretation, since to speak of it boldly, adequately, is to counteract it, to produce it, to produce the opposite – or itself as its own opposite (shame as absence of shame)" (2002: 3). This is, as he explains, because

“[s]hame cannot be studied as such, either theoretically, empirically, clinically, or sociologically [...]” (ibid: 39) without perverting its essence. Searle’s statement to some extent concurs with Sanders’ definition of shame as producing its own opposite and thus complicating a definition of shame, when she registers her “sadness about the attacks and (her) inability to voice the shame sparked by them” (2010: 545-546). But even Sanders’ interest in the blurring of definitions of shame misses the social dimension of shame, which may link as well as separate selves. For shame is an affect that links. Something more complex is at work in shame, expressed also in Butler’s attempt to articulate “a dimension of political life that has to do with our exposure to violence and our complicity in it, with our vulnerability to loss and the task of mourning that follows, and with finding a basis for community in these conditions” (2004: 19). Butler’s statement may be read as a summation of my argument here, in which shame is intimately linked to the complexity of connectedness, and complicity (etymology, folded-together-ness).

There are two dimensions of this shame-of-complicity. The first has to do with the tension between agency and passivity in the act of gazing. In the artwork, Searle’s alter-ego is both looked at and looking, both an “object” of someone else’s gaze, and a spectator. The spectator-position is not just a marker of agency, but perhaps also of a contaminated, shameful co-agency in oppression. Speaking of colonial violence, Ogaga Ifowodo states that one of the most important ideas coming from Fanon was that “[e]very onlooker is either a traitor or a coward” (Ifowodo 2013: 2). By standing by and doing nothing, the spectator becomes complicit in the violence being perpetrated before her/his eyes. In *Towards the African Revolution* (1964) Fanon asserts: “The future will have no pity for those men who, possessing the exceptional privilege of being able to speak words of truth to their oppressors, have taken refuge in an attitude of passivity, of mute indifference, and sometimes of cold complicity” (Fanon 1964: 117). Sanders argues that this contradictory position is typical of intellectuals who need to acknowledge their own complicity in political structures or ideologies they attempt to oppose: “Complicity was a problem not exclusively for supporters of the apartheid regime and its policies but also for opponents” (2002: x).

The second dimension of this shame-of-complicity has to do with the way in which the act of gazing draws the spectators into the machinery of mediatic representations of violence. As discussed above, such discourses are powerfully authoritative and thus embedded in the machinery of colonial and neo-colonial power.

Phelan, already quoted above, notes that via visual representation, “contemporary culture finds a way to name and thus to arrest and fix the image of that other” (1993: 2). Searle’s alter ego manages to escape her role as ‘object’ and claims agency by returning the gaze, only to become complicit in the mediatic replication of and instrumentalization of violence. In her role as spectator, however, she finds herself being complicit as a consumer of the representations of violence pointed at on the other screen.

This double performance of complicity thereby in turn confronts the viewer with his/her own complicity. Shame, like tears, may be the ultimate marker of affect as connectivity, albeit in a discomforting and unpleasant mode, because it enables the victims of colonization and its aftermaths “to be aware of” – and only thus to “overcome” – “an intimacy of psychic colonization that led them to collaborate with the oppressor” in Sanders’s words (2002: x).

Affective ties on a meta-level

If affect links individuals and entities, it also links continents and epochs at much larger scales, in ways that are exemplified by Searle’s *Mute*. Instead of providing an explanation of any sort, the artwork invites an affective and subjective dialogue with the idea of history and community as an entanglement of different temporalities and even different spaces. In *Mute* Searle appears to negotiate between grand political narratives as they are documented in the archives and mediated in representative forms such as photojournalism or even in the public performances of the TRC hearings (mediated via television and radio), and her own history as a so-called coloured person during and after apartheid.

By exhibiting *Mute* in 2011 as part of a travelling solo exhibition entitled *Interlaced* in Belgium, the Netherlands and France, Searle brings her performance of affective grief and mourning into a relationship with historical and contemporary violence not only in South Africa but also abroad. The exhibition spaces were carefully chosen so as to create connections to the colonial pasts and present immigration policies of the respective countries. In this way, South Africa’s history of violence becomes *interlaced* with broader questions of colonial and xenophobic violence in a global context. The idea of ‘multidirectional trauma’ (Rothberg 2009) in the interlacing of different temporalities and spaces also recalls, as already mentioned, Mbembe’s (2001) notion of entanglement. “[E]very age”, says Mbembe, “including the postcolony, is in

reality, a combination of several temporalities” (2001: 15). “This time,” he stresses, “is not a series but an interlocking of presents, pasts, and futures that retain their depths of other presents, past, and futures, each age bearing, altering, and maintaining the previous ones” (2001: 16). As we have seen in the previous section, these connections run in both directions, backwards and forwards in time. In this way, the spectator is invited to participate in a critical encounter with insidious trauma and ongoing structures of violence in different temporalities that run in countervailing directions.

TONGUE-TIED CONCLUSION: Ingrid De Kok's *A Room Full of Questions*

At the beginning of Part I, I started off with a small extract from De Kok's poem "Tongue-tied" to introduce the complexity of this particular image of the wounded mouth in relation to the shift in trauma studies. Now, at the end of Part I, I would like to come back to De Kok's poem, or rather to the whole poem sequence, entitled *A Room Full of Questions*, which – as the title indicates – opens up a plethora of questions with regard to the TRC that remain unresolved. In so doing, the sequence lays bare the limited appropriateness or failure of Western trauma treatment in dealing with the insidious trauma of apartheid within the format of the TRC and its desire to work mainly through this insidious trauma via the 'talking cure'. What is made visible in these poems is the impossibility of completely articulating trauma and of interpreting the symptoms of such failure entirely on the basis of Western trauma theory. The myriad of questions posed in De Kok's poem sequence cannot be answered, but make us think however about alternative ways of living with a past that will always be linked to or *interlaced* with the present and the future and thus can never be entirely resolved.

In contrast to the TRC's proclaimed aim of undoing the past and finding closure, the poems in *A Room Full of Questions* do not uncover the past or resolve its conflicts. Similarly to Miller's *REwind*, De Kok draws on fragments of TRC testimonies, which refuse to expose anything quintessential about the speakers or their histories. We simply have to accept that "[s]ome stories don't want to be told" [...] (De Kok 2002: 21, line 1) and even "refuse to be danced or mimed" (ibid., line 6). They are inaccessible no matter which discourse – whether scientific or artistic – one chooses. The only thing they can do is to perform this inaccessibility. Not unlike the other works discussed in this chapter, De Kok's poems make use of various images of tongue-tiedness to expose moments of emotional collapse in which language reaches its limits. In fact, her poem sequence contains in itself a synopsis of the three phenomena of **vocal collapse, audible weeping, and silence**, that I have examined with reference to Jones, Miller and Searle in this chapter. Each of these phenomena, in turn, spans the full range of modes of experiencing trauma that I have delineated above: **the inadequacy of Western trauma theory, the impact of insidious trauma, and the emergence of affective ties** that respond to trauma in ways that Western trauma theory has not.

Similarly to the **vitiating voices** in Jones's *Sorry*, we find a form of literal tongue-tiedness in the poem "Tongue-tied." Struggling to confront her grief, the victim cannot

respond to the typical legal question at the beginning of the poem: ““Do you promise to tell the truth, / the whole truth and nothing but the truth?”” (lines 1-2). Her words resemble a “[v]oice in a bottle” (line 8), which first seem to be stuck in her throat and cannot be articulated at all. When in stanza six her voice is finally heard, her testimony is fragmented and incoherent: ““They came for the children, took, then me / and then, then afterwards / the bucket bled. / My ears went still. / I’m older than my mother when....”” (lines 15-18). The core of the symptom – of her tongue-tiedness – cannot be revealed. The legal discourse as well as the Western ‘talking cure’ used by the TRC in the attempt to excavate the ‘truth’ in order to heal a nation of its traumatic wounds is called into question. Her traumatic past remains obscure but her tongue-tiedness in all its forms can be regarded as a traumatic “after-affect” (Pollock 2013: 3), as a trace of an insidious trauma that refuses any coherent interpretative access, but may, nonetheless, open up communicative possibilities that are in no way guaranteed or secure in their outcomes, but full of promise and potential, as mentioned above. Despite the failure of communication, in the midst of that failure, “[h]er tongue’s a current” (ibid) – fluid, connective, life-giving, galvanizing and vivifying, exemplifying at the very moment of speechlessness the affective ties that may sustain life in the face of death.

In De Kok’s “The Archbishop chairs the first session” we find a good example of **audible crying** during the TRC hearings, an event which was also the focus of Miller’s *REwind*.⁴³ The poem refers to the well-known scene where in the middle of Singqokwana Ernest Malgas’s testimony about his experiences of torture during detention⁴⁴, Archbishop Desmond Tutu suddenly collapsed into tears:

1 On the first day
2 after a few hours of testimony
3 the Archbishop wept.
4 He put his grey head
5 on the long table
6 of papers and protocols
7 and he wept.

The poem’s speaker seems to be aware of the sensational public attention this emotional breakdown caused:

⁴³ For the whole poem see appendix 2.

⁴⁴ See Human Rights Violations Hearings: Ernest Malgas (1996).

8 The national
9 and international cameramen
10 filmed his weeping,
11 his misted glasses,
12 his sobbing shoulders,
13 the call for a recess.

However, no matter how many “doctorates, books and installations” and even the poem itself try to “simplif[y], lioniz[e], romanticiz[e], mystif[y]” (lines 23-24) this incident, none of these attempts will lead to a satisfying interpretation. The reader of the poem as well as the spectator who watches this scene live or on television is denied access to a coherent narrative or a sense of resolution. Instead he/she is invited to participate in an ongoing unresolved crisis, the uncertainty and irresolution of the situation at hand. In this way, as Susan Spearey notes, De Kok “complicat[es] and re-open[s] questions about the nature of justice, logic of grief, the foundations of community and the emergence of particular forms of understanding” (2008: 6). The “emergence” of “particular forms” is exemplified in De Kok’s *closing* line: “That’s how it began” (line 29). What appears to be an ending is in fact a new beginning, one that links – *ties* – to the future of new configurations of community.

In analogy with the **silent weeping** of the sort to be found in Searle’s *Mute*, “The transcriber speaks”⁴⁵ (De Kok 2002: 32) explores the entire spectrum of wordless ‘utterances’ that are patently manifest and thus have the potential to affect “forms of understanding” that go beyond representation:

13 But how to transcribe silence from tape?
14 Is weeping a pause or a word?
15 What written sign for strangled throat?
16 And a witness pointing? [...]

“Weeping” (line 14), here, appears as a semantic gap, a semantic ‘silence.’ Is it “a pause or a word?” (ibid.).

By pointing at different forms of tongue-tiedness, the poem as well as the other works discussed in this chapter exemplifies the difficulties of struggling with language as a means to voice, transcribe and write trauma, both personal and collective, and as such addresses the limits of language to excavate the core of insidious traumatic experiences. The different forms of tongue-tiedness do not merely refer to individual experiences brought into focus by personalized therapies. Rather, the different degrees

⁴⁵ For the whole poem see appendix 3.

of ‘tongue-tiedness’ may index more insidious traumas that concern whole communities – indeed by “witness pointing” – and which thus cannot be easily pinned down in terms of Western trauma theory. Embedded in assertions of the impossibility of transcription, including the collapse of the identity-function of metaphor (“*Is weeping a pause or a word?*”, line 14, my emphasis), a deep social connectedness is evinced. These connections are embodied in a series of enjambments that perform the looser but more resilient chains of association characteristic of metonymy: “the silence seemed to stretch / Past the police guard, into the street, / Away to a door or a grave or a child” (lines 19-21) – becoming an inclusive glimpse of a community that is wounded, but also – above all via the concluding figure of the child – resilient, promising and life-affirming.

Within the affective language of poetry *A Room Full of Questions* manages to perform within a single work the progressive crumbling of the machinery of representation – from vitiated voices, to audible weeping, and silent crying – that I have illustrated in the discussion of the respective works by Jones, Miller and Searle mentioned in this chapter. De Kok’s poems reveal in an exemplary manner the limits of Western trauma theory in dealing with the insidious trauma of Global South experiences of discrimination in various incidents and the inappropriateness of the Western talking cure to articulate and resolve insidious trauma. In most cases, the Western trauma approach may even appear as an imposed ‘tongue-tying’ itself despite its apparent good intentions.

PART II: MUTED MOUTHS

MUTED MOUTHS: INTRODUCTION

In his collection of essays *Moving the Centre*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiongó describes how during the late colonial period in Kenya, he and other children were punished when caught speaking their native languages. “In some cases”, Ngũgĩ recounts, “our mouths were stuffed with pieces of paper from the wastepaper basket, which were then passed from one mouth to that of the latest offender. Humiliation in relation to language was the key” (1993: 33). In this instance, the children were not only forbidden to speak their own language, but were physically punished for doing so: their mouths were stuffed literally with pieces of paper from a waste-paper-basket. This sort of humiliation demonstrates to what extent the oppressors forcefully silenced indigenous languages (by literally stuffing the mouths of the children) while imposing instead their own language upon them (here instantiated by paper as the medium of Western writing that overrides indigenous orality). The children are depicted as helpless victims who are not only stuffed with rubbish but are treated as such. Ngũgĩ’s description is paradoxical. It is clearly an indictment of this treatment, but by the same token, it appears, in a bizarre manner, to perpetuate the portrayal of the colonial subject as a silenced subject. Ironically, his description perpetuates the very mode of silencing he describes: writing in English, in a paper format, he continues just those active medial repressions of oral literatures in native languages that he critiques. Of course, in other contexts, Ngũgĩ decided to fight against this trap by writing his texts in Gikuyu, in genres which mobilized the forms and characteristics of oral literature, and in some cases were even read aloud in public groups, thus making the written text an exemplar of oral literary culture⁴⁶, but this specific instantiation appears to re-inscribe the silencing he critiques. Does it perhaps become, via this very inscription, an instantiation of the insidious violence it rebukes?

In apparent analogy to this example, Afro-Cuban-American artist María Magdalena Campos-Pons also dramatizes the presence of a text (embodied in a textile) in the colonial subject’s mouth. In her silent video projection *No es otro día cualquiera* (*Not Just Another Day*, 1998), Campos-Pons presents a frontal view of her white

⁴⁶ See for instance his novel *Caitani mũtharaba-Inĩ* (1980) (*Devil on the Cross*, from 1982), which Ngũgĩ wrote on toilet paper while in prison. All his novels since *Devil on the Cross*, culminating in his most recent novel, *Mũrogi wa Kagogo* (*Wizard of the Crow*, 2006), have been written in Gikuyu and then translated into English, sometimes by himself. *Devil on the Cross* was apparently read aloud in public bars (see Serpell 2017: n.p.), and *Wizard of the Crow* includes such an episode in its fictional action.

painted face and upper torso, the latter inscribed with the Spanish words *PATRIA UNA TRAMPA* (fatherland is a trap). Eyes closed, she pulls a white organza ribbon out of her mouth. The textile is a text, inscribed with the English words *identity* and *incident*.

The stuffing of the mouth via writing and text(ile) seems to have created a repressive identity, written over in English, the language of global US-led imperialism; and the text in its materiality may be the trauma event (*incident*), performed before our eyes. Yet, a number of significant differences are evident. First, the vector of stuffing is the opposite to the one we observe in Ngũgĩ's example: the textile is being removed from the mouth, presumably freeing it of obstruction. Second, it is not paper that fills the mouth, but a ribbon, a textile often used in art works of feminine industry and productivity (Parker 1984, Farber and Tully 2014, Syfret 2016)⁴⁷. And third, a ribbon *ties*: the strip of ribbon that Campos-Pons pulls out of her mouth may, in fact, embody connective ties that can be productive for this process of ongoing collective identity formation. Fixed categorisations in terms of identity are a trap as the writing on her white-painted chest indicates (*PATRIA UNA TRAMPA*), but the possibility of living empowered with the influences that branded the colonial subject is exactly what differentiates the victim from the survivor. As Philip Auslander notes in a review of Campos-Pons' work, "the artist offers pensive meditations on the ways in which the various sources of her identity do not so much trap as haunt, like spirits from other times and places" (2009: 196). Haunting and ghosting are familiar tropes in relation to slavery's ongoing presence (see e.g. Wester 2012; Young 2006; Sharpe 2003). Western trauma theory understands haunting negatively as a sign of a melancholic stasis that involves a compulsive acting out of the trauma of the past. By contrast, haunting in this context, indexed by the polysemic 'ghostly' whiteness of the artist's skin, is a means of commemorating slavery and colonisation in a manner that prompts new and positive ways of living with that past in the future.

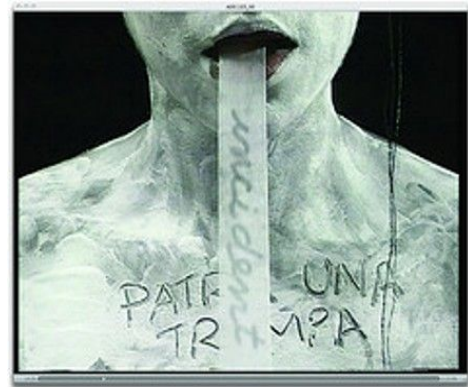


Fig. 3: Still from María Magdalena Campos-Pons *No es otro día cualquiera* (1998).

⁴⁷ In her article "How Women are changing the world with textiles", Wendy Syfret draws attention to the way women used domestic art as covert forms of protest and activism all around the world (2016).

Thus, whereas Ngũgĩ seems to rehearse and re-inscribe the victim status of the ‘Other’ in the brief account mentioned above, Campos-Pons’s *No es otro día cualquiera* appears to offer a counter-example where the muted mouth becomes productive and generative rather than merely disabling.

These two contrasting works are very mild instances of the forms of muting the mouth that I examine in the course of this second part of the thesis, and thus serve as heuristic examples of the point I want to make: it is not enough to be aware of the insidious trauma experienced by the ‘Other’ and to attempt to reveal the cruel histories of the past and present; the revelation runs the risk of becoming a re-inscription, thereby perpetuating, rather than stopping, insidious trauma. As Liisa Malkki suggests, the notion of revelation relies on “a simple, romantic argument about ‘giving the people a voice’” (1996: 398). In reality, however, “one would find underneath the silence not a voice waiting to be liberated but ever-deeper historical layers of silencing” (ibid.). Portraying the powerlessness of those suffering insidious trauma might thus be tantamount to replicating those structures of disempowerment. What remains hidden and *unheard* are the many voices of those subjects who, despite being muted in one way or the other, continue to “talk back”, as bell hooks (1989: 5) suggests, with or without a stopped-up mouth. It is perhaps less the Western ‘talking cure’ that will enable the voice of the oppressed to be heard and the trauma to be ‘overcome’ than, as Nthabiseng Motsemme suggests, a space of “imagination-as-generator,” which may allow the (re)invention of the othered subject “beyond the limits of available oppressive representations” (2004: 924). The insidious trauma cannot be healed completely but the manner in which the multiple facets of insidious trauma are approached in works of music, art and literature may enable “the invisible but agentic work of the imagination to reconfigure our social world” (Motsemme 2004: 910). The counter-examples in this chapter demonstrate that even within a “state of exception” (Agamben 2005) where political subjects are reduced to what Giorgio Agamben calls ‘bare life’, resilience can subsist against all odds and affective ties can emerge and trigger political change.

a) Methodology

In contrast to the largely abstract images of tongue-tiedness that I described in chapter one, this chapter will focus on more concrete images of the wounding of the mouth by objects that are intentionally used to prevent speech. Ranging from iron

masks to various textiles, these objects are used as instruments of torture and coercion in order to humiliate and denigrate the ‘Other’, thereby reducing ‘it’ to the status of ‘bare life.’ Agamben’s notion of ‘bare life’, described in *Homo Sacer* (1998), is useful in this context, since it describes subjects who are not merely denied political and legal representation, but are cast outside the bounds of the body politic, and thus are exposed to the full force of sovereign violence because they are no longer within the purview of the rule of law. The subject ceases to exist as a social and political subject, remaining visible only as the object of violence, that is, as “bare life”. Agamben constantly stresses the paradoxical “topology” of “bare life” (Agamben 1998: 19, 20): “bare life” is *excluded* from the polis, the rule of law, indeed, the realm of the human, but *included* in, or captured by the power of state violence in what is an “exterior” “zone of lawlessness” where “bare life” is abandoned by law (ibid. 7, 8, 28, 110). Agamben’s study takes the figure of “the camp” – paradigmatically, the Nazi concentration camp – as epitomizing the state of exception extracted from the normal rule of law (Agamben 2005) where the ‘Other’ becomes the subject of a violent “biopolitics” (Foucault 1991 [1975]; 1980 [1978]). However, what Agamben seems to ignore in his discussion is that even ‘bare life’ outside the polity may display forms of political resistance. Even in these states of exception, new political subjects may emerge who refuse to be silenced, as the counter-examples I enumerate in this chapter will demonstrate.

As Christian Williams notes, such an understanding of ‘bare life’ “opens the possibility that the ‘camp’ is not merely the end of modern history, as Agamben suggests, but also one of its beginnings – a space where socially significant histories are produced” (2014: 121). Reduction to the status of “bare life” occurred already during slavery and colonization, and thus well before the invention of the concentration camp, a fact that Agamben seems to ignore in his, often ahistorical, study. However, “[a]ny historical account of the rise of modern terror”, as Mbembe stresses, “needs to address slavery, which could be considered one of the first instances of biopolitical experimentation” (2003: 21). A number of voices (e.g. Malkii 1995; Williams 2014; Fiskesjö 2012; Whitley 2017) have emerged, who similarly to Mbembe, take the figures of the ‘slave’ and the ‘barbarian’ as the first *homines sacri*⁴⁸ into account:

⁴⁸ In order to reflect on citizenship, exclusion and the rule of law of the modern Western state, Agamben revives the ancient Roman figure of *homo sacer* as an outcast who is excluded from society. Stripped of any legal protection, so that his biological life could be taken by anyone with impunity, the *homo sacer* was reduced to bare life.

The two paradigmatic figures are so closely linked, and in effect have formed a two-pronged tool for such subjugation and exploitation by which people first defined as barbarians are reduced to and exploited as slaves, a pattern repeated today when “illegal migrants” are dragged down into (illegal and hidden) slavery (Fiskesjö 2012: 162).

By the same token, even in these contexts of dehumanization, resilient subjects persisted in contesting the conditions that sought to reduce them to ‘bare life’. Bare life, as suggested by Alexander G. Weheliye (2014), never loses its humanity. Even within the most dehumanizing environments there is still space for humanity, agency and resilience to occur. Rather than taking the figures of the slave and the colonial subject merely as victims of the ongoing Global North brutality, we should focus on their long tradition of resistance and the way it founded an ongoing practice of contestation, and a fabric of continuing acts of resistance, acts that are often silenced in the dominant discourses of the Western world.

Accordingly, the torture methods I discuss in PART II start with examples of slavery and will end with more recent practices of muting the mouth of the ‘Other’ in states of exceptions such as refugee camps and prisons. Instruments of torture that involve muting the mouth have been used since colonialism and slavery (and in fact even much earlier) and are still used in many conflict situations all over the world, often state-sanctioned although officially condemned as human rights violations.

The concreteness of the examples I examine in PART II is of greatest significance. In the face of these entirely physical modes of muting the mouth, it becomes impossible to regard silence, as Western trauma theory claims, as a psychosomatic reaction to a prior trauma. In this conception, trauma and silence, as it were, are separate elements linked sequentially by a causal relationship that trauma therapy seeks to reverse. By contrast, the instruments of torture and coercion that I discuss here show that silence is what modes of oppression, in the past and in the present, deliberately seek to produce in the most concrete manner. Silence *is* trauma, produced again and again. This is insidious trauma, ongoing today. The notion of Western trauma is thus driven out of PART II of this study, as it were, by the brutal immediacy of the instruments of silencing that are displayed in the texts and works of art I treat here. Instead, what takes its place in PART II is the immediacy of a trauma repeating literally in the present, perpetuated even by representations of that trauma; and, in response to that, an immediacy of resistance even in the moment of the annihilation of the social existence of the ‘Other’.

b) Structure

I began above by contrasting very briefly two examples of the muting of the mouth that demonstrate the shift from silencing the mouth of the ‘Other’ in a figurative sense (as in PART I) to a more concrete manifestation. The respective examples evince speechlessness – as mentioned above – *not* as a psychosomatic *reaction towards* a traumatic event but *as* the concrete instantiation of the traumatizing experience. They also instantiate, to various degrees, the perpetuation of insidious trauma by the artistic representation of powerlessness, as well as embodying the positive generation of affective ties that counters such powerlessness.

Thus, in PART II, I work with a binary structure in each of the following three chapters (chapter 4, chapter 5 and chapter 6) instead of the triadic structure I used in PART I for the first three chapters. I contrast here two distinct approaches on the part of artists and writers towards the insidious trauma of the language loss phenomena. Both approaches reveal the insidious trauma that is present in the speechlessness of the subjects. However, one approach to this trauma portrays it in such a way as to represent survivors only as powerless victims and thereby perpetuating their victimization and continuous reduction to the status of ‘bare life’. In so doing, this approach effectively perpetuates insidious trauma *as* insidious trauma in its re-presentation in literature and art. The other approach, by contrast, produces representations of such insidious trauma that change the very terms of representation so as to empower those these works seek to represent, often via the re-establishment of the affective connectivity capped by the muting of the mouth. The concept of ‘bare life’ as a powerless status on the one hand, and as a space where connective empowering ties can nonetheless be created on the other, thus provides a significant focus for reflecting on contemporary art practices that take topics such as slavery, statelessness, diasporic communities, and human rights as their subject matter. The artistic recreation of a space where connective empowering ties can occur allows an exploration of the possibilities of resistance within the ‘state of exception’. This is exactly what my counter-examples will demonstrate.

In the following, these two major aspects – perpetuation of victimization on the one hand and empowerment of the survivor on the other hand – will be exemplified in three selected modes of the physical muting of the mouth from across the Global South: **muzzled mouths, sealed lips, and suffocating silence.**

Starting off in the **fourth chapter** with Fela Kuti's famous song *Beasts of No Nation* (1989) where he invokes the image of a **muzzled mouth** where the "basket mouth" (Kuti 1989) needs to be taken off in order to reclaim agency and voice, I will move on to two performance installations that make use of the iron mask in a more concrete manner. The first one is a tableau vivant entitled "Still-life with Negro" which depicts a muzzled slave as an object of a tastefully framed still-life painting. This piece is one of twelve tableaux vivants that belong to a travelling exhibition entitled *Exhibit B* (2010-2016) by South African artist Brett Bailey. The manner in which black subjects are exposed in this exhibition as victims of the Global North provoked numerous critics to suggest that Bailey, as a privileged South African, reinforced the silencing of the 'Other' rather than subverting it. In contrast to Bailey's representation of the muzzled slave as a victim, I suggest that Marissa Lôbo's performance installation *Iron Mask, White Torture* (2010) offers quite a different approach to the muzzling of the slave. By referring to the well-known blue-eyed figure of Anastácia, a muzzled slave from Brazil, the Brazilian-Austrian artist highlights numerous forms of resistance towards such forms of silencing.

The **fifth chapter** looks at two images of **sealed lips**. Here, I will scrutinize another tableau vivant of Bailey's *Exhibit B*, entitled "Survival of the Fittest." It displays a deported refugee inside an aeroplane whose mouth is taped. Once again, the 'Other' is represented as a silenced victim. In analogy to this tableau vivant, *Close the Concentration Camps* (2002) by Australian performance artist Mike Parr and Mehmed Al Assad's poem "Asylum" also point to the treatment of refugees in contemporary societies. In his performance, however, Parr refers to the act of self-harm as a political protest that detained asylum seekers, such as Al Assad, were engaging in while being segregated in Australian detention centres. In imitation of these asylum seekers Parr had his lips sewn together as an act of solidarity and an affective call for political intervention on behalf of the contemporary 'Other' who, despite being caught in a 'state of exception' (the refugee camp), gathers the strength to "talk back" (hooks 1989: 5) even with – or especially via – sewn lips.

The **sixth and last chapter** will look at examples that deal with **suffocating silence** in a literal sense. Similarly to Bailey's example of the taped asylum seeker, this image will focus on a torture method that is still used today to interrogate political opponents: the wet bag method, also known as waterboarding. This technique forces the detainee to open the mouth only to say what the torturer wants to hear. Otherwise, the

mouth is effectively blocked by fabric, over which a continual stream of water is poured, provoking a sensation of near-death suffocation. The first example of this chapter will look at examples from South Africa and the Global War on Terror to discuss waterboarding as and in states of exception which perpetuate victimization. This will be contrasted in the second example with works referring to these states of exceptions in empowering ways, as exceptions to the exception so to say.

CHAPTER FOUR: Muzzled Mouths

In Kuti's song *Beasts of No Nation* written after his imprisonment in 1986, he encourages his Nigerian compatriots and other people who suffer from political oppression to free themselves from their imposed silence by figuratively describing how he himself will never accept a muzzle to be muted with: "Basket mouth wan start to leak again, oh/ [Chorus] Basket mouth wan open mouth again, oh."⁴⁹ In this context, the image of the leaking basket mouth is very effective: it leaks and loosens, and not for the first time. The repetition of the adverb "again" implies that Kuti will not stop resisting the silencing of his thoughts and that there are numerous instances in history, beginning with the muzzling of the slave, where the apparently helpless speechless victim has gathered the strength to "talk back" (hooks 1989: 5) and fight oppression. Kuti's reference to the "basket mouth", a muzzle used nowadays only to discipline wild animals, is of great significance.⁵⁰ It reminds the audience that this object was actually physically used during slavery as an instrument of torture to silence and discipline human beings as if they were animals. In particular, slaves working on plantations were often forced to wear these iron masks. Grada Kilomba explains that the masks were "composed of a bit placed inside the mouth of the Black subject, clamped between the tongue and the jaw, and fixed behind the head with two strings, one surrounding the chin and the other surrounding the nose and forehead" (2013: 14). Such muzzles used in part to "prevent enslaved Africans from eating sugar cane or cocoa beans while working on the plantation but [their] primary function was", as Kilomba asserts, "*to implement a sense of speechlessness and fear*, inasmuch as the mouth was a place of both muteness and torture" (ibid; my emphasis). By evoking the image of a muzzle, an instrument of torture used primarily to create a "sense of speechlessness and fear", Kuti draws as much attention to a long history of imposed silencing as to a long history of resistance towards such silencing, a resistance whose origins lie far back in the legacy of slavery - a history that Lôbo's counter-example, analysed below, elaborates more specifically.

⁴⁹ For the full lyrics see appendix 6.

⁵⁰ The use of iron masks for punishing and humiliating people has a long history and was not only used for slaves. In the mediaval period so-called shame masks in the form of exaggerated animal heads were created to punish and humiliate culprits in public (see Karen Adkins's *Gossip, Epistemology, & Power* (2017). These masks were used until the 18th century. In the 16th century, the so-called scold's bridle, also known as the witch's bridle, was invented to punish and humiliate women suspected of witchcraft. For more information on this topic see, for instance, Dubravka Ugrešić's article "The Scold's Bridle" (2016).

Kuti refuses to be reduced to a muted and powerless victim. By writing his song directly after his release from prison, and by performatively asserting the power to speak in defiance of the muzzle mentioned in the song, he ostentatiously re-instantiates the resilient will to speak demonstrated by oppressed peoples. Similarly to many slaves, he continues to fight back, to “loosen the muzzle” despite precarious circumstances⁵¹. In his song, the muzzle no longer holds the mouth tight. Having just been released from prison, he immediately reasserts his power to speak. In order to express his criticism and resilience, he makes use of a number of techniques that recall his West African heritage and challenges the imposition of the colonizers’ culture and language: “Beasts of No Nation” is presented as a narrative in a question and response style (Shonekan 2009) typical of a rich oral tradition that “engages his audience in a conversation about politics, colonialism, and oppression” (Saleh-Hanna 2008: 366). Furthermore, Kuti uses Afro-Beat⁵² as a political tool of resistance where he combines African rhythms, code-mixing and code-changing: “When addressing the elite”, Saleh-Hanna explains, “[Kuti] used Standard Nigerian English; when addressing civil society he used Nigerian Pidgin English; when addressing Yoruba political issues he used Yoruba” (ibid: 363-64). Deploying such a range of languages as an “intertwining of languages” (ibid: 363) itself constitutes a way of weaving “affectives ties”, of speaking ongoing affirmative communities into being by the mode of linguistic address itself. Such affirmative speech acts resist the pressure exerted by continuing “experiences with oppression [...] and colonialist histories” (ibid: 367). Kuti’s song/speech strengthens solidarity among the oppressed, and perpetuates a tireless continuity of resistant speech that demonstrates resilience in the face of silencing-as-insidious-trauma.

The ongoing insidious trauma of being silenced is as acutely relevant today as it was thirty years ago when Kuti’s song was released. Many artists, writers and musicians are aware of the continuing necessity of addressing these issues. However, their approaches towards such a form of muting of the mouth vary immensely. As discussed above, in many works (despite the best intentions on the part of the artists), the ‘Other’ remains represented as the silenced victim without a real chance of gaining his/her own

⁵¹ Kuti had to serve two years of a five-year prison sentence on trumped-up foreign currency violation charges.

⁵² According to Saleh-Hanna (2008), Kuti invented this genre to counter Western musical styles by mixing different African beats.

voice. Other artists, by contrast, realize that even in ‘bare life’ there is the potential of resilience and empowerment.

In the following I contrast two artistic examples which refer to the muzzle or iron mask used to mute the slave. The two examples illustrate the diametrically opposed tendencies already mentioned here: the perpetuation of victimization on the one hand, and the production of empowering connections on the other. The first example is one element of a very controversial travelling exhibition entitled *Exhibit B* (2010⁵³-2016) by South African artist and playwright Brett Bailey, whose representation of a muzzled slave tends to cement the slave’s status as a victim of colonial domination. I then contrast Bailey’s work with an art installation by Brazilian-Austrian artist Marissa Lôbo, *Iron Mask, White Torture* (2010). Lôbo’s installation serves as a counter-example in which the muzzled slave (in an analogy to Kuti’s reference to the basket mouth) becomes an icon of defiance and resilience, able to generate affective ties rather than expressing mere victimisation.

EXAMPLE 1: Brett Bailey’s “Still-life with Negro” and the victimization of the ‘Other’

“Still-life with Negro” is one of twelve tableaux vivants that constitute Bailey’s performance installation *Exhibit B*. This particular tableau displays a black performer who represents a muzzled slave within a golden frame of a tastefully arranged still-life painting. The specific aspects of the tableau upon which I focus are generated in part by the very nature of the genre that Bailey chooses for the entire exhibition, namely that of the human zoo. The genre is not neutral, but carries within itself an array of colonial power structures and attitudes towards colonial structures that hamper Bailey’s putative project of critique.

Exhibit B is the second part of a threefold performance installation⁵⁴ showcasing diverse instances of a traumatic colonial past and postcolonial present where people

⁵³ Starting off in Vienna as *Exhibit A*.

⁵⁴ The performance was originally planned to be shown in three successive parts: *Exhibit A*, *Exhibit B*, and *Exhibit C*. Whereas *Exhibit A* focussed primarily on German colonialism, as well as on the brutal regime of apartheid in South Africa, *Exhibit B* expanded the show to include examples of Belgian, French and the Netherland’s colonial atrocities. *Exhibit C*, which still has not taken place, was planned to include British, Portuguese and Italian colonial intrusions in Africa.

from the African diaspora ‘exhibit’ *mutely*⁵⁵ and *immovably* the suffering of indigenous peoples at the hands of the Global North. Whereas some of the tableaux vivants expose historical examples of European colonial atrocities, others reveal more recent racist attitudes towards migrants and asylum seekers in European countries, thereby exposing the ongoing nature of structural racism in our societies.

Paradoxically, these horrific atrocities are captured in aesthetically arranged images whose contents are not always self-evident without the additional information the spectator can find on the signs in front of the exhibits. The manner in which the spectator is led through the exhibition to read the signs and watch real actors on display – sometimes in cages, sometimes on stages, and often half-naked – is reminiscent of the nineteenth-century “human zoo” and has been harshly criticized.⁵⁶ Human zoos became very popular after the abolition of slavery and remained a major attraction in Europe and the United States up until after the Second World War. In these spectacles of colonial domination, indigenous peoples were put on display in enclosures to be gazed at by a predominantly white paying audience. This dehumanizing practice “combin(ed) the functions of exhibition, performance, education and domination” (Blanchard et al. 2008: 1). Human zoos emerged in tandem with the invention of pseudo-scientific racial classification, where the opposition between the ‘modern Caucasian’ and the ‘primitive barbarian’ provided the basis on which other forms of alterity were mapped: the female, the violent or exuberant, the sexually expressive, the bodily deviant, and so on. Anthropologists used these doubtful findings as ‘proofs of evidence’ to legitimize colonization and imperialism.⁵⁷

Bailey picks up on this aspect of the historical human zoo by presenting his performers as ‘pieces of evidence’ (exhibits) to a privileged audience who can afford a twenty-Euro-ticket to watch black people on display. However, whereas in the traditional human zoo, the audience was invited to come and see living ‘pieces of

⁵⁵ “Dr Fischer’s Curiosity Cabinet: Nama heads collected from concentration camps” is the only tableau vivant in the exhibition where we hear the voices of the black actors singing lamentation songs about the Herero and Namib genocide in their native languages (Nama, Otjiherero, Oshiwambo, Tsana, and isiXhosa). Only their heads are visible so as to recall the use of Namib skulls by German colonizers as anthropological specimens.

⁵⁶ After several more performances in other European cities (Amsterdam, Ghent, Avignon, Paris, Strasbourg and Edinburgh), the show eventually reached the Barbican Centre in London in September 2014, where it was closed down as a consequence of protest campaigns, initiated by Sara Myers, claiming that the work perpetuated racism rather than subverting it.

⁵⁷ For more information on the human zoo see, for instance, Blanchard et al. (2008), Boëtsch et al. (2012), and Chikha & Arnaut (2013).

evidence' to reassure themselves that the imperial exploitation of the 'inferior race' was justified, the performers in Bailey's installation are *not* used as 'proofs of evidence' for their apparent inferiority but rather as 'exhibits' of an ongoing insidious trauma caused by the Global North to which most of the spectators belong. Thus, on the one hand we have the mute and immobile performers who represent and reinvent the helpless silenced 'Other' as the victim of Global North brutality; and on the other hand, we have the spectators, who find themselves once again in the position of the perpetrator. This latter position is doubtless intended to provoke a heightened political awareness on the part of the spectators; it may, however, have more problematic consequences not intended by the artist.

It is especially striking that no acts of resistance on the part of the oppressed 'Other' are shown, only the horrors he/she had to endure. What Bailey seems to say is that the victimisation of the 'Other' goes on and that one should be aware of the underlying racist structures in contemporary societies that are responsible for this phenomenon. What is also implied here, however, is that the 'Other' is still a helpless victim, very much in need of the Global North to change these inequities. It is exactly this tendency in Bailey's choice of representation that seems to perpetuate the same stereotypes and discourses that represent the 'Other' as a silenced, powerless victim who still depends on the white man to be spoken for and who seems to have no agency of his or her own, a structure identified by Spivak (1999: 285, 287) for numerous colonial contexts.

In what follows, I use the tableau vivant of the muzzled slave to demonstrate how – despite Bailey's best intentions – the black subject in his exhibition is once again degraded, via its restricted representation as a victim, to an object that appears to be even doubly silenced. Paradoxically, this is done by three strategies Bailey uses to subvert the concept of the traditional human zoo and to reveal the ongoing insidious trauma done to the Global South. His three strategies are a) the **aestheticization of horror**, b) the notion of the **returned gaze**, and finally c) the **framing of the victim**.

a) Aestheticized Horror

From the outset, the title of Bailey's tableau vivant, "Still-life with Negro," evokes confusion and discomfort. On the one hand, the title on the sign in front of the tableau vivant, which is positioned at a safe distance between the spectator and the

‘exhibit’, announces one of the principal aesthetic genres of Western art: the still-life. On the other hand, contrasting with this aestheticizing impetus, the title adds the suffix “with Negro,” an abusive word for a black person that has been used in different variations since slavery (thus, around the sixteenth- and seventeenth century when still-life painting gained great popularity) and is still often used as a racially offensive term.

The Still-life genre customarily depicts *inanimate* objects such as drinking glasses, books, vases etc., or organic items like flowers, food, and sometimes even dead animals, which are usually aesthetically arranged on a table or in a niche. Living human beings hardly ever appear in these scenes. In this case, at the moment the spectator shifts her or his gaze from the exhibit’s title towards the exhibit itself, a further source of discomfort and malaise becomes evident. Within a frame of a tastefully arranged vanitas and memento mori décor⁵⁸ whose aesthetic appearance catches the spectator’s attention, Bailey places a real person acting as a muzzled slave. There is no historical model for such a bizarre still-life painting, so that his combination of a slave and other exotic ‘goods’ becomes particularly telling. In his portrayal, similarly to the inanimate objects of a still-life painting, the slave figure is regarded – quite literally in this context of spectatorship – as a “thing” (Mbembe 2003: 22), another object in the possession of the colonizer.

Bailey’s use of the still-life genre, which was particularly popular during the



Dutch Golden Age, plays upon the obvious and less-obvious levels of meaning contained in the genre in its original historical context. Dutch still-life paintings transmitted moral messages to a rising Protestant class about the futility of life and the vanity of earthly goods. In

Fig. 4: “Still-life with Negro” from *Exhibit B* by Brett Bailey

⁵⁸ Bailey’s still-life arrangement seems to recall to a certain extent still life vanitas paintings from the Dutch Golden Age that were inspired by *memento mori*, a genre of painting which may be translated as “remember you must die”. These pieces often combine flowers with objects such as human skulls, waning candles and overturned hourglasses to comment on the fleeting nature of life. Unlike memento mori art, vanitas paintings also include other symbols such as musical instruments, wine and books to remind us explicitly of the vanity (in the sense of worthlessness) of worldly pleasures and goods (see Grootenboer 2005: 135-165).

addition, still-life paintings alluded metonymically to the economic expansion of the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century (Parker Brien 2006; Berger Hochstrasser 2007). However, what was hidden in the still-life's representations of metonyms of the country's prosperity is the enormous extent to which the Dutch Republic's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade contributed to this wealth. Bailey makes explicit this customarily elided involvement in the slave trade by placing the slave among the other metonyms of slavery-driven prosperity.

What is going on here, however, is even more complex, because this gesture of revelation or of the excavation of the repressed content of the genre lays bare a further ambivalence at the heart of the slavery-based plantation economy itself. This ambiguity is highlighted by Mbembe, who explains that “[a]s an instrument of labour, the slave has a price. As a property, he or she has a value. His or her labor is needed and used. The slave is therefore kept alive but in a *state of injury*, in a phantom-like world of horrors and intense cruelty and profanity” (Mbembe 2003: 21, italics in original). Here Mbembe makes a crucial identification between the slave and *homo sacer* that extends Agamben's earlier work (Fiskesjö 2012). The slave existed within the sovereign ambit of the economic system, just as *homo sacer* or ‘bare life’ continued to be captured by the sovereign violence of the state. Yet as an economic instrument, the slave was reduced to the status of a “thing” and underwent a “social death” that effected an “expulsion from humanity altogether” (Mbembe 2003: 21). A not dissimilar ambivalence characterizes Bailey's work. He lays bare the sovereign, latently violent economic order that captures the slave within its ambit, by placing a muzzled slave-figure in the middle of a still-life painting. In this way, he exposes the brutal truth behind the beauty of these still-life images, invisible and often unknown to the consumer of art. However, as the ‘master’ of his artwork, in which he, too, depicts a black person in a “cruel and intemperate manner” (Mbembe 2003: 19) that symbolically mimics the violence inflicted by the slave-owners upon their possessions, Bailey seems to perpetuate the dehumanisation of the Other. The slave is “included” in his artwork so as to emerge from invisibility, but simultaneously “excluded” from the world of the human, placed under the regime of plantation violence, by being *included among* other inanimate objects in Bailey's representation.

The Dutch still-life managed to control and elide its repressed subtext of brutality in ways that became increasingly difficult as the Industrial Revolution progressed and as Abolition approached. Increasingly, the slave trade indirectly crept back into the

subject of visual representations. Aesthetic representation could exclude the horror of slavery for only so long, and had to find ways of accommodating it, if only in a marginal or allusive manner, as in William Turner's *Slave Ship (Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On)* of 1840. In Turner's painting, the dying slaves in the sea are hardly visible. For the sake of the painting's sublime beauty, the grim reality behind the depicted event is kept hidden: sick slaves were simply thrown into the sea so as to recuperate the insurance on their lost commodity value (see Baucom 2005). Bailey thus condenses the historical stages of successful containment of the repressed (instantiated by the seventeenth-century still-life) and the subsequent recalibration of a no-longer-adequate containment (typified by eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-Romanticism). He retrospectively and therefore to some extent anachronistically forces the evidence of slavery back into a genre that had actually managed to exclude it.

What lies between these two moments is a mid-eighteenth century attempt to deal with this contradiction between horror and beauty under the rubric of the sublime. In his famous treatise *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), Edmund Burke defined the sublime in the following manner: "Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger; that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime" (1844 [1757]: 24). However, in Burke's understanding of the sublime, joy and pleasure are only produced if the horror is kept "at certain distances, and with certain modifications" (1844 [1757]: 25). "When danger or pain presses too nearly", he cautions, horror would be "incapable of giving any delight, and [be] simply terrible" (ibid.). In the eighteenth and nineteenth century the sublime was a common aesthetic concept. In some instances, it was used by artists to conceal cruelties behind beauty and to create a distance from the horror they depicted in order to focus on the aesthetic pleasure of the paintings, as illustrated by the example of Turner's *Slave Ship*. Bailey is aware of this dynamic, as indicated by his comments in an interview with Anton Krueger, where he explains that he "wanted to create images where you are seduced by beauty – you want to look – but the content is so horrific you also don't want to look. You don't know where to look. Somehow you find yourself between these two levels" (Bailey qtd. in Krueger 2013: 3). Bailey's unusual still-life may thus be called an anachronistic assemblage that takes various artistic forms and their respective epochal locations (from the moment of slavery to the nineteenth- and

twentieth century human zoo) and blends them in a single work. In this way, he highlights the perpetuation of racist structures in a variety of discourses (including the arts) that unceasingly victimize the ‘Other’.⁵⁹

Bailey’s anachronistic assemblage nonetheless has a potentially enabling political function that goes beyond the mere identification of oppressive structures. As Jacques Rancière explains, the political function of contemporary art has undergone two sorts of transformation in the wake of the ethical turn. The first is defined as the “aesthetics of the sublime,” where “the passive encounter with the ‘heterogeneous’ sets up a conflict between two different regimes of sensibility” (Rancière 2009: 23) – instantiated, for example, in the ambivalent spectator responses described by Bailey: “you want to look – but the content is so horrific you also don’t want to look” (Bailey qtd. in Krueger 2013: 3). The second is defined as “relational aesthetics” which Rancière understands as “the construction of an undecided and ephemeral situation [which] enjoins a displacement of perception, a passage from the status of spectator to that of actor, a reconfiguration of places” (Rancière 2009: 23-24). If we are to follow Rancière’s definitions, then it would seem that Bailey’s *Exhibit B* is situated somewhere between the two. Bailey tries to follow the aesthetics of the sublime not as a passive encounter as described by Rancière, but as relational aesthetics which seeks to involve the spectator in the artwork by confronting her/him uncomfortably with her/his passiveness in order to turn her/him into an active participant. To this extent, Bailey’s work seems quite successful. The manner in which this still-life (nature **morte**) is turned into a tableau **vivant** *reanimates* the slave who is usually confronted with “social death” which Mbembe understands as the “expulsion from humanity altogether” (2003: 21). This in turn may call forth an active ethical response on the part of the spectator, and possibly a form of empowerment on the part of the actor.

However, instead of endowing the reanimated ‘Other’ with agency, Bailey runs the risk of transforming the slave into a muted living exhibit – an ‘uncivilized barbarian’ – in a contemporary human zoo reminiscent of those of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century. The passive ‘Other’ in his artwork thus remains passive, a voiceless victim. The slave figure continues to be in need of a privileged and potentially active audience to dismantle ongoing forms of oppression.

⁵⁹ The open books on the right-hand side of this still-life even seem to depict nineteenth-century anthropologist sketches of black bodies that would not appear in a seventeenth-century still-life painting. The book nonetheless fulfils the same function as in a traditional still-life painting: it refers to the superiority of ‘knowledge’ as gained via scientific - or here, in fact pseudo-scientific - study.

b) The Returned Gaze

According to Bailey, the passiveness of the slave figure is overcome by “having the people in the installations looking back at you” (qtd. in Krueger 2013: 3). In this way, he places at the centre of his exhibition the crucial issue of the gaze. Since Foucault’s work on the “panopticon” in *Discipline and Punish* (1991 [1975]), the role of the gaze in penal regimes has been prominent in the social sciences. Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright point out that “the gaze is integral to systems of power and ideas about knowledge” (2009: 94); there is always a power imbalance between those who look and those who are gazed upon (see Berger 1972, Mulvey 1975, Kaplan 1997).

Unsurprisingly, the gaze has also structured the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. In *Black Looks* bell hooks recounts how she learnt in history classes at school that white slave owners punished enslaved people for looking back: “The politics of slavery, of racialized power relations, were such that the slaves were denied their right to gaze” (1992: 116). However, hooks is convinced that “all attempts to repress our/black peoples’ right to gaze had produced in us an overwhelming longing to look, a rebellious desire, an oppositional gaze. By courageously looking, we defiantly declared: ‘Not only will I stare. I want my look to change reality’” (ibid.). In order to account for this insurgent desire to return the look, hooks introduced the term “oppositional gaze” to describe a space of agency for black people, “wherein [they] can both interrogate the gaze of the Other [here understood, in the Lacanian sense, as the one in power] but also look back, and at one another, naming what we see. The gaze has been and is a site of resistance for colonized black people globally” (hooks 1992: 116).

In Bailey’s “Still-life with Negro”, as in the other tableaux vivants, the gaze of the discriminated slave is turned back on the eye of power. The black actor, whose mouth is muzzled, replaces speech with an intense, almost accusing gaze. This direct counter-gaze solicits the spectators’ gaze and makes them self-conscious of their own processes of looking. But more importantly, this direct solicitation of the spectator’s gaze makes her/him aware of her/his complicity and responsibility in terms of the effects of her/his own perceptions and interpretive judgments.

The mode of this returned gaze has already been used by a number of artists, such as, for instance, James Luna in *The Artifact Piece* (1987) (Saracho 2014; Hawley 2016), Lyle Ashton Harris and Renée Valerie Cox in *Hottentot Venus 2000* (1994) (Quereshi 2004; Netto 2005) and Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña in *Two Undiscovered*

Amerindians also known as *The Couple in the Cage* (1992) (Fusco 1994; Kelly 1999). Long before Bailey's *Exhibit B*, these artists experimented with the gaze in their artistic recreations of ethnographic spectacles. However, there is a significant difference between the strategy used by these artists and the one adopted by Bailey. Whereas these artists inserted themselves into their own artworks in an attempt to reclaim the lost voice and agency of the objectified 'Other', Bailey uses 'black' performers and *instructs* them to gaze back. It is thus questionable to what extent the returned gaze orchestrated by Bailey is genuinely an act of defiance and resilience, one that helps the black subject leave mere victimhood behind and become an agent on her/his own terms.

Such a critique was evident in a statement issued by critics from the German anti-racist platform Bühnenwatch (Stage Watch). After viewing *Exhibit B* in Berlin, Bühnenwatch questioned the defiance ascribed to the actors by Bailey:

We cannot see any reversion here: The fact that the exhibited Black people are 'looking back' into the audience – as Bailey highlights in an interview – is nothing new, but has always been part of resistance strategies, which also consisted of much more than that. There is no change in the archetypical constellation white observer – Black observed and white organizer – Black exposed. (Bühnenwatch 2012)

The criticism directed at *Exhibit B* is reinforced by a number of further aspects of the installation that are highly problematic. Bailey's clear instructions to the actors – not to speak and move for 45 minutes and to gaze back at the audience – mean that he exerts considerable power over black people, in a mode that cannot but go beyond the de facto power of any artistic director. This power is problematic because of Bailey's unavoidable structural position as a representative of a white South African class whose privileges stem from the apartheid period and, for certain members of that class, have even been consolidated since the dismantling of apartheid. Granted, the actors are paid for following his instructions (as were black labourers under apartheid), but this acknowledgement of their labour does not translate into an acknowledgement of their 'views' in the several senses of the word, nor of their voices.

After viewing all the tableaux vivants, the spectator is led into a room where she or he is invited to write down her or his impressions and to read the comments written by other visitors, and those written by the actors. This is the first time that the performers' voices, albeit indirectly, are heard. Tellingly, none of the actors' comments is critical of Bailey's installation. Nor are the comments, printed on normal A4 paper,

valorized by an aestheticizing procedure of the type the spectator has just witnessed. The actors' comments are disembodied and depersonalized, printed rather than handwritten, in contrast to the spectators' comments. The effect of the performers' comments is to legitimize the work of the white artist rather than to give agency to the voices of the black actors. All these factors remove agency from the supposedly empowering returned gaze which, it transpires, is merely an effect of Bailey's controlling mastery of the entire piece. The agency awarded to the Black actors – the returned gaze, their 'free' expression of approval of the installation – is devolved from the white master but contained by that mastery. To this extent, Bailey's staging of the insidious trauma of the Other fails to be genuinely "open to exploring pluralist perspectives on effective ways to sensitively curate difficult knowledge about colonial violence for diverse, multi-ethnic and cross-cultural audiences" (Dixon, 2014: Part 3). What is lacking in his installation is a "dialogic performance, which brings together various voices, worldviews, value systems, and beliefs in a conversation that resists conclusions and remain open to an ongoing discussion between artists, ethnographers and interlocutors" (Conquergood 1985: 1). Orchestrating the supposedly returned gaze, despite its affective potential, nonetheless runs the risk of all too easily sliding into a replication of mastery and thus a perpetuation of the victimization it claims to alleviate.

c) Framing the Victim

As we have seen, Bailey's anachronistic assemblage blends various representations of the Other as 'bare life' across different times and spaces. First, the muzzled slave is represented as bare life within a frame of an animated seventeenth-century Dutch still-life painting. Second, as part of twelve tableaux vivants, the muzzled slave is turned into the figure of the barbarian, another example of bare life, framed within the format of a nineteenth-century human zoo. Third, he is framed as part of a whole anachronistic assemblage, which - following Agamben's lead (1998; 2005) – also includes examples of the migrant as the contemporary *homo sacer*; in this way, Bailey alludes to the ongoing perpetuation of racist structures, which have not ceased to restrict the non-Western subject by imposing a 'state of exception' as exemplified by the refugee camps (see Agamben 2005).

The connection between these three figures as *homines sacri* – the slave, the barbarian and the contemporary migrant – is revealed in Bailey's work, albeit not as a

successive chronology of historical incidents but as an entanglement that according to Mbembe, “encloses multiple *durées* made up of discontinuities, reversals, inertias, and swings that overlay one another” (2001: 14). Bailey’s framing device is what holds these disparate ‘time-zones’ together in a single space. The role of framing is most obvious in “Still-life with Negro” (as an animated still-life painting in a golden frame). In that tableau vivant, the frame indexes the utter lack of possibilities of movement, manoeuvre, escape, or transformation available to the framed subject. The method of framing makes explicit that the ‘Other’ appears always to be trapped within a restrictive space that does not leave her/him any room for agency. During slavery this restrictive space in the diaspora was, for instance, the plantation; during colonisation it was often the homelands and townships which were created to limit mobility (as in South Africa during apartheid) and to keep different ethnic groups apart from one another; during South African wars and the German occupation of South-West Africa, internment camps were used as various instruments of coercion; and the German concentration camps of the Nazi period constituted a closed space in which large populations could be reduced to ‘bare life’ and then destroyed. Nowadays, such functions – as Agamben notes (1998; 2005) – have re-occurred in the form of the refugee camps.

Frames, however, are never quite that simple. Frames blur constantly (see Lotman 1977: 212-17, 229-31). Bailey’s use of the frame to index the closed space of the camp may thus resonate also with the ambivalent boundaries that Agamben ascribes to the camp. Agamben suggests that “a state of exception is neither external nor internal to the juridical order, and the problem of defining it concerns precisely a threshold, or a zone of indifference, where inside and outside do not exclude each other but rather blur with each other” (Agamben 2005: 23). The state of exception thus defines a special condition in which the juridical order can be suspended by the sovereign due to an apparent threat to the state. The space of the state of exception – paradigmatically the camp – is a similarly paradoxical space, included within the reach of state violence, but excluded from the ambit of the rule of law.

Mbembe, like other theorists engaging with Agamben’s work, takes this ambivalent inside-outside structure and turns it, once again, inside out (Esposito 2008: 157). Initially, Mbembe concurs with Agamben in his description of slavery: “the very structure of the plantation and its aftermath manifest the emblematic and paradoxical figure of the state of exception” (2003: 21). Thus, “as a political-juridical structure, the plantation is a space where the slave belongs to a master” (2003: 21), who regards the

slave as a potential threat and is hence allowed to violate the basic laws and treat the slave as ‘bare life’.

Yet at this point, Mbembe identifies a space of ‘bare life’ where life is nonetheless never entirely ‘bare’. Excluded from the realm of the human, the slave nevertheless maintains a space of humanity: “[i]n spite of the terror and the symbolic *sealing off* of the slave, he or she maintains alternative perspectives towards time, work, and self” (2003: 22; italics in original). Mbembe further notes:

Treated as if he or she no longer existed except as a mere tool and instrument of production, the slave nevertheless is able to draw almost any object, instrument, language, or gesture into a performance and then stylize it. Breaking with uprootedness and the pure world of things of which he or she is but a fragment, the slave is able to demonstrate the protean capabilities of the human bond through music and ‘the’ omitted very body that was supposedly possessed by another (2003: 22).

In this way, theorists such as Mbembe (and also Esposito 2008 and Weheliye 2014) take Agamben’s emphasis on the ambiguity of the space of the camp and use it to reinsert human agency into the dehumanized space of ‘bare life’.

This essential aspect of the potential of bare life in a state of exception is largely missing in Bailey’s diverse representations of the ‘Other’. His use of framing is a formal instantiation of his one-sided representations of victimhood that thus tends to reinforce the perpetuation of victimization, dismissing to a great extent forms of resistance that may arise among these different figures of ‘bare life’.

However, acts of resistance have always occurred. In the context of slavery, as Rudy Uda states, “[r]esistance was the common ground for all enslaved African men, women and children on the plantation and on the cotton-and cane fields in the period of colonial slavery in the diaspora” (2013: 1). Resistance took various forms, sometimes violent, at other times more subtle, or simply passive. One of the most famous slave revolts in history is the Haitian Revolution in 1791, which succeeded in abolishing slavery and led to the 1804 independence of Haiti. Haiti “became the first independent black state in the world” (Uda 2013: 1), a fact that for a long time was silenced in Western representations of world history (Fiskesjö 2012: 166-167). Apart from numerous violent revolts, resistance took less obvious forms, for instance, slaves’ embodied ways of communicating with one another to escape the attention of their slave owners. In the Dutch colonies of Suriname and the Dutch Antilles, for example, the slaves initiated so-called *tambu* gatherings, an “interrelation of dance, songs, music, religion and social organisation which form a strong unity” (Nimako & Willemsen

2011: 83-84). Since many slaves living in the diaspora came from different parts of Africa, communication problems had to be resolved by the invention of new languages. A gender-specific form of resistance among enslaved women was for instance the use of textiles to convey encoded messages (see Uda 2013; Buckridge 2004).

All these instances of empowerment, and there are many more, remain entirely invisible in Bailey's tableaux vivants. Instead, he focuses exclusively on the Other's victimhood. His choice of frames limits the representation of the 'Other' to 'bare life' deprived of agency. The slave figure in "Negro with Still-life" is, in fact, even doubly victimized: not only does the actor have to obey the instructions of the "master" of the artwork to remain silent and still; it has also become physically impossible for him to speak with a muzzle on his mouth and to move within this restricted golden frame. Bailey's work represents a history of ongoing victimisation that contributes to perpetuating that victimisation by framing the black subject within one-sided "oppressive representations" (Motsemme 2004: 924).

Despite (or even because of) this almost entire elision of the Other's resistance, Bailey's work has nonetheless prompted protest. Typical of such resistance is the successful online-petition by Sara Myer, which led to the closure of the exhibition in London in 2014. In an interview with Ashraf Jamal, Myer states:

The perpetration lies in it only showing one side of the story. The objectification of the black man and woman, the others. However, it is not balanced, in fact it is a highly unbalanced showing of the compliancy of blackness but failing to show its resistance. The images in *Exhibit B* are not ones of power, but of powerlessness, hence my chanting of "Black Power" and risen fists. [...] Exhibit B is a look into the mind of a white liberal who has both power and privilege, where the subtleness of racism is still very much alive and masquerading as art. (2014: np)

Myer's protest, which took up earlier criticism by the anti-racist platform Bühnenwatch in Berlin in 2012, in turn triggered more protest in France a few months later. This series of protests exemplifies the idea that the black subject has not ceased to resist the oppressive forms that try to reduce her/him to bare life. Myer's "chanting of Black Power" and the gesture of her raised fist, a reference to the Black Panther movement in the 1960s, allude to an ongoing history of black people's empowerment. Her gesture is particularly significant because it marks another aspect of continuity of resistance. Symptomatic of this continuity, for example, is the fact that the same reference can be found in a counter-example by Marissa Lôbo, to which I now turn.

Lôbo's *Iron Mask, White Torture* exemplifies the way the history of the brutal silencing of the 'Other' can be problematized while simultaneously bringing into visibility the Other's ongoing history of empowerment in opposition to its long elision.

EXAMPLE 2: Marissa Lôbo's *Iron Mask, White Torture* – A History of Black Women's Empowerment

Marissa Lôbo's *Iron Mask, White Torture* is a performance installation first shown in Vienna in 2010 as part of an exhibition entitled "Where do we go from here?" In contrast to Bailey's "Still-life with Negro", where the muzzled slave refers to the ongoing silencing of the 'Other' as a victim of Global North brutality, Lôbo's installation performance alludes to the muzzled slave not in terms of victimization but – and this is the major difference – in terms of empowerment. For this reason, Lôbo chose the blue-eyed figure of the Afro-Brazilian slave Anastácia as a central point of reference. According to popular oral legend Anastácia's resistance to white hegemony was punished by having her mouth muted with an iron mask. Despite her imposed silence Anastácia speaks with her defiant gaze. The image of this muzzled slave became an important icon of black female empowerment, particularly in Latin America. As an affective response to this 'speaking mute', Lôbo's performance installation mobilizes a multi-semiotic bundle of modes of communication. In this way, her installation lays bare a continuing history of black female empowerment that has been silenced in dominant Western discourses. Here, historical as well as contemporary figures that refused to be muted are evoked in a collage of different visual media in yet another anachronistic assemblage.

Thus, some notable similarities can be detected between Bailey's and Lôbo's work, especially in their decision to lay bare the insidious trauma of racism across time and space in the form of performance installations that may best be described as anachronistic assemblages. However, there are also several decisive differences in their respective ways of dealing with the insidious trauma of the 'Other': first and foremost of course, there is the difference between Bailey's focus on the victimhood of the 'Other', and the stark contrast to Lôbo's concentration on the history of black people's resistance. What is more, within this revelation Lôbo stresses the role of black women, which – even in the history of black people's empowerment – is often either minimized

or entirely erased. In so doing, Lôbo seems to remind her audience that, as Spivak asserts, “in the context of colonial production [...] the subaltern *as female* is even more deeply in shadow” than the subaltern in general terms (1988: 287; my emphasis).

Furthermore, instead of re-inscribing a system of *apartheid* where people with different ethnic backgrounds are segregated (as in Bailey’s work, in which the tableaux are shown in separate rooms), Lôbo brings various diasporic black women and women of colour, including herself (another essential difference!), physically (in the form of the performance), visually (on different screens but in one room) and textually (in the performers’ reading of theoretical texts) together. In this fashion, she highlights the strength and power of the collective and its possibility to effect change. As opposed to the traditional Western trauma approach, where the *individual* tries to work through the traumatic experience to make a life in the present possible, there is recognition here of the ways in which the insidious trauma of racism continues to affect *numerous* people and, therefore, has to be dealt with in a different manner, not on an individual basis but rather, as a collective community.

All these essential aspects are realized in Lôbo’s creation of a multi-semiotic collage. This collage is divided into two major parts. The first part takes place in an environment in which several screens, in contrast to Bailey’s tableaux vivants, are all to be found in the same exhibition room: one displays a well-known image of Saint Anastácia while another one comprises a cloth screen with stitched-on photographs that shows a black woman in contemporary clothes progressively removing a muzzle from her mouth. A third cloth screen in the same exhibition space reproduces a photographic still from a film of protesting black women in the late 1960s while yet another one depicts the title of the performance installation on a PowerPoint projection. During this first part of the show, nine black women and women of colour, all dressed in black clothes, enter the exhibition space and mingle with the spectators.

The second part of the artwork is a performance, enacted by the same nine women, including the artist. The women take their seats at a long table in front of the now seated audience. They insert blue contact lenses into their eyes, and then gaze for a moment intensely at their spectators before calling out Anastácia’s name. Then, one after another, the women cite theoretical works of a number of Black feminists from the past and present, and from across the Global South and the diaspora, who are rarely mentioned in dominant Western discourses.

In stark contrast to Bailey's work, Lôbo's performance installation clearly seeks to "go beyond the limits of available oppressive representations" (Motsemme 2004: 924) that either erase the voice of the 'Other' entirely or represent her/him as a defeated victim of Western hegemony. Eschewing Western trauma theory's customary binary of trauma as the failure of representation on the one hand and therapy via the restored word on the other, Lôbo's work instantiates an alternative approach to colonial trauma embedded in feminist practices from the Global South that combines several means of communication. In what follows, I look more closely at the various parts of the exhibition in order to demonstrate how – between the poles of silence and speech – each of the diverse parts of the artwork communicates resistance and offers approaches to deal with the insidious trauma of racism in life-affirming ways. I elaborate how Lôbo links the different elements of the installation to one another so as to reveal a history of ongoing black female empowerment across the Global South and North that refuses to be muted.

a) Anastácia's Defiant Blue-eyed Gaze

I begin with the image of Anastácia, which is – as mentioned above – the major point of reference in this artwork. The image was originally an engraving from the early nineteenth century based on a drawing by Jacques Arago that actually was supposed to depict a male slave (see Handler and Hayes 2009; Wood 2011). About a century later,



Fig. 5: Enslaved Brazilian
(Arago 1839)

this image was increasingly associated with the various myths circling around the female figure of *Escrava Anastácia* who, for "the members of the *movimento negro* or black consciousness movement", became "a symbol of black pride and heroic resistance: a reminder of the horrors of slavery and its continuing legacy of racism" (Handler and Hayes 2009: 26). Although there is no evidence that Anastácia ever really existed, numerous versions of her life have been recounted: one account claims that she was born in Angola of royal descent, was forcibly enslaved by a Portuguese family and taken to Brazil where she was then sold to the owner of a sugar plantation (see Kilomba 2013: 15-16). Another version depicts her as a Nigerian princess enslaved by a brutal master in Brazil who

tried to rape her; when she resisted his sexual advances, she was “confined to a mask” (see Burdick 1998: 76). Yet another narrative asserts that she was born in Bahia (Brazil) as the daughter of a slave and plantation owner (see Handler and Hayes 2009: 35) from whom she inherited the striking blue colour of her eyes.⁶⁰ The reasons for punishing her with a facemask and an iron collar⁶¹ vary: while some believe that she was punished for her refusal of the slave owner’s sexual advances, others think it was her political activism in helping other slaves to escape that gained her this form of punishment (see Lôbo 2010: 3; Kilomba 2013: 16).

In all of these versions, it was her courage to resist that makes her such an important and inspiring figure. According to Handler and Hayes, Anastácia has become “an icon of the sufferings not only of slaves but of female slaves and black women in general” (2009: 37). “[F]or many Brazilians” in particular, as they assert, the mute Anastácia “has provided an opportunity [...] to narrate a painful era in their history and to reclaim a past that, in ways large and small, continues to affect the present” (ibid: 49). What is strikingly absent from this account, which concentrates very much on ongoing suffering, is the empowering effect of narratives about Anastácia’s resistance. Obviously, Anastácia even seems to resist being pinned down to a single interpretation. Her “many faces”, as Lôbo explains, “make the indissoluble ambivalence of this imago clear: it is the Black woman, who was not obedient, who did not listen to orders, who was enslaved, but with the face of the warriors, who stares balefully and relentlessly, who was forced into silence and screamed incessantly: I am not a slave” (Lôbo 2010: 3).

The most relevant aspect of the figure of Anastácia is evidently her continuous resistance, a resistance that did not even cease when she was punished with a muzzle. Her “relentless stare” is an “oppositional gaze” as described by hooks. It opens up a space of agency that has the potential to announce: “Not only will I stare. I want my look to change reality” (hooks 1992: 116). It is exactly this potential – the “site of resistance” (ibid.) – that Lôbo attempts to excavate. The iron mask, in Lôbo’s words, “goes beyond the image of a victim of colonial violence and represents the fighters who

⁶⁰ A number of these legends, despite some differences, regard her as a saint who possessed healing powers and performed miracles while stoically enduring all her traumatic experiences (see Kilomba 2013: 16)

⁶¹ The iron collar around her neck caused a tetanus infection and eventually led to her death (see Handler and Hayes 2009: 35; Kilomba 2013: 16).

refuse to be silenced” (2010: 3). One of these fighters was Anastácia. This mythical historical figure exemplifies that

[e]ven the most subjected person has moments of rage and resentment so intense that they respond, they act against. There is an inner uprising that leads to rebellion, however short-lived. It may be only momentary but it takes place. That space within oneself where resistance is possible remains. (hooks 1990: 15)

hooks regards anger not as a pathological sign of powerlessness as in Western trauma theory (see for instance Cobbs and Grier 1992 [1968], whose theories are based on Freud) but as a potentially healthy, healing response to oppression and exploitation - which is a “necessary aspect of resistance struggle” (hooks 1990: 16).

Although rage can be destructive, hooks highlights its potential as a “catalyst inspiring courageous action” (ibid.). hooks’s understanding of rage refuses to consider the ‘Other’ as a perpetual victim, for whom anger is directed against oneself. This kind of self-destroying anger derives from a split self-perception that makes the black subject look at her-/himself through the eyes of the white oppressor as described by W.E.B. Du Bois’ notion of “double consciousness” (2015 [1903]) and later by Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1986[1952]). Such an extremely disabling psychological condition is based on a subliminal conditioning that ‘trains’ black people, from early childhood, to associate ‘blackness’ with ugliness and villainy. This condition produces an inferiority complex in the mind of the black subject who then tries to appropriate and imitate the culture of the colonizer by figuratively donning a “white mask”. It is not by accident that Lôbo chose *Iron Mask, White Torture* as a title for her work, clearly echoing Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Mask*. By slightly changing the title, she invalidates the power of the white oppressor over the black subject’s psyche while nevertheless acknowledging the ongoing validity of Fanon’s study of the damaging psychological effect colonialism has on the black subject. Fanon’s *White Mask*, understood as the black subject’s rejection of blackness and her/his desire to be white, becomes in Lôbo’s piece a concrete object, an *Iron Mask*. Significantly, this instrument of *White Torture* can be taken off (as another image in Lôbo’s installation demonstrates), as can the figurative *White Mask*, the desire to become white. Fanon’s *Black Skin* regains and reclaims its value and self-esteem in Lôbo’s work where the explicit reference to the figure of Anastácia not only reveals the physical and psychological suffering and silencing of the black ‘Other’ at the hands of the Global North but – and this is the

essential point – also the resilience and resistance of the black subject in the struggle against oppressive structures.

Anastácia's strikingly blue eyes recall yet another interesting intertextual reference in the context of Lôbo's work, namely to Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970). Significantly, this novel is also centrally concerned with the phenomenon of self-alienation explored by Fanon in *Black Skin, White Mask*. As Lôbo asserts:

In her book "The Bluest Eye", Toni Morrison undertakes a poetical critique of the dominant ideal of beauty, which white supremacy transfers into the fantasies of the ideal body. The desire for blue eyes is the effect of internalised racism, created by colonialism and which entrenches itself as trauma in the unconsciousness of the Black subject. The dream of blue eyes obscures the view of Black identity. (2010: 3)

In Morrison's portrayal of the economically disadvantaged Breedlove family who reject their blackness as the ultimate signifier of ugliness and lack, one can see how dangerous and self-destructive such self-hatred can become. The Breedloves are constantly abused and abuse one another physically and psychologically, thereby exemplifying how under severe white cultural imposition the black person can undergo, in Fanon's words, "a kind of scission, a fracture of consciousness" (1986 [1952]: 194). The innocent young Pecola Breedlove is the most vulnerable character in the novel. She is the victim of an endless series of shaming abuses, culminating in her being raped by her father, that eventually push her into madness. Her desire for blue eyes is the epitome of internalized racial self-loathing. *The Bluest Eye* resembles Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* in many ways: both Fanon and Morrison deal with the desire among oppressed people to become white. However, while making this desire comprehensible, both Fanon's work and Morrison's novel condemn this desire as a pathological reaction to an oppressive situation. In the character of Claudia, who in contrast to the other black girls, rejects whiteness as the ideal of beauty (exemplified for instance in her destruction of white dolls ([1970] 1999: 15), Morrison evokes what hooks calls a "constructive healing rage" (1990: 18) that may lead to self-recovery. Gurtpreet Singh Johal describes this empowering rage as a "fundamental component of the political process of decolonization. For the oppressed, confronting rage forces one to grow and change. It allows one to intimately understand that rage has a potential not only to destroy but also to construct. It is a necessary aspect of the resistance struggle" (Johal 2005: 272). This "potential to destroy" and thereby to "construct" is what Lôbo detects in the figure of Anastácia, who possesses what Pecola desperately longs for: blue eyes. However,

Anastácia's blue eyes are not desired, but are the result of the colonizing lust on the part of a white oppressor who rapes the mother before later abducting the daughter. As Lôbo remarks:

Anatácia's striking "blue eyes" tell the story of distorted desire and of symbolic and sexual violence/power through the white colonial ruler. The colonial ruler appropriates the Black body and instrumentalizes it as an exotic object of desire, which the hyper-sexualized Black woman must serve as. Anastácia pays for her resistance against violence/power by being tortured with the metal mask, which leaves her eyes visible; a blue that mirrors desire pervaded by racism. (2010:3)

To that extent, the beauty generally ascribed to Anastácia is attributed to her strikingly blue eyes (see Handler and Hayes 2009; Wood 2011) - a sign of whiteness. This aspect of descriptions of Anastácia reveals the persistence of ongoing racist structures. However, this ascribed marker of beauty is significantly and visibly rejected in Lôbo's work when the nine women at the end of their performance demonstratively take out their blue contact lenses. In Lôbo's performance installation the *white mask*, the *iron mask* and even the desire for blue eyes are regarded as instruments of *white torture* that attempt to deprive the 'Other' of her/his self-esteem, agency and voice. However, the image of Escrava Anastácia as the centrepiece of Lôbo's work functions as a reminder of an ongoing history of female empowerment that dates back to the beginnings of slavery.

b) Taking off the Muzzle

As a direct response to Anastácia's image, where even despite her defiant look, the muzzled Anastácia may continue to appear more as a passive victim of white oppression than as an active resistance fighter, Lôbo creates an image where the muzzle is actively taken off. The step-by-step process of removing this "mask of speechlessness" (Kilomba 2013: 14) is depicted in a series of twelve black and white photographs that are stitched on a beige cloth screen with a red yarn. In between these photographs are the printed names of women, among them Anastácia, who despite the precarity of their circumstances resisted white oppression.

Here, the use of different media – photography, printing, and fabric – deserves closer attention. The medium of **photography**, usually employed to capture a single



Fig. 6: Part of *Iron Mask, White Torture* (2010), performance and installation by Marissa Lôbo

moment in a static freeze-frame, is used in a manner reminiscent of a flipbook where the series of photographs creates the effect of a dynamic movement. Each of the photographs presents a successive step in the process of taking off the mask. The first photo in the series is almost identical with the image of Anastácia reproduced

above, suggesting a static situation that merely reproduces a situation of passive subjection. However, this first vignette is then succeeded by a series of stills that show the progressive removal of the facemask. Stasis gives way to transformation, passivity to activity.

Lôbo underlines the fact that this agency has always been present in the history of black female empowerment by **printing**, in between the photographs, the names of a number of prominent black female figures from the past and present, among them that of Anastácia. Each of these women is known to have suffered from structural racism. While most of them were actively involved in resisting white oppression, others inspired protest. One of the earliest examples of a female resistance fighter listed on the cloth is **Nzinga**, a seventeenth-century queen of the Ndongo and Matamba Kingdoms (in today's Angola) who was known for her fearless struggle for freedom against the Portuguese colonizers and her attempts to free her people from slavery (see Bortolot 2003). One of the more recent examples printed on the cloth is N'deye Mareame **Sarr**, a little known woman from Senegal who became a victim of racial profiling and was shot by the police in Aschaffenburg, Germany, in July 2000. Although Sarr is not known to have been actively involved in organizing protest, her tragic fate inspired

other Black women living in the diaspora to initiate protests against racial profiling⁶². In between Nzinga and Sarr, we also find the name of historical figures such as **Josephine Soliman** who fought, albeit unsuccessfully, to have the remains of her father, Angelo Soliman, returned to her in order to bury him in a Christian manner. Angelo Soliman had been brought as a slave from Western Africa to Austria, where he then became a soldier and adviser to a princely household. Later he served as a valet and tutor in Vienna. Despite his apparently successful integration into Austrian society, where he gained a reputation for great erudition, his body was posthumously skinned and stuffed so as to be displayed in the imperial natural history collection as an example of a primitive savage from Africa (see Reed 2006). This dehumanizing treatment recalls the fate endured by **Saartje Baartman**, whose name is also printed on the cloth screen. In the nineteenth century this Khoi Khoi woman from the Eastern Cape of South Africa was brought to Europe to be exposed to the colonial scopophilic gaze in freak shows and human zoos. After her early death, plaster casts and waxen moulds were made of her dissected remains and put on public display at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris until 1982, when public protest caused her to be removed from public viewing (see Quereshi 2004). It took another twenty years, however, before the South African government's requests prompted the French government to return her remains to her home country. Interestingly, both the figures of Saartje Baartman and Angelo Soliman appeared in Bailey's *Exhibit B*, where they were once again represented as exhibits of a contemporary human zoo. In Lôbo's installation, by contrast, Saartje Baartman and Angelo Soliman (via the intervention of his daughter) are remembered as figures that triggered subsequent political protest.

In addition, Lôbo presents a range of names of women who were actively involved in resistance movements, such as Fela Kutis's mother **Funmilayo Ransome Kuti**, a teacher, political campaigner and famous women's rights activist in Nigeria; **Sojourner Truth**, an African-American abolitionist and women's rights activist in the nineteenth century; **Nana Yaa Asantewaa** who, in 1900, led the "War of the Golden Stool" of the Ashanti people against British colonization in a part of today's Ghana; **Angela Davis**, an academic scholar, author and American Civil Rights activist who, in the 1960s, was also involved in the Black Panther Party and **Audre Lorde**, a writer, feminist, womanist, and Civil Rights activist.

⁶² See no-racism.net (2000: n.p.), <http://no-racism.net/print/1925/>

Lorde is of particular interest in this context. Her name, printed on the cloth, is flanked obliquely by two of the successive photos and several of the strands of red yarn that attach the photos to the cloth background. Lorde directly addresses the connections between selfhood, agency and history. In her *On My Way Out I Passed Over You and the Verrazano Bridge* (1986: 57), we find the following lines:⁶³

102 History is not kind to us
103 we restitch it with living
104 past memory forward
105 into desire
106 into the panic articulation
107 of want without having
108 or even the promise of getting.

Lorde's poem stages a progression from the suffering-laden "History is not kind to us" (line 102) to the more affirmative assertion "we restitch it" (line 103). Like Lôbo, Lorde undertakes this re-stitching process by employing "living past | memory" (lines 103-104) - in order to trigger a dynamic process of "living | past memory forward | into desire" (lines 103-105). This dynamic process also includes "panic articulation" (line 106), traces of suffering that resonate with the penetrative force and the blood-red thread that Lôbo also acknowledges. Yet even here there is 'articulation' – voice and connectivity. Lorde's poem rehearses a non-Western process of trauma mastery that involves resiliently living on, using memories of past women as a resource that empowers the women of the present and carries them into the future. Her poem articulates verbally what Lôbo does by stitching.

There is a substantial tradition of black feminist creativity where the imagery of stitching, sewing or embroidery is used to link the past with the present and to create communities (often between mothers and daughters or other female members) with whom to share their 'yarns'. One of the most prominent literary examples can be found, for instance, in Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple* (1982), where the activity of sewing quilts is used as a means of reconstructing female identities and strengthening interpersonal relationships (see Cutter 2000; Bilali 2014; Grüdtner 2014). As Martha J. Cutter suggests in her analysis of Walker's novel, "sewing does more than enable conversation: sewing *is* conversation, a language that articulates relationships and

⁶³ For the whole poem see appendix 7.

connects networks of individuals to create a community” (2000: 172, italics in original). The stitching in Lorde’s poem as well as on Lôbo’s cloth screen not dissimilarly serves as a binding element, a common language that brings different eras and people from various places together. Lôbo’s use of diverse textile forms (the red yarn and the cloth) thus evokes a whole tradition of feminist artistic creativity in which women employ embroidery and other needlework “to tell their own stories – often in societies that refuse to hear them otherwise” (Jana 2016: n.p). While the red threads that are pinned into the cloth on Lôbo’s screen include a sense of pain endured by those who suffered from having been silenced, they also evince the creative potential of women to find a voice that can be heard in a variety of alternative forms of communication.

c) *The Female Black Panther*

As mentioned in the previous section, one of the names printed on the cloth was Angela Davis who, in the 1960s, was involved in the Black Panther movement. The



Fig. 7: Part of *Iron Mask, White Torture* (2010), performance and installation by Marissa Lôbo

importance of this movement in relation to Lôbo’s work is stressed by the artist herself who (writing with Sheri Avraham), asserts that the performers’ “black outfits give tribute to the Black Panther Party, expressing their importance as a significant resistance group in all of black history” (2010: 1). This claim is given extra weight by a still from

a video projection that hangs to the right of the central cloth with its photo series and names. The still depicts black women protesting on the streets in the 1960s, quite possibly female members of the Black Panther party. Although this is only a photographic still that catches a single moment of the protest, the gestures are clear enough and their words almost audible: their raised fists, a typical gesture of the Black Panthers, and their open mouths chanting their protest against the injustices they experience in a white environment are expressive of their demands (“wanting without having” as Lorde’s poem phrases it in line 107).

Yet a photographic still such as this freezes feminine agency into immobility, perhaps thereby commenting indirectly on the marginalization of female agency even within this black resistance group. Likewise, the absence of a soundtrack, as might have been included in a video, reinforces the evocation of the silencing of feminine voices. The Black Panther Party (BPP) was a male-dominated organisation. However, as in many revolutionary movements, women were prominently represented among the membership. According to a survey done by the co-founder of the Black Panther Party, Bobby Seale, two-thirds of the Party's members were women (see Cleaver 2009). Many of these women played important and influential roles. Angela Davis, one of the 'signatories' of Lôbo's cloth, for example, had close relations with the Black Panther Party through her involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. Despite this evidence, female Panthers were often neglected by the American media and even by the Party's own newspaper *The Black Panther*. The invisibility of the many influential women in the Party shaped the idea that female Panthers only participated in social service programs and were voiceless in decision-making processes (see Martin 2014; Farmer 2017). The still of protesting women in Lôbo's installation performance highlights this ambiguity: it exposes the silencing of black female voices and activism in dominant discourses while at the same time bringing their important active role within this movement back into visibility.

d) The Performance – Speech as Resistance

Whereas the first part of the exhibition focussed very much on silent forms of communication to reveal the muting of female voices, the second part turns to speech as resistance.

In this second part the spectators are asked to sit down to watch a performance by the same nine women who had previously walked around among the visitors to the exhibition. The group of women comprises Lôbo herself, Sheri Avraham, Agnes Achola, Alessandra Klimpel, Belinda Kazeem, Flavia Inkiru, Grace Latigo, Steaze and Njideka Stephanie Iroh. They all live in the diaspora where they are actively involved as either artists, writers, academics or activists in claiming their rights as marginalized subjects in political systems that are marked by deeply-rooted racist structures, such as Austria and Germany.

Now the women take their seats at a long empty table opposite the audience, insert blue contact lenses into their eyes and stare for a moment at the audience before announcing Anastácia's name. "Their blue eyes", as Lôbo explains in a comment on her artwork, "appear very clearly as an element that had been shoved into the black subject body. The physical illustration is meant to evoke a certain dissonance within the viewer – a white middle- and upper-class spectator – the typical guest of such an event. For a moment, he has been disturbed in his ritual and is compelled to witness such a gaze upon him" (2010: 1). The returned gaze is thus meant to put the spectator in the discomforting position of having to hear the voice of the black female 'Other'. One performer after another quotes text passages by black feminists from across the Global South and from the diaspora, including some of those present. Starting with a passage from *Plantation Memories* (2013) by Grada Kilomba who explicitly talks in this text about the iron mask and Anastácia's fate, the subsequent texts by bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, Araba Evelyn Johnston-Arthur, Claudia Unterweger, Belinda Kazeem, Njideka Stephanie Iroh and Grace Latiga⁶⁴ are also all concerned with issues such as "racism and sexism, African Diasporas, black identities and colonization [which] are juxtaposed with critical migration politics" (Lôbo 2010: 1). The aim of the performance is to "rethink [...] black feminism as a social justice project" in the formulation of Patricia Hill in the passages from *Black Feminist Thought* (2009) [1990]) quoted by one of the women. The previous announcement of Anastácia's name and the subsequent reading of quotes by various black feminists are what Lôbo calls an "intervention performance" that "create[s] a moment for ignoring the white canon that is legitimized by knowledge produced by Western or Eurocentric



Fig. 8: Part of *Iron Mask, White Torture* (2010), performance and installation by Marissa Lôbo

⁶⁴ The three last women mentioned here are also among the performers.

epistemologies” (2010: 1). Seated in front of the various images of the installation (the picture of Anastácia, the cloth screen with the woman taking off the muzzle, the title of the exhibition and the film still of protesting women), these women instantiate Lôbo’s claim that “[t]he mask is broken with each of the quotations” (2010: 1). The mask that mutes their mouth, in a literal and figurative sense, is rejected. So are the blue eyes, indices of a fallacious desire to become white, in the performers’ final gesture at the end of the reading, when they demonstratively remove the blue contact lenses from their eyes. Effectively, they stay *what* they are: powerful black women and women of colour who claim their right to voice and agency. What is more, they want to stay *where* they are, hence their concluding answer to the whole exhibition’s interrogative title “Where do we go from here?” – “Nowhere! – We are here to stay!”

The exhibition’s title contains a clear reference to Martin Luther King’s *Where do we go from here? Chaos or Community?* (2010 [1967]), written as the first successes of the Civil Rights Movement started to diminish. As Vesna Bukoveć notes, “King’s self-reflexive and critical analysis is a snapshot of a society faced with the choice of sinking into chaos or working towards a life together as a peaceful community based on equality” (2010: n.p). The latter option is endowed with pragmatic activist content by Grace Latigo, who presents a programme whose fundamental nature is a practice of resilience: echoing King, she asks, “Where do we go from here Vienna?” Without waiting for an answer from the privileged audience, she announces: “Nowhere! – We are here to stay!” Apparently this last ‘question-response’- announcement was suggested by Lôbo and Sheri Avraham as an ironic comment on legislation passed two years before the exhibition (2008) that massively curtailed the rights of “aliens” and asylum seekers, especially limiting their rights of residence in the EU (see Gržinic 2014: 5-6; Lôbo 2000: 3).

Another even more striking intertextual reference - whether deliberate or not - can be found closer to the Vienna of 2010. In an analogous performance art installation by Lubaina Himid in London, entitled *The Thin Black Line* (1985), eleven black women artists living in the British diaspora announced: “We are claiming what is ours and making ourselves visible. We are eleven of the hundreds of creative Black Women in Britain today. *We are here to stay*” (Himid qtd. in Parker and Pollock: 1990: 67; my

emphasis).⁶⁵ Such claims to the right to stay and to the rights to citizenship as “aliens” had thus been voiced in a similarly explicit manner by a group of black women artists in the 1980s in Britain. Like Lôbo and her eight fellow performers, the black women artists in the London multimedia installation utilized among other alternative means of communication “resistant speech that is indicative of a shared determinacy to self-inscribe a visibility that is [still] absent in the dominant art world” (Tsfagiorgis 1993: 148). As in London in 1985, the combination of various media and hence different forms of communication between the poles of silence and speech, mobilized by a collective of women of colour, makes *Iron Mask, White Torture* in Vienna in 2010 such a powerful affective piece of art.

e) Conclusion: An Entangled History of Black Female Empowerment

The group of nine black women and women of colour from different origins are not only linked to one another, but also to their ancestors (such as Anastácia, Saartje Baartman, Nzinga, and the other women, whose names are imprinted on the cloth screen) and to the black feminists whose thoughts they quote. All of these figures from different epochs and continents are connected in an entanglement of “multiple *durées* made up of discontinuities, reversals, inertias, and swings that overlay one another” (Mbembe 2001: 14) via a history of slavery, colonialism and structural racism whose traces are still prevalent in the present. These links are made visually tangible by the manner in which each of the images in the installation refers to the others and to the performance as a whole. Lôbo’s work thus instantiates an alternative approach to the insidious trauma of racism that is embedded in feminist practices from the Global South and the African diaspora. By combining various modes of communication located between the poles of silence and speech, she foregrounds a continuing history of black female empowerment that has been silenced in dominant Western discourses. In so doing, she follows a tradition of black women artists who, according to Freida High W. Tsfagiorgis, “explicate the potential of a self-initiated discourse to transform its subjects from a state of exclusion, marginalization, fragmentation and victimization to one of empowered visibility and action” (1993: 229). This is certainly the case in Lôbo’s performance installation, which reclaims “the histories, voices, visibility and

⁶⁵ The group of women involved in this project reworked the performance installation under a slightly altered name, *Thin Black Line(s)*, in 2011-2012 at Tate Britain.

cultural production of Black artists who, like others, have participated in the shaping of the sociocultural *fabric* of the world” (Tesfagiorgis 1993: 229 my emphasis). As a collective these women confront an international art world that is dominated by an American- and European capitalist market. In implicit opposition to the work of Bailey, with its interest in the exhibition as spectacle, these women effectively locate themselves in opposition to lay bare galleries, museums and other sites of spectacle as “a space of production of an epistemological violence” (Lôbo 2000: 3) where the history of the ‘other’ is appropriated and where their own voices are muted. The figurative and literal dismantling of Anastácia’s muzzle is an essential act of resistance, suggesting a “decolonising [of] the mind” (see Ngũgĩ, 1986) that refuses Western representations of mere victimhood. It exemplifies how “[i]ndividuals who have decolonized their minds make it possible for rage to be heard and used constructively by working together” (Johal 2005: 272).

CHAPTER FIVE: Sealed Lips

Sealing the lips is yet another violent method of muting the mouth. Modern and contemporary state agents often use various materials to this end: scarves, ropes, bags, adhesive tape etc. If applied tightly to the lips, using the voice and absorbing nutrients become impossible. Even breathing, depending on how tightly the material is fastened around the mouth, becomes difficult, and if the nose is blocked too, taping and other forms of binding may lead to suffocation. These are often state-sanctioned methods used by the police in a ‘state of exception’ to render detainees silent and obedient as, for instance, in South Africa during apartheid, during the war in former Yugoslavia, or all around the world in the so-called war on terrorism. In opposition to such methods, other forms of mouth-muting - in particular self-imposed, as in the cases I will examine - such as lip-sewing by detainees, may be deployed as an essential political message, a call for resistance within that ‘state of exception’.

In this chapter, I look specifically at two images of sealed lips that comment on the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers in contemporary societies: the taping of the mouth and lip sewing. On the one hand, the first example, another tableau vivant from Bailey’s *Exhibit A* and *Exhibit B* entitled “Survival of the Fittest”, suggests the taping of the mouth as an imposed silencing of the ‘Other’ as a sign of sovereign power that reduces the asylum seeker to the status of ‘bare life’ (EXAMPLE 1). On the other hand, the counter-examples, Mehmet Al Assad’s poem “Asylum” and *Close the Concentration Camps* by Australian performance artist Mike Parr, will be analysed in terms of a self-imposed form of muting the mouth that “speaks” physically of the figurative silencing of the refugee ‘Other’ (EXAMPLE 2). While Bailey’s “Survival of the Fittest” focuses once again on the ongoing victimhood of the ‘other’ – this time on the asylum seeker as a contemporary *homo sacer* – the counter-examples given by Al Assad and Parr exemplify the possibility of empowerment of the apparent helpless victim of Global North brutality within a ‘state of exception’.

EXAMPLE 1: Brett Bailey's "Survival of the Fittest" – The Migrant as Contemporary *Homo Sacer*

Bailey's "Survival of the Fittest" is one of the tableaux vivants in *Exhibit A* and *B* that comments explicitly on contemporary migration policies in Europe. Significantly, in most shows it forms the last tableau of the exhibition, and – by virtue of its terminal position within the sequences of the installation – thus suggesting that migration policies constitute the apex of institutionalized racism in our contemporary society.



Fig. 9 "Survival of the Fittest" from Brett Bailey's *Exhibit A* in Vienna (Austria), 2010.

Depending on where the exhibition is shown, some aspects of the tableau vivant change slightly, but the main elements remain always the same. "Survival of the Fittest" consists of a row of airline passenger seats. In the middle a black man is tied to the seat, sometimes

with adhesive tape, rope or cable ties or with several materials. His wrists, ankles and chest are in many shows tightly connected to the seat so that his mobility is entirely restricted. While in some performances adhesive tape covers almost the whole of his face (see Fig. 9), in other performances it is merely his mouth that is sealed. The seats on either side of the black man are empty; only two pairs of shoes in front of the empty seats – a pair of women's high heeled shoes and a pair of elegant men's shoes – suggest other people's presence on the plane. A sign belonging to the tableau contains the title, "Survival of the Fittest", followed by information about the composition of the artwork. In the Paris exhibition, for instance, the sign read: "Mixed Media: Airplane seats, Somali man, shoes, packing tape, cable ties, rope etc." (*Exhibit B*, Théâtre Saint Germain, Paris, December 2014). Following this list of 'objects', some additional personal details about the "Somali man" are listed: his full name, date of birth and death, the country of his birth, point of entry in Europe, his status, his religion and finally the reason for his death: "Asphyxiated by French border police officers while resisting deportation on a Sabena Flight from Roissy-Charles de Gaulle airport to

Johannesburg” (ibid.). For the first time in Bailey’s performance installation there is a mention of resistance on the part of the ‘Other’ (in other cities this information is left out). At the same time, however, what is foregrounded is the consequence of such struggle: resistance merely leads to death. Thus, while clearly exposing the brutality of European migration policy, the potential for resistance on behalf of the asylum seeker is foreclosed from the outset. A final list of names, sometimes on the same sign as the other information, sometimes separate, enumerates the identities of asylum seekers who have died in a similar manner during deportation from Europe to the countries of their origin since the 1990s, thereby reinforcing the idea that any form of resistance is pointless.

Regardless of the location of the respective exhibition, “Survival of the Fittest” always depicts an asylum seeker of African origin who has suffocated during a deportation flight from Europe to Africa. However, the details of the deceased asylum seeker represented in the respective exhibition vary according to recent events regarding the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers in the relevant country. The names of the asylum seekers mentioned in the show are not fictitious. Each of them had a real existence, so that what is depicted, despite the individualizing impetus of the representation, instantiates a state of affairs current and ongoing both locally and globally: the asylum seeker instantiates a transhistorical series of successive examples of the *homo sacer* and his constitutive ‘state of exception’ of which we are now confronted with the most contemporary instance. According to Steven L. Gordon, “the ‘state of exception’ logic of contemporary legislation is nowhere more evident than in the very principle of the national deportation system” (2010: 17). Yet again the ‘state of exception’ constitutes the defining characteristic of the *homo sacer*.

While the information on the sign makes clear that the people represented in this particular tableau died during their deportation flights, the tableau vivant depicts them in a moment when they were still alive but often already on the verge of dying. This threshold location typifies three central characteristics of the ‘state of exception’.

First, in a state of exception the individual is constituted within a ‘zone of indistinction’ where “[s]overeign violence opens up a zone of indistinction between law and nature, outside and inside, violence and law” (Agamben 1998: 41). The fact that the murdering of the asylum seeker takes place on a plane high above the grounds of any fixed territories reinforces the idea of being caught in such an in-between stateless zone where *homo sacer* is seen as the outlaw citizen, the exception to the law. As we have

seen, ‘Sacer’ in Agamben’s understanding of the term is not meant as ‘sacred’ in religious terms but as being ‘set apart’ from the rest of the society (a phenomenon also known in South Africa as *apart-heid*). The asylum seeker is excluded from society, as indexed in the tableau by the absence of the other people nonetheless present on this regular passenger flight, an absence that is actively suggested by the empty shoes. Yet the asylum seeker is still subject to the penalty of death and therefore still included, in the very act of exclusion, within the law. In being the interstitial exception he effectively blurs the lines between outlaw (refugee) and citizen. Such zones of indistinction provide the underlying structure of the ethnographic forms of representation that Bailey harnesses in his Vienna version of “Survival of the Fittest”.

Second, the zone of indistinction is legitimized (to the extent that a sovereign decision needs any legitimization at all, its self-founding character being the essence of sovereignty), by the evocation of a threat: “Detention and deportation is classified as a preventative measure that allows individuals to be taken into custody on the basis that their mere presence serves as a danger to the security and integrity of the state” (Gordon 2010: 17). The reason given for the binding and silencing of the asylum seekers on the plane was their reluctance to be deported to a country where they expect death, torture or imprisonment. Since resistance is interpreted as aggression, a threat to the security of the state, any kind of measurements to stop the ‘danger’ is permissible. The migrant is depicted as a criminal, as a threat to the body politic so that killing him/her, as Agamben asserts above, is no longer regarded as a crime. In this context, it becomes an expression of social Darwinism, as the following discussion will illustrate.

Finally, the asylum seeker – the contemporary *homo sacer* – is presented as a disenfranchised and banned human being who may be killed with impunity. As Agamben argues, within the ‘state of exception’, “human beings [...] have been so completely deprived of their rights and prerogatives to the point that committing any act against them would no longer appear as a crime” (1998: 110). Significantly, the two police officers responsible for the deaths of the asylum seekers were never seriously charged for their crimes. It is this third point in particular that will be central to the portrayal of contemporary asylum seekers as instantiations of an ongoing transhistorical insidious trauma in Bailey’s work.

In *Exhibit A* and *B* Bailey folds two forms of instantiation into each other. The first is a diachronic instantiation. The asylum seeker is the latest instance of a long entangled series of states of exception with their respective forms of *homo sacer*,

stretching from slavery to contemporary border regimes. Bailey says this explicitly on his homepage: “EXHIBIT A [...] draws together several threads concerning European racism towards Africans from the mid-19th century to the present” (qtd. in Grechi 2016: 145). In order to make this point, however, Bailey needs to rehearse a second, synchronic form of instantiation. His figures have a *pars pro toto* function. Their role as synecdoches makes the particular cases he portrays indicative of a larger European system. For this reason, Bailey openly addresses recent political developments regarding the treatment of migrants and asylum seekers in each depiction of his contemporary tableaux vivants. The combination of a particular individual ‘case’ with a list of named victims all over Europe extends the specific instantiation of border regimes to the larger context of European refugee policies. In this way, his strategy makes clear that the apparent individual fate is embedded in institutionalized racism and is thus part of an insidious trauma that affects a whole community.

In what follows I discuss this tableau vivant as it was represented as part of *Exhibit A* in Vienna in 2010, the same year as Lôbo presented *Iron Mask, White Torture*. The political situation in Austria at that time regarding migrants coming from African countries is quite explicitly at the centre of Bailey’s contemporary tableaux. On his homepage, already quoted above, he explains: “EXHIBIT A [...] draws together several threads concerning European racism towards Africans from the mid-19th century to the present” and “opens wounds of ethnographic exhibitions, social Darwinism, and the increasingly xenophobic policies of the EU” (qtd. in Grechi 2016: 145). In what follows, I argue that the Vienna show, as Bailey’s statement explains, faces in two directions at once. On the one hand, it portrays the contemporary asylum seeker as part of long-standing historical processes of representation (**ethnography** and **social Darwinism**) that constitute in themselves an insidious trauma. On the other hand, it faces towards the present, embedding its individual case within the broader pattern of **contemporary migration policies**. “Survival of the Fittest” as it was presented in Vienna in 2010 exemplifies how all these threads – from **ethnography** to **social Darwinism** and **contemporary migration policies** – are intertwined. In contrast to Lôbo’s work, however, the potential for resistance on the part of the ‘Other’ is largely erased.

a) *Ethnography*

As a venue for *Exhibit A* in Vienna in 2010, Bailey chose an empty wing of the Vienna Museum of Ethnology (since 2013 renamed World Museum Vienna⁶⁶) in the Hofburg Imperial Palace. The choice of the venue is of great significance, since it draws attention to the ongoing dehumanization of the ‘Other’ in institutions that hold a high degree of authority.⁶⁷ Such museums are heterotopias, as Foucault (1984) pointed out, sites both within and outside the social fabric, that capture the ‘Other’ within a web of Eurocentric representations so as to exclude that ‘Other’ from a common humanity. They thus constitute a historical ‘zone of indistinction’. This is done by placing the ethnographic Other in a temporal, developmental space that, via a “denial of coevalness” (Fabian 1983: 32), is clearly located outside ‘our’ Modernity.

One of the first tableaux vivants in the Vienna show bears the title “Origins of the Species”. (This direct reference to Darwin’s scientific nineteenth-century treatise links the tableau explicitly to the “Survival of the Fittest” tableau, that in turn is located towards the end of the installation.) Bailey’s “Origins of the Species” resembles displays of nineteenth-century ethnographic museums: it depicts two half-naked Nama people in glass cabinets in their apparent natural environment against the backdrop of a rural Namibia diorama. The sign reads: “Mixed media: various trophies (antelope heads, two Namas, cultural artefacts, snake, etc), vitrines, anthropological paraphernalia, spectators.” Just like the other listed objects, the Namas – a topless woman and a man with a bow on his shoulder and yellow measuring tape tied around his neck, upper arms, legs and chest – are described as “trophies” brought from the exotic colony to reassure the spectators of their superiority. As the “mixed-media” information notes, the spectators have become part of the artwork themselves, although

⁶⁶ The renaming of ethnological museums into terms that suggest world culture (e.g. Weltkulturen Museum Frankfurt; Kulturen der Welt in Cologne, the Weltmuseum in Vienna) cannot change the fact that these museums hardly ever offer a proper dialogue between cultures as they like to claim. Instead they tend to be still stuck in Eurocentric representations of the ‘Other’ that do not take into account the voice of the Other in its own terms.

⁶⁷ To highlight the connection between each country’s colonial history and more recent racial discourse of the respective cities, he also carefully chose the venues. In the Brussels performance, for instance, where some of the tableaux specifically referred to Belgian’s cruel exploitation of the Congo, the performance took place in the Gèsu church. The Gèsu church is known for having sheltered undocumented migrants in the more recent past. Thus, the performance changes slightly in every city not only according to the colonial history but also to the contemporary migration policies of the respective country so as to expose the ongoing nature of racist structures. In each city Bailey even hired some local diasporic performers, among them some asylum seekers, to play the parts of those asylum seekers who quite concretely became victims of inhumane European migration policies.

not as trophies (like the Namas) but clearly as members of the ‘superior race’ who are responsible for the Namas’ displacement and their (mis)representation in the Western world. On a desk in front of the cabinets lie charts in German and English, tables of measurements, including penis length, taken by nineteenth-century anthropologists.

In the nineteenth-century, museums took pride in showing off their riches in permanent exhibitions. They were filled with objects that were considered authentic documents about different epochs, places and people. Similarly to Bailey’s representation of “Origins of the Species”, artefacts were usually categorized according to different criteria taking into account material, type, shape, size and age. As Saphinaz-Amal Naguib explains, “[m]useums of cultural history have been projected as Western inventions expressing linear and irreversible conceptions of time and history” (2004: 7). In *Time and the Other*, Johannes Fabian (1983: 32) criticized anthropology for its constitutive “denial of coevalness”, and proposed to counter this aspect by stressing the actual dialogical encounter of the anthropological interaction. Bailey does something akin to this by placing in a dialogical space different spatial and temporal instances of a cruel colonial past with the racist character of contemporary migration policies, as both the “Origin of the Species” tableau and “Survival of the Fittest” exemplify. Whether his assertion of a shared temporal space genuinely empowers the ‘Other’, as Fabian’s polemic intended, is highly questionable: as I show, the diachronic contiguity signaled by the anachronistic entanglements of the ‘exhibits’ serves a political ‘synchronic’ contextualization which minimizes the agency of the contemporary asylum seeker as *homo sacer*.

The ‘exhibits’ in Bailey’s *Exhibit A* have a quite explicit contemporary existence, emphasized by those tableaux vivants that depict present immigrants and asylum seekers, dressed in contemporary clothes. The pseudo-scientific studies presented in the “Origins of the Species” tableau are echoed here in the information given on the accompanying signs. In yet another contemporary tableau vivant, entitled “Found Objects,” black actors behind electric fences embody refugees and asylum seekers who are classified, as in ethnographic displays, into certain categories. Enlarged immigration forms provide the spectator, not unlike anthropological measurements tables, with information about the displayed ‘object’: their size, age and other details including possible diseases that may endanger the European society. This method reiterates the features of anthropological classification so as to highlight the pathologization of non-European bodies. The various props in Bailey’s diverse tableaux vivants along with

their pseudo-scientific titles link the anthropometric techniques of nineteenth-century racial science with contemporary information regimes of migration control.

Bailey's installation thus implies a critique of a specific Western perspective which still regards the 'Other' as a 'primitive creature' in need of civilization (some tableaux in *Exhibit A* and *B* are even entitled "Civilizing the Natives"). The history of ethnological museums is thus closely linked to Eurocentrism and colonialism. As Regina Wonisch notes: "The knowledge of other cultures is supposed to promote mutual understanding, appreciation and tolerance. But the aggregation of ethnological knowledge in the 19th and 20th century proved the exact opposite" (2017: 2). Ethnological museums still tend to represent their own interpretations of their displays as 'facts.' They distort and hence mask the oppression of the cultures they represent; and their ideological messages appear as 'authentic' since the institutions hardly ever reveal to their public the actual choices and negotiations through which cultures have been (mis)represented. Bailey's exhibit makes this point over and over again in an implicit fashion.

Yet his work manifests equally persistently another blind spot at the moment his transhistorical entanglements are keyed into the present and its systemic spread. No less an object of mis-representation and mis-interpretation is the resistance on the part of the asylum seeker 'Other' as Bailey's "The Survival of the Fittest" demonstrates. Resistance coming from the 'Other' is interpreted by the state as a sign of aggression, an undisciplined 'barbaric' behaviour, apparently threatening the security of the host country. Punitive measures, going so far as to include the extermination of the 'Other', are thus permissible. Here, once again, the second aspect of the 'zone of indistinction' in which the *homo sacer* is caught becomes manifest. It is not by accident that Bailey chose "Survival of the Fittest" as a title for one of his contemporary tableaux, mirroring the earlier ethnographic display "Origins of the Species". "Survival of the Fittest" is probably the best-known phrase associated with Darwin's *On the Origins of Species* (1859), often mis-interpreted to legitimize the triumphalist "survival" (i.e. military victory) of the European colonizer – and not the resilience of the colonized – as the following section illustrates.

b) Social Darwinism

In the specific context of the analysis of Bailey's "Survival of the Fittest", Social Darwinism can be considered as the essential temporal link between nineteenth-century ethnology and contemporary migration policies. Bailey's choice of naming some of his tableaux after Darwin's evolutionary theories is intentionally misleading. Darwin's theories in *On the Origins of Species* and especially the phrase "Survival of the Fittest," which was originally coined by English philosopher Herbert Spencer, have often been misunderstood (see Shermer 2006; 2009). Darwin (1985: 443) was interested in the extraordinary creativity of the natural world, seeing "no limit in this power, in slowly and beautifully adapting each form to the most complex relations of life" (see also Grosz 2011: 63). Social Darwinism, seizing upon Darwin's own references to race and Malthusian population theory (ibid), focussed upon the quasi-imperialist notion that "as all groups cannot thus succeed in increasing in size, for the world would not hold them, the more dominant groups beat the less dominant" (1985: 444). Social Darwinism has taken up the phrase to apply the evolutionary concept of natural selection to the competitive character in human society. According to Social Darwinism, a concept that also appeared in the second half of the nineteenth century, human groups and races are subject to the same laws of natural selection: the weak will be diminished and their cultures decimated while the strong grow in power and in cultural influence over the weak. As David Sloan Wilson and Eric M. Johnson note, it comes as no surprise that "the term is associated primarily with the moral justification of inequality, resulting in policies such as withholding welfare for the poor, colonialism, eugenics, and genocide" (2015: 3). In the nineteenth century, for instance, the 'dying race' theory posited the inevitable decline of Indigenous peoples in North America and Australia so as to legitimize settler colonial genocide (see Brantlinger 1995). Bailey's title implies the same spurious mixing of evolutionary science with cultural prejudices, relating it now to the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers. His "Found Objects," where three black people in contemporary clothes are displayed behind electric wire fences, alludes – similarly to "Still-life with Negro" – to a specific Western art genre. A 'found object' (translated from the French objet trouvé) is an everyday natural product or manufactured object, or fragment of an object originally not designed for an artistic purpose that is 'found' by an artist and kept.⁶⁸ It only gains its status as art from the

⁶⁸ The most famous 'found object', also known as readymade (a more up-date version of it) is probably Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917), a urinal that was simply turned over, inscribed with the date 1917 and signed with a pseudonym R. Mutt (see Alu 2014).

designation placed upon it by the artist and from the social history that comes with the object (Wallace 2014). By calling some of his contemporary tableau vivants “Found Objects”, Bailey emphasizes the absurd objectification of the apparent ‘weaker’ black subjects who can be displayed as ephemeral objects that may even be ‘disposed’ of in the manner to which “Survival of the Fittest” even more explicitly alludes. Via the allusions to the ‘found objects’ of contemporary migration police raids and daily racial profiling in European countries, Bailey’s installation performance depicts those subjected to a Darwinian struggle for survival between the West and the Rest as contemporary *homines sacri*. His installation implies a neo-social-Darwinist framework in which the contemporary *homo sacer* is condemned to die within a power struggle between more and less adaptive species, between fitter and less fit races. The unmistakably Darwinian title thus ironically refers to the contemporary European border policy understood as a social-Darwinist regime of death that objectifies the illegal immigrant. The reduction of the human to an object to be possessed and disposed of is the core idea at the heart of Agamben’s *homo sacer*.

However, the problem with Bailey’s depiction of the contemporary *homo sacer* is that the ‘Other’ is once again reduced to a powerless victim without voice and agency. This reduction is the active feature of an ongoing historical process of repetition that in itself constitutes an insidious trauma. His depiction actively participates in this reduction by depicting the asylum seeker as agency-less. The fact that even within the most dehumanizing environments there is still space for agency and resilience to occur, a version of the theory of ‘bare life’ that to certain extent resembles Darwin’s original idea of the “survival of the fittest”, is actively ignored by Bailey’s depiction. For, according to Darwin, adaptation to the environment does not necessarily imply dominance. Rather, Darwin suggests that cooperation is far more relevant than competition in the working of the natural system since natural selection, as Michael Shermer notes, “is a description of a process, not a force” (2009: n.p). The possibility of gaining some form of political empowerment within such a zone of indistinction remains invisible and unheard in Bailey’s installation. Instead the success of a continuing Social Darwinism is emphasised.

c) Contemporary Migration Policies

In the Vienna exhibition, “Survival of The Fittest” refers explicitly to the death of Marcus Omofuma who suffocated on 1 May 1999 during his deportation to Nigeria on a regular passenger-flight via Bulgaria. Here Bailey’s exhibit shifts its focus towards the embedding of the individual case within a larger system of European border regimes in which the asylum seeker becomes the contemporary instantiation of the *homo sacer*. The details given about Omofuma on the accompanying sign list the usual facts: his name, date of birth and death, place of birth etc. but this time the place of residence is also asked for but significantly left out. Omofuma is depicted as a contemporary *homo sacer*, a stateless subject cast outside the bounds of the body politic, and thus



Fig. 10: Sign accompanying the “Survival of the Fittest” – tableau vivant in *Exhibit A* in Vienna (2010)

exposed to the full force of sovereign violence, as the reason given for his death illustrates: “suffocated with plastic tapes by Austrian police on deportation flight on Balkan Air passenger liner.”

Omofuma came to Europe as a Nigerian refugee, illegally entering first Germany where he was immediately rejected and then Austria in 1998 (see Bischof and Rupnow 2017). Here too, his application for political asylum was denied. When he refused to enter the plane, his resistance was punished by binding him to the seat and by sealing his eyes, mouth, and partly his nose with adhesive tape. People did not notice until the arrival in Sofia that Omofuma had died. On the one hand Omofuma’s death provoked massive protests among Vienna’s African community and heated discussions about Austria’s xenophobic migration policy ensued. On the other hand, however, it also triggered the Austrian Interior Ministry immediately to launch a massive hate campaign in order to discredit Omofuma and other black people and people of colour living in Austria (see www.no-racism.net). On 1 May 1999 anti-racist demonstrations were rapidly dispersed by the police and a few weeks later police raided dozens of houses and flats of ‘suspected drug dealers’ to stop further organized anti-racist

demonstrations. About one hundred people were arrested during what was referred to as ‘Operation Spring’:

Under the pretences of a crackdown on drug-trafficking, some 100 Africans were arrested in the country’s largest police-action since 1945. Under the name “Operation Spring” 850 police searched refugee-accommodations and flats all over the country. In a trial with numerous inconsistencies and obvious manipulations, 100 black men – many of them being active in the protest movement – were sentenced to more than 100 years of prison (www.no-racism.net 2009: n.p).

Since then, many black people were too intimidated to appear in demonstrations fearing similar consequences (see Van der Steen, Katzeff and Van der Hoogenhuijze 2014). Migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers are often regarded as a threat to European norms and values. To this extent they conform to the second characteristic of the *homo sacer* listed above: the *homo sacer* is retrospectively characterized as a threat to the body politic so as to legitimize his expulsion into a ‘zone of indistinction.’ As already illustrated by Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978), these fears are not based on empirical reality but on one-sided misrepresentations in media. Discourses on migration issues tend to focus exclusively on problems apparently caused by illegal asylum seekers and refugees (see Van Dijk 1996). Especially the conservative and right-wing press emphasizes the problems that immigrants create in terms of housing, schooling, unemployment, and most of all crime (Rheindorf & Wodak 2018). Political discourse replicates such topoi: on the 10 May 1999 FPÖ (Freedom Party of Austria) MP Helene Partik-Pablé announced in Parliament: “Ask civil servants about the behaviour of black Africans. They do not only look different, actually they are especially aggressive. The reason for this is obviously their nature” (qtd. in Bischof et al. 2001: n.p.). Austria’s tabloid newspaper *Kronen Zeitung*, which has “the highest national circulation” and is “known for its populist style and discriminatory language” (Hintermann 2017: 252) criminalized Marcus Omofuma and depicted him as a dangerously aggressive drug dealer, thereby framing his death as a necessary protective measure.

Such topoi of political and medial discourses manifest deeply ingrained racist attitudes originating in the pseudo-scientific anthropological studies of the nineteenth century. Yet their present-day outgrowths are everywhere evident, as in Bailey’s multiple references to events more or less contemporary with the moment of his exhibition in Vienna. In 2009, a year before *Exhibit A* was shown, the tenth anniversary of Omofuma’s death provoked considerable protests by human rights activists. Even

closer to the moment of the installation, the deportation of a group of Nigerian soccer players in 2010, some of them even arrested on the soccer pitch, garnered a great deal of publicity, and corresponding protests. This event is also alluded to in Bailey's Vienna installation, in the "Found Objects" tableau, where one of three depicted asylum seekers is merely represented by an empty pair of soccer shoes. Red letters in German saying DEPORTIERT (deported) are stamped across his immigration form, explaining his absence, pointing to the fate of many Nigerian asylum seekers at that time who were often wrongly accused of having been responsible for the drug problem in Vienna (see Meersman 2014 n.p.).

Although Bailey addresses various aspects of institutionalized racism in our contemporary society which he reveals as the accumulation and incorporation of long-standing racialized practices into all of our social and economic structures, he nonetheless tends to reinforce the idea of Social Darwinism that regards the 'Other' as the less "fitter" species. This is particularly evident in the Vienna representation of "Survival of the Fittest." Here, the face of the actor is almost entirely taped: not only his mouth, but also partly his nose and both his eyes so that the spectator is not even able to see the actor's returned gaze, that residual site of visual agency on the part of the object of anthropological spectacle. Instead, the information about the artwork on the accompanying sign makes the spectator aware of the location chosen for this tableau vivant. It says: "Mixed Media: Aeroplane seats, packing tape, Nigerian, shoes, Houses of Parliament." The room in which "Survival of the Fittest" is exhibited was carefully chosen: its window, looking out at the Houses of Parliament which constitute part of the artwork, is tainted blood red, thereby pointing at the government's responsibility for the death of the deported asylum seeker. This is surely an effective method to reveal the racist right-wing policy in Austria at that time, but the withdrawal of the returned gaze, which Bailey declared to be the major element of agency on the part of the black subject in his exhibition, reduces the asylum seeker to bare life with little potential for agency or survival. Instead, Bailey stresses the omnipresent power of the state as an enforcer of border regimes. His exhibition thus elides the fact that, as Christiane Hintermann notes, Omofuma's death "was also a starting point for closer cooperation and networking of African communities in Austria and anti-racist and anti-discrimination NGOs and it is one of those rare incidents in the younger Austrian migration history which is publicly – although not officially – remembered" (2017: 249). Bailey's *Exhibit A* recognizes and

registers the significance of Omofuma's case, but almost entirely ignores the potential for political change contained within it.

Like the transhistorical collage created by Lôbo, the venue chosen for *Exhibit A*, the former ethnological museum, in combination with the title of this contemporary tableau vivant, "Survival of the Fittest", exposes once again the anachronistic connection between the various figures of *homines sacri* in the past and present. Where Lôbo's temporal palimpsests create networks of solidarity, Bailey's usage of ethnological anachronism, and its objectification of the African 'Other', tends to reinforce the idea of ongoing victimhood, thereby minimizing the potential for resistance in bare life. Even the most desperate state of exception, however, contains the potential for resistance and political empowerment as exemplified by the following counter-examples by Mike Parr and Mehmed Al Assad, to which I now turn.

EXAMPLE 2: Lip Sewing as Resistance Speech – Mehmet Al Assad's "Asylum" in Dialogue with Mike Parr's *Close the Concentration Camps*

The lip sewing I discuss in this section is, unlike the other forms of mouth muting that I mentioned so far, a self-imposed silencing on the part of the 'Other'. Since the 1990s, and even more increasingly since the new millennium, there have been numerous cases where refugees and asylum seekers have sewn their lips together. Not having any other possibility of being heard, their lip sewing was meant as a form of protest against the dehumanizing treatment in detention centres, where their mobility and agency were restricted to a bare minimum for an undefined time while their asylum applications were considered. In 2003, for instance, Abas Amini, a Kurdish refugee from Iran, sewed his eyes, ears and lips together to protest the refusal of his refugee status in the UK (see Haran 2003: n.p.). Similar protests occurred in 2015 on the border between Greece and Macedonia where six Afghan refugees sewed their lips together in protest at not being allowed to continue their journey (see *BBC News* 2015: n.p.). One of the more recent cases appeared at the so-called 'Jungle' camp in Calais (France) in 2016 where a group of Iranians sewed their lip together in protest against the worsening conditions in the camp when the authorities started to demolish a large section of their shelters (see Hayden 2016: n.p.).

Similarly to the resistance of deported people on planes (as exemplified by Bailey's "Survival of the Fittest"), the lip sewing protest has been interpreted by

numerous Western politicians and in the media as a sign of aggression and a marker of Otherness. The image of the ‘Other’ whose ‘uncivilized’ and ‘barbaric’ behaviour is read as a threat to the security of the host country is used to justify her/his reduction to ‘bare life’. As Bailey’s examples have already shown, refugees and asylum seekers have become contemporary *homines sacri* who occupy a zone of indistinction in which sovereign power may suspend the rule of law and even kill asylum seekers with impunity. In contrast to the taping of the mouth in Bailey’s “Survival of the Fittest”, however, I claim that the act of lip sewing as a form of protest demonstrates how the ‘bare life’ of refugees and asylum seekers may nonetheless regain political agency. In fact, by muting their own mouths, they ‘speak’ quite clearly about the silencing of their voices and express their demand for political change. This reclaimed agency, embodied in the act of self-imposed silencing, has also been identified as a form of protest in a number of art works, from poems⁶⁹ to performance pieces⁷⁰, some of them commenting explicitly on the inhumanity of contemporary migration policies. The current treatment of refugees and asylum seekers, especially of those coming from African countries and the Middle East, infringes upon basic universal human rights. It is for this reason that I focus here on two works that make this dehumanizing treatment in the refugee camp explicit: I place a poem entitled “Asylum” (2002) by Iranian Mehmet Al Assad, who was one of the lip sewing asylum seekers in the Woomera detention centre (Australia) in 2002, in dialogue with the performance installation *Close the Concentration Camps* (2002), by Australian artist Mike Parr. Both works respond to the muted plight of detainees in Woomera whose lip sewing protest has been misrepresented by the media as a ‘barbaric threat’ to the Australian civilization; their aesthetic form constitutes a response to the media’s response to lip-sewing, as Parr stated explicitly:

Like many Australians I feel outraged at the way we are treating asylum seekers and I think their treatment in so-called ‘detention centres’ requires that we do something. I

⁶⁹ See, for instance, Mohsen Soltanyzand’s poem “Sunset” (2003) where he describes the Port Hedland detention camp in which he was detained during the processing of his asylum application. Another prominent example is an untitled poem by Abas Amini which, similarly to Al Assad’s poem, draws attention to the act of self-harm as a claim to his right to citizenship (e.g. “He sewed up his lips so he could speak out. / He sewed up his eyes to make others see. / He sewed up his ears to make others hear. / You whose eyes, ears and mouth are free can hear and speak out” (qtd. in Hodge 2004: n.p.). When Amini was granted eventually citizenship, the poem was read in public by one of his friends.

⁷⁰ Performance artists such as Russian Pyotr Pavlensky, American Ron Antheys, American David Wojnarowicz, Italian Franko B, Serbian Marina Abramovic and German Ulay (Frank Uwe Laysiepen) all included the act of lip sewing in their performances as a political statement although not always in relation to migration policies (for more information see for instance Richards 2005; Jones 2009).

want to use the language of my ‘body art’ to make the strongest possible statement in support of the detainees. (qtd. in Scheer 2005: 23)

Although *Close the Concentration Camps* and “Asylum” are generically distinct and the position of their respective authors radically different, both works form a sort of meta-textual and meta-bodily commentary on the performance of lip sewing and the media’s own commentary on those performances.

Following on and commenting upon his own real action of lip-sewing, Al Assad formulates in poetic form his plight and criticism of current migration policies in a poem that explicitly thematizes his protest performance:

1	Will you please observe through the wire
2	I am sewing my feet together
3	They have walked about as far
4	As they ever need to go.
5	Will you further observe
6	Through the wire
7	I am sewing my heart together
8	It is now so full of
9	the ashes of my days
10	It will not hold any more.
11	Through the wire
12	one last time
13	please observe
14	I am sewing my lips together
15	that which you are denying us
16	we should never have
17	had to ask for.

By contrast, Parr, who – as an Australian citizen - was not directly affected by the migration policies but nonetheless shocked by the depiction of such incidents in the media decided to make the lip sewing protest more visible in a performance art installation. In solidarity with those protesting detainees, Parr sat for six hours motionless on a chair in the middle of an art gallery with his lips (as well as eye-brows, nostrils and ears) sewn together. The top of his right trouser leg was ripped open revealing the world ALIEN branded into his thigh.

In what follows, I suggest that both works of art, however distinct their generic form, and however various the location of their authors, can be placed in productive

dialogue. I claim in the following sections that both Al Assad's poem and Parr's performance piece embody the three aspects of Agamben's figure of 'bare life' already elaborated in the preceding section on Bailey's "Survival of the Fittest": **zone of indistinction**, **homo sacer as a threat**, and the **denial of a shared humanity** which makes killing with impunity possible. However, unlike Bailey's tableaux vivants in *Exhibit A* and *B*, both Al Assad's and Parr's works assert that even in the dehumanized space of 'bare life' resilience and agency can occur. While both counter-examples expose the refugee camp as a zone of indistinction they simultaneously "assert an unbroken fabric of life [...]" which resists "the extreme manifestations of biopolitics" (West-Pavlov 2014: 116) by 'turning the inside out' as Roberto Espósito phrases it (2004: 157). Thus, whereas Agamben's zone of indistinction takes the outside of the law ("everything is possible", "killing with impunity") and places it within the boundaries of the nation (the camp), these two artists take the zone of silencing that is situated outside the rule of law (confinement, voicelessness) and import it back into a realm of speech that circulates widely within the polity. More importantly, however, these artists' work goes beyond the mere task of corrective representation. Al Assad's "Asylum" was written in English as an essential function of the imperative addressivity evinced in each stanza. The pronominal shift from "I" to "we" in the last stanza is essential since it makes clear that the lyrical voice speaks from the position of the collective of asylum seekers who not only tied their lips together as a common act of resistance but also managed to form – even within this zone of indistinction – a community, tied (or sewn) together by different nationalities to fight for their basic human rights (according to Lucy Fiske, Iraqis and Iranians joined Afghans in their physical plight; 2016: 131). The poem's wide reception also included Australian citizens in this community. The poem was immediately published online, first in *The Age* and then, soon after, in the *Borderlands e-journal*. The 'zone of indistinction' constituted by the camp is thus drawn into a 'zone of positive indistinction' that connects Australian citizens to asylum seekers, that ties them together. In a similar manner, in Parr's performance, the gallery does not operate in the realm of representation, as the artist himself has stated: "It's ridiculous; you can't possibly re-represent the plight of someone in a detention centre sewing their mouth together, their lips together" (Parr qtd. in Cox 2015: 123). Rather than representing, the performance enables something exceptional to happen. It is once again a zone of 'positive indistinction' where barriers between citizens (within-laws) and outlaws may begin to

blur. It includes the excluded in such a way as to make us feel as if we (the spectators) are connected to them even in their exclusion. In what follows, I will analyse Al Assad's poem and Parr's performance in a dialogical manner with regard to these three aspects so as to show how they "turn the inside out" by responding in empowering ways to the victimization perpetuated by Bailey's work.

First, I examine the refugee **camp as a zone of indistinction** and demonstrate how Al Assad's poem and Parr's performance embody this zone of indistinction within their respective works. Second, I demonstrate how a zone of indistinction is legitimized, to the extent that a sovereign decision does not need any legitimization, by the **evocation of a threat**. The asylum seeker is depicted by the Australian government as an 'outlaw' or as an alien threat to the body politic. Parr calls attention to the outlaw/alien status by the branding of the word ALIEN on his thigh. The status of alien means that any measures to keep her/him outside of the host society, including killing her/him if necessary, as Agamben asserts, are no longer regarded as a crime. The media image of the outlaw was essential to this representational operation. The media's access to detainees at that time was extremely restricted by the government (Hazou 2010: 162) so that the tabloid press's reports on the lip-sewing protest had to rely on the official version of the Immigration Department. These versions reinforced the image of the asylum seeker as a threat to Australian security and helped create an even wider gap between the Australian 'Self' and the asylum seeker 'Other'.

Third, I specify how the asylum seeker – as the contemporary *homo sacer* – is presented as a disenfranchised and banned (less-than-)human being who may be killed with impunity. The **denial of a common humanity**, that is, the denial of a relationship between humans who are linked, for instance, via a basic common vulnerability (Butler 2004), makes such a treatment possible. Both Al Assad and Parr, however, erase the distance between Self and Other, and turn the inside out, by connecting people within the language of poetry and within the space of the art gallery where the previously abandoned *homo sacer* who was set at the margins of society appears to be more tangible and thus more 'human'. Even more radically, within the world of art, people may be able to realize, as Agamben suggested, that "we are all virtually *homines sacri*" (1998: 115) – it is our potential exposure or abandonment to lawless violence that we have in common.

Thus, instead of depicting the asylum seeker as a victimized *homo sacer* as in Bailey's work, both Al Assad and Parr perform 'acts' related to the acts of the asylum

seekers' lip sewing, as an embodied form of resistant speech, where agency and voice are reclaimed and change may be effected.

a) The Refugee Camp as a Zone of Indistinction

Australia's controversial 'Pacific Solution' to the 'problem' of illegal asylum seekers involved immediately transporting all unauthorized arrivals to offshore detention sites, for instance, to the small Pacific island state of Nauru, where indefinite detention and appalling conditions of incarceration awaited them.⁷¹ Effectively, the asylum seekers did not even enter Australia before being deported, and thus had no recourse to the normal right to apply for asylum. The offshore camps left them in a limbo outside of the jurisdiction of Australian asylum law, but subject to the punitive force of the Australian government that was ejecting them from a territory they had legally not yet entered. The offshore detention centres, for all their bizarre legal status, merely made explicit the character of their predecessors, the mainland detention centres such as Baxter, Curtin, and most notoriously Woomera – as zones of indistinction between the inside and the outside of the nation state.

Long before Australia started to send asylum seekers to offshore processing centres within 'The Pacific Solution', the Howard government had enforced a policy of mandatory detention for refugees and asylum seekers in isolated camps on the mainland far away from Australian society. The rapid increase of unauthorized arrivals from Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran in the late 1990s led to the building of detention facilities surrounded by wired fences in remote locations (Stevens 2002: 889). One of them was Woomera in the South Australian desert, which – due to riots, abuse, escape attempts and several incidents of self-harm – soon became one of Australia's "most controversial detention centres" (Hughes 2003: n.p.). The asylum seekers were kept in these overcrowded confinements for an undetermined time while their applications for protection were considered. According to Camillo Boano, "[t]he goal of these buildings like the aim of the government directives that enable them, is dehumanization. Asylum seekers are to be locked up and kept out of view of the Australian populace, while they

⁷¹ The 'Pacific Solution' is a policy that prevents asylum seekers from entering Australia by transporting them straightaway to offshore detention centres on island nations in the Pacific Ocean. This policy was implemented from 2001 to 2007. During that time, mainland detention centres such as Baxter, Curtin and Woomera were closed down (see for instance Perera 2002; Diken 2004).

are ‘processed’ – like objects or pieces of paper – by government bureaucracy” (2017: 42). Such a dehumanizing treatment can only occur in a zone of indistinction where the rule of law is suspended and where those who do not belong are accommodated.

In an interview with Denis Campbell a detainee at Woomera described his impression of the camp: “When we came first to Woomera, we didn’t believe we were in Australia ... Because the things that happened – they wouldn’t happen in Australia. It must be another country” (Campbell qtd. in Diken and Laustsen 2005: 81). This comment makes explicit that Woomera is a zone of indistinction where inside and outside are blurred: Woomera is *inside* Australia but at the same time it seems to be *outside* (“It must be another country”) because inside the detention, the usual rule of law pertaining under Commonwealth jurisdiction no longer applies. However, although the refugee or asylum seeker is excluded from the juridical order, she/he still remains subject to it. As Bülent Diken and Carsten Bagge Laustsen explain, “[t]he refugee is included while being excluded and excluded while being included; this zone of indistinction between inclusion and exclusion, in which the life of the refugee borders on the life of the *homo sacer*, is the very place of sovereignty” (2005: 80). In this zone of indistinction, as the detainee notes, “the things that happened – they wouldn’t happen in Australia”, not even in ordinary prisons, where detainees at least “have visiting rights and a definite length of imprisonment, luxuries denied to them as asylum seekers inside Woomera” (Campbell qtd. in Diken & Laustsen 2005: 82). Thus, in the camp, “the normative aspect of law [is] obliterated and contradicted with impunity with a governmental violence that – while ignoring international law externally and producing a permanent state of exception internally – nevertheless still claims to be applying the law” (Agamben 1998: 3).

When this frustrating experience of indistinction seems to go on infinitely, desperation among detainees grows and may lead to suicides, escapes or other forms of resistance as was the case in Woomera. In January 2002 when the Australian government temporarily stopped processing claims for asylum by Afghans (Wolfram Cox & Minahan 2003), detainees in Woomera (among them people from Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran) took part in a two-week hunger strike during which almost seventy people sewed their lips together.

Mehmet Al Assad, as mentioned above, was among the asylum seekers who sewed their lips together (Farrier and Tuitt 2013: 254). In addition to his protest action, he formulated his plight and criticism of the dehumanizing treatment in his poem

“Asylum”. In each stanza the imaginary Western reader is politely invited to “observe through the wire” (lines 1, 6 and 11) the desperation inside the fenced confinement – this zone of distinction – that leads the asylum seeker to the act of self-harm, which would not have been necessary if the Australian government granted her/him “that which you are denying us / we should never have / had to ask for” (lines 15-17); in other words: basic human rights.

The sewing motif is also repeated in each stanza so as to signal the progressive deprivation of basic civil rights: freedom of movement (sewn feet), dignity and the feeling of self-worth (sewn heart), and freedom of speech (sewn lips). Contrasting with this progressive erosion of human rights and deprivation of agency, however, the lyrical ‘I’ is the one who decides to render him-/herself immobile and silent and thus, similarly to the women in Lôbo’s performance, seems to claim his/her right to stay (as Grace Latiga said at the end of *White Mask, Black Torture*: “We are here to stay”). Furthermore, she/he also decides to sew her/his heart together, thereby impeding ‘interpretive’ access to his/her trauma (“the ashes of my days”). Finally she/he decides to render her/his voice inaudible. The self-imposed silence of the last stanza, however, is exactly what becomes most audible: it is the asylum seekers’ embodied *right* to *human rights*, which is clearly articulated (“that which you are denying us/ we should never have/ had to ask for”). Lucy Fiske notes:

A recurring theme among refugees interviewed was the desire to be recognised as human. Embedded in these calls was both an appeal to a shared or universal humanity and an implied belief that human status entails a guarantee of a minimum standard of treatment and an implicit acknowledgement of a human rights framework. (2016: 19)

This common humanity I locate in the most surprising site in Al Assad’s poem – in the wire that both separates and links – via the gaze and the poetic word that both pass “through the wire” (line 1; line 6 and line 11) – humans on both sides of the fence.

In Al Assad’s poem the reiterated image of the barbed wire in each stanza also evokes the iconic marker of the camp in the twentieth century. But the poem talks about the camp as more than a mere space of incarceration, where mobility is restricted, evinced by the arrest of the feet in the first stanza: “I am sewing my feet together / They have walked about as far/ As they ever need to go” (lines 2-4). In the very form of the poem, the ‘zone of indistinction’ that characterizes the camp – a space inside the polity where, because of the suspension of rights under the ‘state of exception’, the subject

finds her/himself effectively outside the polity – is manifest in the poetic syntax. In his *The End of the Poem* (1996), Agamben has examined the poetic enjambment as a suspension of meaning, a zone of indistinction, where contradictory meanings in the poem clash without being resolved (see Farrier and Tuitt 2013: 257). Al Assad's poem ends with three such borders, states in which syntax and rights are suspended: "that which you are denying us / we should never have / had to ask for" (lines 15-17). The 'wire' thus marks out a space within the linguistic polity of English that is simultaneously without: separated, broken off, and marked by the cancellation of those rights it can only name negatively as that which "we should never have" (line 16). The two characteristics of the zone of indistinction named above, the brand-marking of the other as threat, and the power to kill with impunity, are also presupposed by the poem, with its mention of the threatening mobility (walking) of the refugee, and its evocation of "ashes" (line 9), which since the Holocaust have been a standard metonymy of the extermination camp.

Agamben famously developed his concept of the zone of indistinction between the outside and the inside of the polity with reference to the Nazi concentration camps. His subsequent comparison of the Nazi concentration camps with today's refugee detention centres relied upon their common contours of indistinction (Agamben 1998: 174-5). Al Assad's poem explores just that zone of indistinction.

Such parallels between the concentration camps and the Australian detention centres are also picked up by Parr as his title clearly indicates. *Close the Concentration Camps* (2002) consists of a performance and an installation and both of them allude to the comparison between Australian detention centres and concentration camps. In one room Parr sits slumped and resigned on a chair, dressed in a tattered old suit, in front of a huge mirror. Due to his sewn lips and eyelids, he is incapable of speaking and seeing. Sarah Austin asserts that Parr's clothes resembled those of Jews "from the Second World War, wearing brown suits with patched together elbows and a star of David on the sleeve being marched into the concentration camps in Nazi Germany (and throughout Eastern Europe)" (2005: n.p.). The smell of singed flesh from the branded word ALIEN on Parr's thigh serves as another reminder of the burning of the bodies of Jews in the concentration camps. Written in large black letters on the wall of the gallery space beside Parr is the title: CLOSE THE CONCENTRATION CAMPS.

The similarities drawn between concentration camps in Nazi Germany and those for refugees are made even more explicit in yet another room where there are two large

framed maps on the wall. One shows the Northern and Western suburbs of Melbourne and indicates the location of the Maribyrnong Detention Centre, and the other map depicts Munich in South Germany, indicating the location of the Dachau concentration camp. The distances between the city centres and the respective camps are similar. Apart from these maps, extracts from the 2000 Immigration Detention Centre Inspection Report (also titled *Not the Hilton*) are projected on the wall, and include the following:

DIMA [Department of Immigration Affairs] advises that soccer and volleyball are available. The committee observed few outdoor recreation facilities available apart from a yet to be assembled children's playground and a shaded area when visited. The climate of Woomera in January is not conducive to outdoor activities, the limited indoor facilities included table tennis (qtd. in Austin 2005: n.p.).

The content of these extracts about the apparent "recreation facilities" is as misleading as a propaganda movie about the concentration camp in Theresienstadt (Terezin) that was filmed during the Nazi regime. The 90-minute black-and-white movie was entitled *Terezin: A Documentary Film from the Jewish Settlement Area* (1944), also known as *The Führer Gives the Jews a City*, and was to be shown in neutral countries such as Switzerland, Ireland and the Vatican and to organisations such as the Red Cross.⁷² It was meant to convince people that although the Jews were kept apart from the rest of the society they were well treated and still enjoyed a comfortable life with lots of "recreation facilities" similar to those described by the Australian DIMA report.

In the same room the spectators could also read Parr's letters to his friend and colleague David Bromfield, where he explains the purpose of his performance. In these letters he also compares the attitudes of German citizens who lived close to the extermination camps in which millions of Jewish people were killed but nevertheless closed their consciences to the atrocities nearby, with Australian citizens living with a detention centre within their suburban landscape. These and other obvious comparisons between refugee camps and concentration camps are meant to make the audience feel ashamed, shocked and implicated. The gallery as a heterotopia (Foucault 1986: 22-27) becomes a zone of indistinction that replies to and transforms the camp as a zone of

⁷² However, the war ended before the film could enter general circulation, and the original print was burned. Only about 20 minutes of footage survived.
See: http://www.jewishfilm.org/Catalogue/films/city_to_the_jews.htm (accessed 10 August 2018).

indistinction. The gallery is inside society, and is one of its oldest cultural institutions, but also outside of society: it is a place for disturbing, intense, contradictory experiments with aesthetic forms, a place for art as “the social antithesis of society”, in Theodor Adorno’s words (1997 [1970]: 8). The gallery mirrors society but also disturbs the society it mirrors - an idea that Parr reinforces by the use of a mirror placed in front of him. His mirror shows an “outside” seemingly beyond the gallery, an “outside” where the spectators can see themselves (like the detainees in the detention centres that Al Assad asks the reader to “observe”), although they – as spectators – are actually inside the gallery.

b) Homo Sacer as a Threat

In the current political discourse asylum seekers are depicted as a ‘problem’ and the task of the Western states consists in finding a ‘solution’ to solve this problem whatever it takes. The discourse used here is not dissimilar to that used in Nazi Germany. In 2018, Australian Senator Fraser Anning gave an inaugural speech in Parliament where he used the term ‘final solution’ in his call for immigration restrictions for asylum seekers with Muslim backgrounds (Conifer 2018: n.p.). His speech was widely criticized because his language recalled the Nazi ‘final solution’ to the ‘Jewish Question in Europe’ which culminated in the murder of six million Jews. But Anning’s language is in fact symptomatic of a worldwide tendency to infringe upon human rights with regard to certain groups of people who are represented in the media as a ‘threat’ to Western sovereign power, a threat that demands a ‘solution’.

Due to the “fallout from the first Gulf War, the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and political persecution in Iran” (Hazou 2010: 154) from about 1999 to early 2002 there was an increasing number of unauthorized asylum seekers coming from the Middle East. Especially after 9/11, asylum seekers with Muslim backgrounds were depicted not merely as uncivilized, irrational people but, furthermore “as potential terrorists who may cause substantial harm if released into the general community” (Wolfram Cox & Minahan 2004: 294).

The rhetoric of threat proceeded in several phases.

First, it suggested the radical otherness of the asylum seekers. Media coverage reinforced familiar racist stereotypes about the oriental ‘Other’ already described by Edward Said’s famous *Orientalism* (1978). Philip Ruddock, the Australian Minister for

Immigration at that time, responded to the lip-sewing as “a practice *unknown* in our culture but we’ve seen it before amongst detainees and it’s something that offends the sensitivities of Australians” (*BBC News* 2002: n.p., my emphasis). Ruddock’s comments imply a threat that consists in the idea that lip sewing is an established practice in these putatively radically other cultures: *unknown* to the Western civilized Australian society but presumably *known* and customary to the foreign cultures of the asylum seekers. The idea that the act of lip sewing is “barbaric” means that asylum seekers are racially different people who will never successfully integrate into Australian society. This in itself constitutes a further threat: that of the permanent foreign body that can never be assimilated.

Second, the hunger strikes and the lip sewing protest in Woomera were not regarded as political statements but construed “as attempts at manipulation and blackmail” (Bargu 2017: 6). Ruddock rounded off his comments with the statement: “They believe it will influence decisions. It can’t and it won’t”. The claim that refugees’ actions were merely an attempt to manipulate and blackmail the Australian government has a long history. In 2002 the press also claimed that asylum seekers had forcibly sewn their children’s lips together as an attempt to gain publicity for their plight. While no evidence was ever found to support this claim, it reminded the public of an earlier scandalous report in the media. In October 2001, the media announced that asylum seekers confined to boats had thrown their children overboard in an effort to blackmail the Australian Navy into picking them up. Although it eventually transpired that the government’s video proof was manipulated, Prime Minister John Howard stated immediately in the mainstream press: “I can’t imagine how a genuine refugee would ever do that” (qtd. in Donald 2002: n.p.).

Third, the asylum seekers are presented as radically inhuman. Commenting upon the boat people’s supposed casting of their children into the sea, Ruddock added to the statement by Howard just quoted: “I see a lot of comments [...] particularly from those who are perhaps not dealing with these issues all the time, that these are refugees or asylum seekers. They are nothing of the sort [...] to use a term that is perhaps apt, they are rejectees (qtd. by Morris, 2002). Ruddock’s comment shows clearly that he does not even regard the protesting people as asylum seekers and refugees who can make claims but rather as disposable objects (rejectees). Just as they throw (etymologically, “jeter”, French for “to throw”), so too they can be re-jected, thrown away – out of the nation,

out of the polity, out of the community of human beings. Muslim people, in this view, should be considered less-than-human beings.

In summary, as Richard Ek explains: “One form of life (separated out in an act of racism and imagined as responsible for biological threats) is perceived as a threat to another form of life (imagined as a ‘society’), which means that society must be defended” (2006: 369). The desperate plight of the asylum seekers in Woomera who sewed their lips together as a means of protesting the lengthy time involved in processing of their visa applications was entirely erased in Ruddock’s representation of the incident. His statement rejects any responsibility of government policy in the occurrence of self-harm and emphasizes instead the security of a decent Australian community whose “sensitivities” are offended by the act of lip sewing. The construal of the refugees’ protest actions as proof of a threat made it almost impossible for the Australian society to ‘hear’ the asylum seekers’ justified plight as human beings.

The media’s access to detainees was extremely restricted by the government (Hazou 2010: 162). Moreover, as Alison Jeffers argues, “given the conservative tendencies of the media generally, it is unlikely that their representation will be allowed to produce sympathy or empathy” (2012: 108). Indeed, this mis-representation of the lip sewing protest as a barbaric threat to Australian security prevents empathetic identification with the plight of the asylum seekers.

The government’s determination to present the act of lip sewing as a barbaric act rather than allowing the public to see that the system causes the desperate people to act in such a manner is opposed by Al Assad’s invitation to “observe”. Similarly, it is presented critically by Parr’s *Close the Concentration Camps*. Parr’s use of a live webcam that filmed the whole endurance performance alludes to the glimpses of the asylum seekers’ protest in the Australian public via the media.⁷³ However, it stands in stark contrast to the live performance, which can either be watched directly (by looking at Parr once the spectator comes closer) or by gazing at him through the mirror. Parr invited the audience to ‘see’ what they otherwise only heard about in the media: an embodied plight that may encourage a critical reflection on the realities of detention centres. His performance does not exploit the asylum seekers’ plight; rather, it seeks to highlight the incident in order to provoke a debate that would change the views of his

⁷³ Of course the webcam also helped disseminate the event to a larger audience.

fellow Australian citizens.⁷⁴ The performance provokes the audience to realize what is really going on by *looking*; to see that in Australia refugees and asylum seekers are not only denied citizenship via a legal process but also their basic rights to live like humans. The desire to make people *see* is also stressed in Al Assad's poem "Asylum", where the figure of the asylum seeker invites the reader to "observe" "through the wire" the act of self-harm for what it really is: a desperate demand for human rights. Al Assad demands the right of the asylum seeker to be acknowledged as a human being. He wants us, the readers, to look through the wire and recognize that the asylum seeker is just like you or me – a human being.

c) Denial of a Shared Humanity

After World War II, world leaders sought ways of ensuring that such atrocities would never happen again. Consequently, they created the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in which they guaranteed that "basic rights and fundamental freedoms are inherent to all human beings, inalienable and equally applicable to everyone, and that every one of is born free and equal in dignity and rights" (United Nations 1948). Despite this declaration, many human beings around the world continue to be deprived of their "basic rights and fundamental freedoms", that is, they are denied the recognition of rights "inherent to all human beings" – they are effectively dehumanized. Hannah Arendt expressed her scepticism about the concept of human rights. She pointed out that human rights are a contract between members of a political community and they only apply to the extent that members agree to guarantee those rights to one another (1976: 296-297). Apart from civic rights, which include internationally recognized human rights such as the right to food and shelter, the right to vote, to education, to freedom of movement etc., Arendt insists on "the right to have rights" (1976: 296). "The right to have rights" involves the right to belong to a community, to "a place in the world which makes opinions significant and actions effective" (ibid.). The asylum seeker is denied both of these attributes because she/he is not regarded as being part of any political community. Ultimately, this deprivation of the right to have rights may culminate in a situation where the refugee, like Agamben's

⁷⁴ In contrast to Bailey's *Exhibit A* and *B*, which was not intended to create a dialogue between artist, performers and audience, Parr was prepared to answer questions regarding his artwork on 26 June 2002 at the Victorian College of Arts.

homo sacer, may be killed with impunity (this, de facto, is what is happening in the Mediterranean today when EU border forces deliberately impede rescue operations to save refugees from drowning). It is thus relevant to ask, as Judith Butler points out, to whom we are willing to grant human rights and according to which rules of inclusion or exclusion:

It is crucial to ask under what conditions some human lives cease to become eligible for basic, if not universal, human rights [...] to what extent is there a radical and ethnic frame through which these imprisoned lives are viewed and judged such that they are deemed less than human, or as having departed from the recognizable human community? (2004: 57)

Arendt argued that the notion of human rights, which presupposes the existence of a “human being as such”, is drawn into a crisis whenever it is confronted with a particular type of real people who have no qualities except that of “merely” being human: refugees (Arendt 1976: 299). The qualities needed to gain the right to human rights are thus lacking in the bare life of asylum seekers and refugees who have been forcibly deprived of their legal status. What they require in order to have a right to human rights is some form of social recognition as not just a human being, but as a *person* belonging to a polity. The plight of the stateless consists precisely in the fact that they lack membership in a political community, a polity, and thus the recognition upon which rights are dependent. Speech and agency are thus fundamental attributes of the human condition that may however not be recognized if the human being is merely a human and not recognized as a *person*, as a member of a polity. As Lucy Fiske asserts, “[s]peech and action become meaningful only when they are recognized by others, and this recognition of our words and deeds conveys and constitutes our equality and our membership of a polis” (Fiske 2016: 28).

Due to the geo- and topographical isolation of refugees and asylum seekers in remote detention centres, their plight is often not able to be recognized: nor, as a result, can their voices be heard or their actions seen. Fiske notes that governments make a great effort “to obstruct, if not entirely prohibit, contact between detained refugees and citizens, thereby retaining greater control over the narrative used to frame asylum seeking and the need for immigration detention” (2016: 3). The asylum seekers’ own narratives are often inaccessible so that the public is forced to accept the overall negative depiction of refugees and asylum seekers by government officials and the

media. As illustrated in the previous section, the ‘official’ versions of the detainees’ protest actions reinforce an image of their supposed otherness that denies them a common humanity and vulnerability. The distance created by these images prevents Australian (and other Global North)⁷⁵ citizens from seeing what they actually have in common with refugees and asylum seekers. The images focus on an apparent cultural difference that depicts the ‘Self’ as human and the ‘Other’ as less-than-human. This consequently makes it difficult to feel any kind of empathy for the ‘Other.’ What is more, this denial of a common humanity excludes a moral bond which in turn facilitates the occurrence of a state of exception in which killing with impunity becomes permissible.

As already indicated in the previous sections, art as “the social antithesis of society” (Adorno 1997 [1970]: 8) may be able to reveal in discomfiting ways the complicity of the Australian (or other Global North) citizen in accepting an “outside” created by the rejection of certain human beings – an “outside” that is a state of exception consisting of a denial of a common humanity. This denial, however, may simultaneously be overcome within art by its habit of “turning the inside out” (Espósito 2008: 157). Both Al Assad and Parr create a proximity between the ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’ that makes the spectator aware of a common humanity, and what is more, of a common vulnerability. It is at this point too where we may finally realize, as Agamben says, that “we are all virtually *homines sacri*” (1998: 115).

Al Assad’s poem is intimately connected to the lip-sewing action and offers a counter-example to the (mis)representation in the media. As such it presents a linguistic attempt to extend the scope of the embodied performative visual protest within a space of detention that has not hitherto been accessible to a wider audience. In the poem, the negative zone of indistinction becomes a positive one, as the listener is drawn “through the wire”, via ‘observation’, into the zone of exclusion which by the same token becomes a participatory zone of inclusion. Significantly, the linguistic speech act functions like a question that demands an answer. As David Farrier and Patricia Tuitt suggest, “[l]ip sewing demands a response: as an interlocutory act predicated on a visual

⁷⁵ As mentioned before, the ‘Global South’ is a fluid term. Many Global South countries, such as Mexico and India, are north of the equator; some parts of the former Communist block (the erstwhile second world) display all the characteristics of Global South countries; and Australia and New Zealand, though located south of the equator, have economies and standards of living that make them part of the Global North, though their still semi-colonized Indigenous populations may be seen as part of the Global South. Many Global South countries, however, increasingly display enclaves of the Global North that nestle up against a majority Global South population (Simone 2014: 32).

statement, it asks the viewer to consider both what is right and what are rights – as can graphically be seen in Al Assad’s poem” (2013: 254). The poem, alongside the protest action, inaugurates a dialogue, “through the wire” (lines 1, 6, and 11). As such, it represents a fundamental intervention into the detention centre – for Agamben one of the contemporary avatars of the camp – and its constitutive topography of blurred outside-inside borders. Now, the outside is brought back into the polity via words that cross borders. The lip-sewing action looks like a mere protest against the removal of rights, among others, the freedom of speech. The statement is, however, more complex. The speaker sews his lips together, therefore refusing to demand something that he claims he should not have to demand in the first place because they are his by right: namely, human rights. The refusal to speak thus asserts the inalienability of human rights by claiming they do not need to be claimed.

If we translate the language of rights and their possession or otherwise into the language of topographies of belonging (being part of the polity as a social being (bios) rather than mere bare life (zoë), that is, Agamben’s notions of zones inside and outside of the rule of law), it becomes evident that, for Al Assad, there is no outside of the rule of law – wherever there is a human being, there the rules of law, i.e. that which protects the rights of the human, pertain. Al Assad reverses Agamben’s zone of indistinction (the outside transported into the inside) and asserts that the inside (belonging to the polity, or the human community, having human rights) is everywhere, even in the “outside”, i.e. the camp or detention centre. Just such a process of communication between humans with rights wherever they might be was in fact initiated by the poem. As mentioned earlier, the poem was first published online in *The Age* the year it was written (2002), then republished soon after in the *Borderlands e-journal* in 2002, before appearing again on the website of the Refugee Action Committee (2005). In 2006, as Emma Cox reports, “the poem was one of fourteen works by refugees set to music by Linsey Pollak for the show *Papers of a Dead Man*, performed in Brisbane” (2009: 461-462). Its subsequent citation in several academic works (see for example Farrier & Tuitt 2013; Cox 2009; Rajaram 2003, and now my thesis) displays its success in articulating a political message that has clearly provoked many people to speak out against the treatment of asylum seekers in detention centres and possibly actively to change the gruesome conditions under which these asylum seekers live (Woomera was eventually closed in 2003). As Fiske asserts: “Through a language of human rights, it may be possible for refugees to lay their claims not only at the feet of the state, but also to

fellow humans through an appeal to conscience. A language of human rights can appeal for political, legal and human responses all at the same time” (2016: 9).

Whereas Al Assad turns the inside out via his poetic language, Parr takes the political protest performance out of the confinement of the detention centre and brings it closer to the public within the space of the gallery. His performance brought the acts of self-harm in detention centres into an uncomfortable proximity to audiences, via a visual and olfactory experience (up until then these acts had only been accessible via distanced media reporting). As Emma Cox points out: “Parr offered his body as a means for these injuries to be ‘seen’” (2009: 467) as a call for “recognition of proximity (both ethical and political) to the sovereign-produced position of exception” (ibid: 459). Similarly, the large mirror on the wall in Parr’s performance “reinforced the challenge of looking by making it difficult to avoid the subject; moreover it confronted viewers with the image of themselves in the act of looking/averting” (Cox 2015: 123). If the geographical distance between the camp and broader Australian society produced an emotional distance between the ‘Other’ and the ‘Self’, reinforced by the media’s negative reports of something happening far away from one’s own life, the mirror changes things. Once the spectator enters the gallery, this distance is erased. Neither geographical distance nor a wire fence separates the ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’. Even more, once the spectator gazes in the mirror, she/he will see her-/himself even more obviously in the same space as the ‘Other’. Of course, Parr takes up an in-between position: on the one hand he is physically and geographically separated from the asylum seekers with whom he asserts a connection via the act of lip sewing, and on the other hand he is separated from his Australian fellow-citizens (the audience) in his bodily pain. However, within the art gallery the audience is confronted spatially with the humanity of the ‘Other’ even if Parr is not the asylum seeker ‘Other’. Proximity functions in terms of ethical recognition of the interconnection between the audience and asylum seekers (exceptional bodies). Prem Kumar Rajaram calls this proximity the “intercontamination of identity between citizenry and its others” (2003: 8).

Furthermore, the spectators find themselves in the discomforting position of looking at themselves while gazing at the pain of the Other. This is a confrontational gaze that makes the spectator aware of his/her own complicity in the treatment and marginalization of refugees and asylum seekers. Furthermore, it makes the audience aware that we are all potentially *homines sacri* (Agamben 1998: 115). Agamben argues that the ‘state of exception’ has increasingly become the norm in Western democracies

and that we are seeing the re-emergence of sovereign power structures where everyone can easily turn into *homo sacer*. As Richard Ek notes, once the threat from outside has been located,

sovereign power starts looking inward for enemies from whom society has to be defended. The separation of life thus continues within, from an ‘ethnic racism’ ‘whose function is not so much the prejudice or defence of one group against another as the detection of all those within a group who may be carriers of a danger to it.’ (2006: 369, quoting Foucault)

According to Magnus Fiskesjö, Agamben intends to show

the citizens of modern states, to those already safely holding membership in present-day Western societies, how the built-in threat of their own exclusion from its protections and their acquiescence in this order of things (such as the acceptance of government and corpocratic surveillance; the “black prisons” and Guantánamo as a permanent state of exception) is the foundational mechanism of power in the modern states, and that this means it is no surprise that Hitler’s camps have already reopened in new form. (2012: 164)

This “built-in-threat” does not only cause a sense of shame in having denied the asylum seeker ‘Other’ a common humanity and vulnerability. It may also provoke an anxiety that Amelia Jones calls

narcissistic fear of being hurt (or literally being *silenced* through mutilation of our lips), [that] causes us to react in ways that might urge us to instigate political change - perhaps by writing a letter or joining a protest in front of the embassy, or by inspiring us (as with Mike Parr) to enact a similar wounding in an art context – the narcissism becomes a productive opening of the other. (Jones 2009: 52, italics in original)

Jones notes that this sort of narcissism is not the self-absorbed variety described by Ovid or Freud but “a narcissism forged through an inadequate differentiation between self and other, rather than through a forgetting, disavowal or erasure of the other” (2009: 53).

Both Parr’s *Close the Concentration Camps* and Al Assad’s “Asylum” are resilient attempts to overcome invisibility and muteness. Where there are no words, where oppressed and disposed minorities find themselves on the outskirts of public visibility, the body may act as a communicative tool. In Butler’s terms these subjects are speaking “at the borders of discursive possibility” (qtd. in Kilby 2001: 126). Both

artists, despite their radically different positions, use the image of the wounded mouth as a vehicle to send an explicit political message. By making their silence speak, they attempt to achieve the recognition of their rights (or, in Parr's case, the rights of others) as political subjects. Silence can thus be used as a strategic defence against the powerful. In contrast to Bailey, Al Assad and Parr opt not to represent the asylum seeker as a victim of sovereign power but as an empowered agent who, even within this state of exception, is able to express resistance.

CHAPTER SIX: Suffocating Silence

Again and again in this thesis I have focussed upon the notion of insidious trauma: that is, of a trauma that occurs not only once within the life of an individual, but one that is structurally embedded in collective social, political and economic patterns and persists, sometimes across decades or even centuries in ways that can no longer be described as a single event. One of the most gruesome examples of such insidious traumas is the torture method commonly known today under the euphemistic term ‘waterboarding’.⁷⁶ During this torture procedure the mouth and nose of the captive are covered with a cloth or some other thin material on which water is intermittently poured so that the individual experiences the sensation of drowning. The victim is forcibly pushed into a ‘zone of indistinction’ where she/he is led to the point of death and then brought back again, thereby oscillating constantly between death and life.⁷⁷ Abu Zubaydah, who was falsely accused of belonging to al-Qaeda and of having been involved in planning the attacks on 9/11, was waterboarded repeatedly by US interrogators during his incarceration in Guantánamo Bay and in Thailand. According to Rebecca Gordon, “Zubaydah’s interrogators would waterboard him an almost unimaginable 83 times in the course of a single month. [...]” (2016: n.p.). This “watering cycle” consisted of four steps:

- 1) demands for information interspersed with the application of the water just short of blocking his airway
 - 2) escalation of the amount of water applied until it blocked his airway and he started to have involuntary spasms
 - 3) raising the water-board to clear subject’s airway
 - 4) lowering of the water-board and return to demands for information.
- (ibid)

The point of near death was indicated by the stage at which the victim became “completely unresponsive, with bubbles rising through his open, full mouth” (Gordon 2016: n.p.). At this stage medical intervention was required to prevent his death.

Such a brutal method and its effects, both physically and psychologically, cannot be sufficiently explained in terms of Western trauma theory. The speechlessness described here is once again not a symptomatic reaction towards a catastrophic event as

⁷⁶ There are slightly different variations of the use of this torture method and there are several terms to describe it, such as ‘wet bag method’ or ‘water torture’.

⁷⁷ Due to the deprivation of oxygen, waterboarding can cause severe damage to the brain and to the lungs and if the water is poured uninterruptedly into the victim’s mouth it may even lead to death.

described, for instance, by Bessel van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart (1995: 172) but *is* itself the traumatizing event that is part of a larger coercive system causing an ongoing insidious trauma.

Waterboarding has a history that extends back through the entire length of the twentieth century, and even well before. The torture technique's longevity is remarkable. Publicized most recently and most spectacularly in US prisons or internment camps such as Guantánamo Bay in Cuba, Abu Ghraib in Iraq and Bagram in Afghanistan, it was used in South Africa during the apartheid period, during the Vietnam War, during the South American period of the junta dictatorships, and during both World Wars.⁷⁸ In fact, its history goes all the way back to the Spanish Inquisition. Over the centuries it has been used by non-state institutions such as the Catholic Church, and more recently as a state-sanctioned method by both non-democratic *and* democratic nations. The very persistence and ubiquity of the waterboarding method, quite apart from its traumatic effects upon the victim, constitute a form of long-term traumatising not as a result but as a cause-and-result combination.

In this chapter I select two specific recent cases from this shocking panorama of repeated usages of waterboarding: the use of the 'wet bag method' during apartheid in South Africa as exemplified in the Jeffrey Benzien case at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), and the use of waterboarding as a state-sanctioned method in the US-led 'Global War on Terror'. I argue that waterboarding is a form of insidious trauma of particularly significance because it is so persistent and all-pervasive that hardly any works of art on this topic appear to be able to offer perspectives that are genuinely redemptive or reparative. In previous chapters I have reviewed works under a double optic: a **perpetuation of victimization** in supposedly critical works of art on the one hand, and of **empowering aesthetic approaches** on the other hand. Here, I will follow the same structure, although, as just mentioned, it was much more difficult to find works of art in the latter category. Waterboarding is apparently so powerful as an unbroken and persistent method of victimization, right into the present, that it admits of hardly any visualizations or performances that do not merely end up *re-present-ing*⁷⁹ it as a disempowering spectacle.

⁷⁸ See Eric Weiner's "Waterboarding: A Tortured History" (2007), Edward Peters' *Torture* (1996), and Darius Rejali's *Torture and Democracy* (2007).

⁷⁹ My unconventional formatting of 're-present-ing' here is clearly intentional. It implies the idea that representation is itself a perpetuation of victimization by repeating the same act of the past in the *present*,

In the two parts of the chapter, I shall also employ a three-fold structure similar to that used in the previous chapter: (a) waterboarding *as* and *in* a state of exception; (b) the ticking bomb threat; (c) the state of impunity created by the denial of the Other's humanity which in turn exposes a common inhumanity.

(a) On the one hand, waterboarding itself installs a zone of indistinction and therefore a state of exception on the border between life and bare life. On the other hand it is circumstantially linked to the state of exception, as it has been reintroduced into widespread use, as for instance during apartheid in South Africa, or even more recently within the context of the 'Global War On Terror' that has led to the suspensions of the rule of law across so many putative Western democracies.

(b) Waterboarding, as a torture method, is justified by the threat posed by the apparent terrorist 'Other', commonly described by the 'ticking bomb' scenario, which posits that the collective body of the polity finds itself also on the verge of mass extinction (between mass life and mass death). In Foucault's formulation, "Society must be defended" (2003 [1997]) against that which threatens the life of the polity. The threat itself is a borderline temporal phenomenon: the coming catastrophe has not yet happened, but it could occur at any moment. In order to prevent this looming threat, a state of exception must be declared, a state whose local manifestation is the torture of the suspected terrorist.

(c) Paradoxically, the borderline status of the victim between life and death, between humanity and eradicated humanity, calls forth a different sort of blurred border, which is that of a shared humanity in vulnerability (the potential universal status as *homines sacri*) - or more sinisterly, a shared inhumanity, the potential also to become a perpetrator, which, it will transpire, is one of the few sites where the counter-examples I discuss display a hint of empowerment. However, most of the examples I discovered during my research tend to replicate – rather than resist – each of these three aspects of my argument, thereby perpetrating insidious trauma in the very act of seeking critically to expose it. As I will show, among other aspects, replication tends to consolidate trauma via an investment in a voyeuristic economy that is part of its coercive power in the public domain as a dehumanizing state of exception legitimized by a putative threat.

EXAMPLE 1: Waterboarding and the Perpetuation of Victimization

In this first part of the chapter, I thus address the question of the link between perpetuation of victimization, even in works of art that may claim to oppose such victimization, and the state of exception. I suggest that waterboarding is a structure of victimization that tends, like the state of exception that justifies its use, to blur boundaries and thus become part of an ongoing insidious trauma. This will be exemplified in the first section **(a)** by examining the links between waterboarding's persistence and that of **states of exception in South Africa**. I first scrutinize the ways in which the South African apartheid regime that was dismantled between 1990 and 1994 constituted such permanent states of exception, constituting in turn an insidious trauma in itself. I will briefly demonstrate that the state of exception started in fact long before apartheid was institutionalized via numerous legal statutes, and that states of exceptions have even continued to appear in the post-apartheid era, as the Jeffrey Benzien case at the TRC exemplifies.

In the second section **(b)** I discuss the justification generally given for states of exception: the inside and outside **threat** that apparently demands the suspension of laws by allowing violent measures such as waterboarding. Here, I shift the focus from South Africa to a more recent example of waterboarding as an interrogation technique used in the so-called 'Global War on Terror' by the United States. Although the TRC in South Africa clearly condemned the wet bag method as a human rights abuse, thereby joining numerous other countries (including the US), which declared in national and international treaties that torture is prohibited, the US has decided to revive the waterboarding torture as a necessary means to obtain information from the 'Muslim terrorist Other.' Since the attacks on 11 September 2001, after which President George W. Bush announced a 'Global War on Terror' and declared a state of exception (Patriot Act, 2001; Homeland Security Act, 2002), the US has de facto suspended the usual rule of law so as to protect the state from such threats as imagined by the 'ticking bomb threat'.

The third and final section **(c)** considers how the state of exception instantiated in waterboarding is re-enacted in performances of waterboarding, which, I argue, perpetuate victimization rather than offering any empowering form of protest. Furthermore, these performative re-enactments dangerously blur the borders between 'fact' and fiction. They tend to reveal a **shared inhumanity**, which is particularly

manifest in an increasing desire to watch the suffering of the ‘Other’. I will mention several examples of artistic waterboarding protest performances both from the Global North and the Global South in the context of the ‘Global War on Terror’, which despite the artists’ best intentions seem to perpetuate victimisation and thus insidious trauma of the ‘Other’.

a) Waterboarding as and in a State of Exception: The South African TRC and the Jeffrey Benzien Amnesty Hearing

As mentioned above, waterboarding itself can be seen as a state of exception since it pushes the victim to a threshold between life and death, a sort of oscillating bare life, which is the core of its method. Generally condemned as a gross human rights abuse, waterboarding is circumstantially linked to states of exception or states of emergency where the usual laws, including basic human rights, are suspended. As Gerard Emmanuel Kamdem Kanga states: “Emergency regimes are a set of exceptional measures allowing states to legally suspend the law and infringe the freedoms and human rights of the governed” (2016: 91). Most constitutions around the world provide circumstances for such states of emergency, as for instance where there is war, invasion or natural catastrophes that may threaten the state’s security for a certain period of time. In case of war or invasion, waterboarding – as a coercive interrogation technique – occurs among other apparently necessary measures in order to obtain relevant information from the enemy that may prevent the danger that threatens the state’s security.

During the apartheid period, the governing National Party announced a state of exception on several occasions. This happened whenever the government faced acute internal protests as in 1960 and twice in the 1980s. In 1960, the government was threatened by a widespread revolt against the infamous Pass Laws, which enforced influx control regulations. Pass Laws created a national space in which black people, by virtue of having to show a passbook, were defined as being ‘intruders’ on a territory to which they did not belong. Similar logics underpinned the implementation of Bantu education, forced removals and the creation of Bantustans and many other discriminatory apartheid laws and policies (see Morton 2010; 2013). The Apartheid government made it legal for Blacks to become citizens of their independent Bantustans, and thus ‘legally’ denied South African citizenship, with its attendant civil

right, to millions of Africans. The Bantustans thus excluded the great part of the Black population from the South African polity while including them under the punitive force of labour exploitation and repressive security measures. The states of emergency declared in response to unrest at these measures thus resonated with an ‘exceptionalism’ that created spaces where black citizens (or non-citizens) were outside the protection of the law of their land but exposed to its punitive violence, normalizing in geographical terms the sporadic time scheme of the formal states of exception from 1960 onwards. In the 1980s, when internal unrest and political violence coming particularly from Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the armed wing of the African National Congress (ANC) increased, further states of emergency were declared. During that time even more anti-apartheid activists were arrested without trials, tortured or even killed with impunity in detention centres outside the public view.⁸⁰

In many ways, the entirety of apartheid itself can be said to have constituted a state of exception. Suren Pillay notes that the last chapter of the TRC report makes clear that the “perception emerges [...] that those who defended apartheid as they did, did so because they felt they were ‘at war’ and it was a kind of war which required ‘unconventional methods’” (2007: 418-419). Furthermore, the threat was felt to come from both outside and inside the country. Marxist-oriented liberation movements in Angola, Mozambique and Namibia constituted, in the eyes of the National Party, a ‘swart gevaar’ (black danger) outside the borders of South Africa that would encourage the black majority within South Africa to rise up against the white ruling minority (see e.g. Baines 2014; Baines & Vale, eds. 2008). Thus the illegal and part-covert ‘border wars’ combatted the enemy *without*, while numerous repressive security measures and states of emergency combatted the enemy *within*. The dynamics of threat from both without and within legitimized measures that locate the ‘Other’ outside the protection of the law, but within its reach - an ‘outlaw’ in Agamben’s terminology.

Former chief of the South African Defence Force, General Constand Viljoen, defended these measures by explaining that “this was a new kind of total war, not total in its destructiveness, but total in its means of applying different ways of coercion: political, psychological, economic propaganda. This war, if it could be called a war, is so unique that the traditional ‘just war theory’ cannot easily be applied” (*TRC Report* 1999: 263). What Viljoen describes here is the ongoing nature of this apparent ‘war’

⁸⁰ Black Consciousness leader Steve Biko was one of the many suspected terrorists who were detained under this Act and who died because of torture.

that cannot be compared to a time-limited condition. Stephen Morton suggests that the origins of the long apartheid state of emergency may lie even further back in the colonial period:

From the standpoint of the oppressed, the state of emergency in apartheid South Africa did not begin with the election of the National Party in 1948, but can rather be traced to the formation of British colonial institutions such as the Department of Native Affairs, which regulated the exclusion of Africans from citizenship and the establishment of a racially repressive labour market in the 1920s and 1930s. (2010: 492)

Morton follows on by saying that “it was the transformation of the Department of Native Affairs from an obscure and ineffective administrative department into an efficient and centralized state bureaucracy that gave apartheid its institutional form” (2010: 492). Mbembe’s description of the state of exception that constituted the colonies resembles in every respect the everyday workings of the apartheid state into the early 1990s:

In sum, colonies are zones in which war and disorder, internal and external figures of the political, stand side by side or alternate with each other. As such, the colonies are the location par excellence where the controls and guarantees of judicial order can be suspended – the zone where the violence of the state of exception is deemed to operate in the service of ‘civilization’. (2003: 24)

South Africa, independent since 1910 and a republic since 1961, remained nonetheless very much a colonial space until almost the end of the twentieth century, governed according to the rules of the colonial state of exception. South Africa was thus a state - in the political sense - of exception, since its very existence was based on excepting and excluding its native population while including (exploiting, co-opting) their labour.

In an attempt to resolve the insidious trauma of apartheid, post-apartheid South Africa initiated – as has been discussed previously – the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in 1995, where both victims and perpetrators of gross human rights violations could talk about their traumatizing experiences. The TRC was an integral part of the democratic process, given its brief by the new constitution.

However, the TRC, though instituted as a central element of the transition to democracy, was structurally founded on certain sovereign, unfounded decisions: first, the arbitrary decision to examine human rights abuses committed only after 1960, which ignored the way the violent phase of apartheid rule was actually merely a

continuation of a much longer colonial state of exception (i.e. a suspension of normal democracy in the very structures of the colonial rule). Taking 1960 as the moment to inaugurate its brief was an arbitrary cut-off point that excluded all that had gone before. Such arbitrary but significant decisions meant that the TRC, as an institution, in some ways also resembled a state of exception, the suspension of the law by sovereign power that has the means to do so because it has inaugurated that law with no other authority than itself (this is the unfounded, arbitrary sovereignty that Carl Schmitt [2005] says is hidden even beneath the liberal façade of benign democracy). In other words, the TRC at times set its own rules without reference to other authorities. This is important, because such arbitrary decisions, such as the assumption of the 1960s as a cut-off point, brought consequences of great significance, some of which were perceived as being highly undemocratic. The choice of 1960 was justified by the perception of that moment as the point at which latent everyday violence erupted into full-fledged armed conflict. This in turn made it possible for the TRC to treat apartheid human rights abuses as more or less equally perpetrated by both parties, thus allowing amnesty to white perpetrators - all on the basis of a contingent (sovereign) decision about what forms of violence constituted 'real' human rights infringements. Furthermore, the TRC worked with a random (sovereign) division into certain forms of truth as already mentioned in chapter two: in contrast to the perpetrators' testimonies, defined as 'forensic factual truths,' the survivors' accounts were classified as 'narrative truths' which were not attributed the same reliability (see Sanders 2000: 20). This paradoxical approach shows how despite the TRC's attempt to provide the previous 'subaltern' with a voice, it still appears to doubt the so-called 'truth' of such 'narrative' testimonies. The division into different forms of truths exemplifies how within the legal rules of the Commission, the majority of the population was to a certain extent included (as now re-enfranchised citizens) but still excluded (as not-fully-fledged bearers of truth) in a process of reconstructing a verifiable past.

Apart from these less obvious 'exceptions,' which were nonetheless legalized within the juridical Act of the TRC, there were several hearings where even these set rules were clearly suspended. One such case was the amnesty hearing of Captain Jeffrey Benzien, a former warrant officer of the Terrorism Detection Unit, who was known for his expertise in applying the wet bag method.

The Benzien hearing became, I argue, a zone of indistinction that reinforced the perpetuation of victimization rather than bringing any relief and positive empowerment. This amnesty hearing is significant because it displays, on several levels, the way a *represent*-ation of victimhood can perpetuate victimization. These various levels are complex and overlapping and need to be teased out from one another in some detail.

First, this amnesty hearing, as Sanders notes, was one of the rare cases where “the quasi-juridical – or from another point of view, ‘legalistic’ – conventions governing the hearings were violated” (2007: 99). Usually human rights violation hearings were kept separated from the amnesty hearings and cross-examinations were only conducted either by legal representatives or the respective Committees’ commissioners. Sanders explains that “[t]he process is mediated, as in the therapeutic situation, and the return to the time of the offence is managed by proxy. This is how the law endeavours to contain and limit the inevitable repetition of the offence and escalation of violence and counterviolence” (2007: 103). At this particular amnesty hearing, however, there was no mediation: several former torture victims, among them Tony Yengeni (now a Member of Parliament), were allowed to cross-examine their torturer face to face. Although still part of a legal process, the usual rules of conduct were thus suspended by allowing a direct confrontation between former victims of gross human rights abuses and their perpetrator.

Second, in the Benzien case Yengeni, who was a former victim of the wet bag method, not only requested to hear from his perpetrator in detail how and what had been done to him during detention but, moreover, also demanded to see a demonstration of the wet bag torture method: “I also want to see it with my own eyes” (TRC 1997). Here, Yengeni participates in the Western tradition of sight as the foremost metaphor of knowledge where he becomes an active spectator of the wet bag method rather than a passive victim of it. What is more, in this scenario, Yengeni also participates in the TRC’s discourse of empirical, ‘forensic truth’ which was predominantly reserved for the perpetrators’ testimonies, thereby setting him apart from the discourse of ‘narrative truth’ of the other survivors who were testifying at the TRC. Yengeni’s *new* position, structurally similar to that of the interrogator, merely displaces victimhood. Yengeni, once the victim of Benzien’s interrogation, becomes the interrogator quizzing Benzien in the hearing’s cast of actors; now that he is an interrogator himself, someone else (a member of the audience, as it turns out) takes up the ‘actor’ position of the victim of torture. Far from providing a release from the erstwhile situation of passive victimhood,

the re-enactment of the method upon a member of the audience merely creates a new victim – albeit, of course, a changed one under different circumstances.

Third, the Benzien hearing displays a complex alternation of perpetrator- and victim-roles where the borders between amnesty hearing and human rights violation hearing are blurred. Yengeni takes up the role of interrogator for some time, asking Benzien to tell the Commission what he had done to him at the Culemborg police station. But after the cross-examination by Yengeni and other survivors, during which Benzien publicly exposes his former victims as betrayers by reminding them how quickly they revealed the names of their allies, Benzien seems to regain more and more self-confidence, occasionally even reverting to his previous role as interrogator as his rhetoric shows. He suddenly starts asking his previous victims whether they can also still remember his many benevolent gestures, thereby trivializing to a certain extent the cruelties he committed: “Could I just ask Mr Forbes if he can remember the times that I contrary to police regulations, brought him Western books? Do you remember it? Excuse me Mr Forbes, I can’t hear you?” (TRC amnesty hearings, 14 July 1997). At the same time, however, he presents himself as a victim of historical circumstances: “It was my contention that the Security Branch were using me to do the dirty work and what my motivation, I tried to explain just now, could be patriotic to the South Africa of the day” (ibid.). Similarly he says, “I may not call myself a victim of Apartheid, but yes Sir, I have also been victim” (ibid.) This comment confirms Pillay’s observation: “In the view of many policemen and soldiers who testified at the TRC, it is they who are victims, for having to bear the weight of legality since they were the ones who had operated ‘outside the law’” (2005: 425). This oscillation between victim- and perpetrator-roles goes hand in hand with a blurring of the borders between the lawful and the un-lawful that is typical of, indeed structurally fundamental to, the state of exception itself. When Yengeni asks him whether he thinks the use of torture techniques, such as waterboarding, was lawful, Benzien replies: “I was engaged in a lawful activity, using unlawful, unconstitutional methods, yes, Sir” (qtd. in Graham 2009: 26). Despite his repeated apologies for the pain he had caused (which he was only partly able to remember), Benzien seems to be convinced that he has fulfilled his task as a police officer more than satisfactorily. These two aspects themselves blur at times, as when, even more strangely, he presents himself as a saviour rather than a perpetrator: “Mr Yengeni, with my absolutely unorthodox methods and by removing your weaponry from you, I am wholly convinced that I prevented you and your colleagues ... I may

have prevented you from being branded a murderer nowadays” (TRC Vol 5, 1998: 263). This statement assumes that without his drastic methods, Yengeni could have been the one sitting on the perpetrators’ side at the TRC. What is more, it casts Benzien not as sadistic perpetrator but rather as saviour of Yengeni’s moral integrity. Without Benzien’s unlawful actions, Yengeni would have strayed outside the law too.

But as contended by some of his other torture victims, such as Ashley Forbes, Benzien did not only use the wet bag method as a necessary means to gain important information. Leigh A. Payne claims that Benzien’s “wet-bag formed part of a ‘systematic and protracted process’ that could last for months and longer after prisoners would have had any more valuable information to reveal” (2008: 231). Waterboarding thus becomes an instrument of torture to denigrate the ‘Other’ to the status of bare life, constantly crossing the threshold between life and death, or held indefinitely in the grey zone between the two.

Indeed, this sense of the reinforcement of perpetrator-victim roles was one that founded a criticism levelled at the TRC by many South Africans. The commission was able to grant amnesty to those who committed abuses during apartheid, as long as their crimes were politically motivated and there was full disclosure by the person seeking amnesty. Although Benzien accepted responsibility for the repeated and long-term use of torture, “he would not allow his victims to link his activities to the broader system of repression in apartheid South Africa” (Payne 2008: 232-233). Whenever there were questions regarding the names of fellow torturers or commanders who ordered torture, Benzien claimed *amnesia* and was eventually even granted *amnesty*. Whereas his psychologist described his amnesia as a typical symptom of PTSD, “[t]o his victims, the absences in Benzien’s confession and the system he protected with his amnesia revealed more about the apartheid era than his wet-bag disclosure” (Payne 2008: 233). For them it seemed more like an attempt to “portray himself as the victim of trauma after he had brutally traumatised his victims” (ibid: 236). As Yazir Henry, another former torture victim, states, “the decision [...] to grant amnesty to Warrant Officer Jeffrey Benzien has not promoted reconciliation. It will, I feel, remain unpopular and continue to be contested and widely regarded as illegitimate” (2000: 171).

This latent extension of the state of exception behind the TRC’s own apparently democratic brief was thus revealed in the Benzien hearings, where the normal procedure of the TRC was in turn replaced by a state of exception, in which the roles of interrogation were reversed, and where, significantly, the waterboarding that has often

been justified by the state of exception also re-emerged in active form, when it was performed by the perpetrator, at the victim's request, on a 'victim' from the audience.

Waterboarding *is* a state of exception enacted *in* states of exception upon the mouth of the 'enemy,' apparently in order to produce coerced words. One may even wonder in this context whether the imposed rules of conduct of the TRC hearings with their insistence on the Western talking cure are also a form of coercive interrogation that may not necessarily produce the desired 'truth' as the Benzien case with all its gaps and inconsistencies demonstrated.

b) The Ticking Bomb Threat and the Global War on Terror

Looking forward from the apartheid era in South Africa, one can detect several similarities that recur in the ongoing 'Global War on Terror'.

First, both display the blurring between the temporary state of emergency and the permanent state of emergency, as demonstrated in the section above. Usually understood as a temporary, exceptional condition, as its name suggests, the state of exception has often become, and increasingly tends to become, anything but temporary. This tendency, according to Agamben (2005), is largely driven by the label of terrorism, sanctioned by the attacks of 9/11. Terrorism refers to a long-term and spatially undefined threat that is treated as a form of war. In the years after 9/11, the state of exception that constituted the 'Global War on Terror' became anything but temporary. The 'Global War on Terror', declared by President George W. Bush after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, is an *ongoing* state of exception, much like the long period of apartheid as a system. A recent example of this ongoing state of exception would be the measures, primarily targeting French Muslims (Fassin 2016), introduced by the French government after the terrorist attacks in Paris on 13 November 2015. The state of emergency was extended five times, and was officially ended by French President Emmanuel Macron on 1 November 2017. However, two days before their abolition (30 October 2017) the emergency powers were transferred to standard legislation (Fassin 2018; Osborne 2017; Perolini 2017) thus making the state of emergency *de facto* permanent. The state of exception is thus part of a structural insidious trauma since it allows the discrimination of the 'Other' by state power, *ad infinitum*. Incidentally, this non-American example shows that the post-9/11 state of exception is not only permanent – it is also everywhere. By announcing a '*Global War on Terror*', Bush

broadened the spectrum of the terrorist threat and forced other countries, particularly all Western nations, to join in the fight against the ‘terrorist Muslim Other’. This, as Kim Lane Scheppele notes, “requires other countries to make exceptions to both international law and their constitutional orders. The United States, as a result, has urged its allies to compromise their constitutional and international commitments to meet the new threat” (2004: 1003).

The second similarity between apartheid and the ‘Global War on terror’ is the central function of a threat as a justification for human rights abuses. This is not to belittle the fate of the victims of terrorist attacks around the world, but to underline the way in which terrorism is created and indeed even maintained by structures of oppression that leave the oppressed little room to manoeuvre. As with South Africa’s ‘swart gevaar’ a constant fear of mass destruction and mass death at the hands of the ‘Muslim terrorist Other’ is reinforced via political propaganda and popular media. Thus, in analogy to South Africa, it appears as if the ‘Global War on Terror’ has also become to a great extent a racial war. I will discuss a number of aspects of these similarities in my analysis of the ‘Global War on Terror’ below: first, the threat; second, the reinforcement of stereotypes; and third, the circular, self-perpetuating relationship between the two. In what follows, I will show that torture methods such as waterboarding are not merely a result of such discursive and mediatic patterns, but are deeply embedded in their very structures, an integral part of their upward spiral of violence via *re-present*-ation.

First, states of exception generally function according to the logic of threat. Threat emerges from the ‘Other’ outside and the ‘Other’ within. But the threat is not a given, it must, in a sense, be identified, interpreted, indeed created. In the ‘Global War on Terror’, the media has played and continues to play a major role in the dissemination of stereotypical views about the ‘Other’ so as to support the sense of an ever-looming threat that may endanger the state’s security anywhere and at any moment. Popular media and public comments by leading politicians help to disseminate these stereotypical views, which in turn reinforce the mistrust among people.

Second, the usage of stereotypes is central to the representation of threat. Today, suspicion and distrust are particularly directed against Muslims and not merely against terrorists. The borders between Muslim and terrorist are dangerously blurred so that all Muslims are now regarded as a threat to the Western states’ security regardless of the fact that the great majority of Muslim people are not involved in acts of terrorism and

are often themselves exposed to the terrorist threat. Anyone with a darker skin colour and dark hair who does not look Caucasian has become a potential suspect and can now easily fall victim to racial profiling, regardless of whether he/she may be a Muslim with Western citizenship living in the diaspora, or a person in need of asylum with the ‘wrong’ ethnic or religious background.

At the same time as blurring categories and homogenizing hugely disparate groups of people, the stereotype remains empty. Two linked examples may suffice. American media mogul, executive chairman, politician, and former Southern Baptist minister Pat Robertson, for instance, termed the terrorist “bearded” (qtd. in Henderson 2005: 187). This, according to Schuyler W. Henderson, is “an impressive synecdoche for Muslim men and a coded racism not only suggesting hidden faces but also conjuring up images of every bad-guy Arab, while blatantly ignoring that the September 11 hijackers were mostly clean shaven” (2005: 187). But the emptiness of the stereotype does not prevent its effectiveness. As a consequence, numerous innocent people with the ‘wrong looks and religion’ have ended up in so-called ‘dark sites’ such as Guantánamo Bay in Cuba, Abu Ghraib in Iraq and Bagram in Afghanistan⁸¹ where they experience inhumane torture including waterboarding.

The second example is that of one such innocent detainee, Abu Zubaydah, already mentioned at the opening of this chapter. After months of waterboarding, it transpired that none of the accusations against Zubaydah were justified. Zubaydah could not provide US interrogators with the desired information simply because he did not know anything. His silence, however, was interpreted as a refusal, which led the interrogators to continue their suffocating waterboarding until the victim became “completely unresponsive, with bubbles rising through his open, full mouth” (Gordon 2016: n.p.). The mouth of the victim pushed into a ‘zone of indistinction’ where he/she is repetitively forced to the point of death and then brought back again only to produce the desired information that he/she could not provide reflects the stereotype that has made him/her a victim in the first place: full, but empty.

Third, the stereotype and the threat exist in a relationship of mutual and reciprocal productivity underpinned by the media. The best example of this symbiotic relationship

⁸¹ Apart from these well-known ‘dark sites’, there are secret torture prisons all over the world. As Mark Danner states, an interrogation room “is likely [to be found] on a military base in Thailand, but in any event at one of the so-called ‘black sites’ that the CIA improvised hurriedly in the days after September 11, secret prisons in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Romania, Morocco, Poland, Lithuania, and perhaps elsewhere” (2011: 46).

that culminates in waterboarding is the ‘ticking bomb scenario’ used to justify torture. Since 9/11 this ‘ticking bomb’ scenario has been created to reinforce the sense of a constant threat that posits the collective body of the polity on the verge of mass extinction. Although the ticking bomb scenario is very unlikely, popular culture, such as for instance the successful American TV drama *24*, has reinforced the sense of an urgent threat, which consequently makes the use of torture including waterboarding as an enhanced interrogation technique look necessary. Bob Cochran, co-creator of the show, states that “[m]ost terrorism experts will tell you that the ‘ticking time bomb’ situation never occurs in real life, or very rarely. But on our show it happens every week” (qtd. in Mayer 2007: n.p.). Jane Mayer notes that, “[f]or all its fictional liberties, *24* depicts the fight against Islamic extremism much as the Bush Administration has defined it: as an all-consuming struggle for America’s survival that demands the toughest of tactics” (2007: n.p.).

24 has been airing on Fox since 2001 and its popularity does not seem to cease despite its constant display of “the toughest of tactics” including waterboarding. It was first released only two months after 9/11 and broadcasted its eight and final season in 2010. In 2014, the series returned with a ninth season, entitled *24: Live Another Day* and only recently all seasons were shown worldwide once again.⁸²

Each episode presents a single, panic-laden day in which protagonist Jack Bauer, a heroic anti-terrorist agent, must unravel a terrorist conspiracy that threatens the nation’s security. A ticking bomb scenario is created in this series via several visual and audible strategies. The image of a ticking digital clock, for instance, appears at regular intervals throughout the show. It reminds the audience of the all-too-rapid passage of time as the anticipated catastrophe approaches. The ‘terrorist threat’ has to be prevented within 24 hours, as the title indicates, or massive destruction will endanger America’s security. Fast changes of scenes between different locations (sometimes shown even simultaneously) reinforce the sense of urgency. The terrorist threat must be stopped as quickly as possible and all means to do so are allowed.

The frequent display of cruel torture scenarios is one of the most prominent aspects of the show. Without any scruple, suspects are beaten, suffocated, electrocuted, drugged, sexually abused, assaulted with knives, and – unlike in real life situations –

⁸² The series’ success can be seen in the numerous prizes it won: in the 2006 Emmy awards, *24* won Best Drama and its main actor, Kiefer Sutherland, who plays the role of intelligence interrogator Jack Bauer, was awarded an Emmy for Best Actor, the Golden Globe and SAG, as well as an Emmy as Co-Executive Producer of the show.

these ‘enhanced interrogation techniques’ seem to be mostly successful in producing necessary intelligence. The message of the show appears to be that torture, no matter how cruel and inhumane, is successful and hence necessary “for America’s survival”, as Mayer mentioned above (2007: n.p.). Waterboarding belongs to these ‘necessary interrogation techniques’, where the mouth of the captive is only allowed to say what the perpetrator wants to hear: information about weaponry, secret plots, and comrades etc. Hence, if the mouth is allowed to speak, it is still deprived of its own ‘voice’ and agency and forcefully turned instead into a device of betrayal.

If the show partakes of the fullness of the stereotype, it also suggests the fullness of the speech that is produced by torture that directly contradicts the fact that torture generally produces little useful information. Shakespeare already had his characters doubt the utility of torture. In *The Merchant of Venice* (c. 1596), Portia tells Bassanio: “I fear you speak upon the rack, where men enforced do speak anything” (Act III, scene ii, lines 32-33). Centuries later this is mirrored in statements by interrogation specialists. Ben Saul and John Gershman state that “torture produces misinformation rather than information, since victims of torture will confess to anything to make it stop. This could jeopardize rather than protect public safety, as investigators waste precious time chasing up false leads. Torture fell into disuse historically because it didn’t work” (Saul & Gershman 2005: n.p.). Although the effectiveness of waterboarding as an interrogation technique has been doubted by numerous specialists ever since, it has been one of the most used torture methods in America’s black sites (see Brady 2012, Saul 2005). It seems, however, as if the ticking time bomb scenario played out on television since 9/11 works nonetheless to perpetuate the debate about the necessity and effectiveness of interrogation torture techniques.

It would seem, then, that torture, stereotype and threat are linked to each other in a mutually reinforcing relationship. One of the most sinister examples of this is the fact that the torture methods depicted on the show served as lessons for soldiers in Guantánamo, Iraq and Afghanistan. In an interview with Prof. Philippe Sands, Lieutenant Colonel Diane Beaver said that in autumn 2002 the show “gave people lots of ideas” (2008: n.p.), meaning as Sands states that “[t]he abusive interrogations [in Iraq and Afghanistan] started in November 2002, just three weeks after the start of the second series of 24” (ibid.). As it turned out, most of the young American soldiers who were sent to Afghanistan and Iraq after 9/11 had only a very brief training in enhanced interrogation so that the techniques they applied on detainees were mostly those they

saw on *24* (see for instance Greene 2008, Van Veeren 2009; Brady 2012: 110-123). In November 2006, when soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan continued to imitate methods seen on *24*, US military and Human Rights activists met with the producers to ask them to reconsider the extensive representation of torture on the program.

In sum, then, it would seem that the fateful relationship between torture, stereotype and threat has more to do with the generation of images of ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ and less to do with information. In her article on *24* and counter-terrorism in the Global War on Terror, Elspeth Van Veeren claims, “the underlying message [of the series] remains the same – that America is open, innocent, and law-abiding, but that extra-legal force is needed to maintain these qualities when confronted by an existential threat” (2009: 362-363). This threat and the stereotype-based national self-image that generates torture need to be maintained, as the history of waterboarding shows. In contrast to the Bush administration, Barack Obama officially prohibited torture and promised to close detention centres such as Guantánamo Bay⁸³ where torture had been used (although he eventually failed to implement these promises). In 2009, however, the annual commemorations of 9/11 were once again accompanied with calls for the renewed use of waterboarding and under US president Donald Trump, there are concrete moves to re-allow waterboarding. Already during his 2016 presidential campaign Trump announced in the media that he would order waterboarding “in a heartbeat” and “a hell of a lot worse than waterboarding” because “only a stupid person would say it doesn’t work” (qtd. in Johnson 2016: n.p.). He then added: “The problem is we have the Geneva Conventions, all sorts of rules and regulations, so the soldiers are afraid to fight” and he eventually promised to “make some changes” (qtd. in Shreckinger 2016: n.p.). Since his inauguration Trump has continued to make similar statements, and has tried to maintain this ongoing state of exception. The US approach towards torture and its willingness to do whatever is necessary to stop terrorism are symptomatic of a more global right-oriented tendency in Western countries to demonize the ‘Other.’

The popularity of a show such as *24* is frightening. It has helped to spread the impression of a very unlikely “ticking bomb” threat, which we apparently face since 9/11 and helps to justify the persecution of the ‘Muslim Other’, the random

⁸³ Similarly to the offshore refugee detention centres in Australia, the U.S. shifted the abject ‘danger’ outside the borders of its own security. After 9/11 the US created so-called “black sites” for the ‘terrorist Other’ outside the jurisdiction of US law, while still making them subjects to the punitive force of the American government.

incarceration of potential suspects and the ongoing use of cruel interrogation techniques such as waterboarding, all of which are not merely ‘results’ but drivers of the structure they are part of. Sadly, it seems that the fiction of the ‘Other’ creates the fiction of the imminent threat, which in turn creates the reality of torture, which does not disperse that threat but merely perpetuates it.

c) The Loss of Humanity: Re-present-ations of Waterboarding

During my research on waterboarding, I came across numerous examples where this brutal interrogation method has been used and may still be used despite official prohibitions. As article 2 of the Geneva Convention of 1949 explains: “No exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture” (qtd. in United Nations 2017: § 2). According to this article, not even a state of emergency should sanction the use of torture methods. Shockingly, however, the use of waterboarding has not stopped as its re-occurrence in the ongoing ‘Global War on Terror’ demonstrates. There is one main reason for this phenomenon: the supposed enemy is not regarded as a human being and can thus be deprived of her/his basic human rights; however, and as if those who believe this are not entirely sure of the legitimacy of the torture whose use they endorse, there is a bizarre and ongoing debate about whether waterboarding can be truly considered a torture method.

These two aspects, I argue, reveal an increasing loss of humanity or to be more explicit, a dying humaneness. After all that is known about waterboarding, one wonders how there can be any doubts as to whether this interrogation technique is a torture method. Nonetheless, there are still numerous politicians who deny this obvious fact in order to justify the continuing victimization of the ‘Other’. Remarkably, even protest performances have joined in this debate, as if the world needs more proof of what this torture method involves.

In what follows, I **first** scrutinize the reasons for not acknowledging a shared humanity and vulnerability in the ‘Other’. **Second**, I briefly discuss the bizarre debate about whether waterboarding is really torture, which, I claim in a **third** part, reveals a loss of humanity, that eventually becomes a shared inhumanity, visible in the ongoing use of waterboarding and in its visual *re-present-ations* in entertainment media as well

as, surprisingly, in performance protest pieces. These performative re-enactments tend to reveal a numbing of empathy that is particularly manifest in an increasing desire in people to watch the suffering of the ‘Other’. Even among works of art and protest performances, which are intended to trigger a critique of the use and efficiency of waterboarding as an interrogation technique, the re-*present*-ation of the torture method often crosses the threshold between torture simulation and real close-to-death experience. Rather than offering an empowering message these forms of protest perpetuate victimization. Even academic criticism of such torture methods (including my own) may end up participating in this voyeurism and perpetuation of victimization, which leads me to inquire about possible exceptions to such an ubiquitous insidious trauma.

First I turn to the reasons for the denial of a common humanity and vulnerability. The reluctance to abolish the use of waterboarding and the constant attempts to extend the usual laws to allow its continuing use are closely linked with the denial of a shared humanity and vulnerability. In a state of exception, the apparent enemy is not regarded as a human being so that basic human rights no longer apply.

On 13 November 2001, two months after the attacks, the US installed one of the most relevant military orders called “Detention, Treatment, and Trial of Certain Non-Citizens in the War Against Terrorism” to justify the detention of “non-citizens” who were and are “engaged in, aided or abetted, or conspired to commit, acts of international terrorism, or acts in preparation thereof” (Administration of George W. Bush 2001: 1666). According to Agamben, the 2001 military order “radically erases any legal status of the individual, thus producing a legally unnameable and unclassifiable being” (Agamben 2005: 3), less-than-human. Detainees are reduced to the status of bare life of a *homo sacer* who can be tortured and even killed with impunity. Agamben goes on: “Neither prisoners nor persons accused, but simply ‘detainees,’ they are the object of a pure de facto rule, of a detention that is indefinite not only in the temporal sense but in its very nature as well, since it is entirely removed from the law and from judicial oversight” (Agamben 2005: 3-4). Agamben refers to Judith Butler’s *Precarious Life* where she claims that the detainees “enter a suspended zone, neither living in the sense that a political animal lives, in community and bound by law, nor dead and, therefore, outside the constituting condition of the rule of law” (Butler 2004: 67). These ‘living dead’ are then forced to experience yet another ‘zone of indistinction’ when they are

subjected to torture methods such as waterboarding where they literally oscillate between life and death.

Interestingly, the 2001 order explicitly says in section 3 (b) that the individual subject shall be “treated *humanely*, without any adverse distinction based on race, color, religion, gender, birth, wealth, or any similar criteria” (Bush Administration 2001: 1667, my italics). As if aware of the inconsistency of American practice, most famously revealed in the pictures of Abu Ghraib, and so as to justify these inhumane actions, Bush signed an executive memorandum in February 2002 in which he makes clear that “the war on terrorism ushers in a *new* paradigm,” in which “none of the provisions of Geneva apply to our conflict with al-Qaeda in Afghanistan or elsewhere throughout the world because, among other reasons, al-Qaeda is not a High Contracting Party to Geneva” (ICRC 2018: Section D.IV., n.p., my emphasis). More memoranda, known now as the ‘torture memos’, followed. These memos advocated enhanced interrogation techniques, while pointing out that adherence to the Geneva Convention would only reduce the possibility of appropriate prosecution of terrorist suspects. These measures reveal a denial of a shared humanity that makes the use of torture possible. Yet as Bush’s exception of al-Qaeda members from the legal provisions of the Geneva conventions, casting them as outlaws outside the international rules of war, demonstrates, there remained a sense that what was happening was indeed unlawful. This in turn explains the bizarre debate about whether waterboarding is really torture, to which I now turn.

Second, then, the debate appears to reveal a residual sense that a fundamental border had been crossed. The 1984 Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment defines torture as “any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession” (1984: part 1, §1). The extreme clarity of this statement, and the fact that it obviously prohibits waterboarding, perhaps explains, paradoxically, why there are numerous voices seeking so strenuously to claim that waterboarding does *not* cause severe pain or suffering – and thus that it should not be considered a form of torture subject to prohibition. Especially in 2004, when reports about the “torture memos” were leaked to the press, bringing to light that CIA interrogators were using waterboarding among other cruel torture techniques on terrorist suspects in so-called US-led black sites, there was, according to Sara Brady, “a sudden reluctance of journalists to

characterize such actions as torture” (2012: 126). This is probably due to the content of the “torture memos” which, among other things, issued a new definition of torture, pointing out that most measures, such as waterboarding, that fall under international definition do not fall within the definition of torture advocated by the US.

This view was officially supported by politicians such as former Vice President Dick Cheney and John Ashcroft, who since leaving office, have stated on several occasions that they do not regard waterboarding as torture (see Defrank 2009; CNN 2008). Former Republican prosecutor of the Bush administration, Andrew McCarthy, suggested that the definition of waterboarding as torture depends on the duration of the treatment, arguing that in “in some number of instances that were not prolonged or extensive waterboarding should not be considered torture under law” (2007: n.p.).

Claiming that waterboarding is not always truly harmful, that it merely “simulates” (Brady 2012: 127) drowning and hence cannot be called ‘proper’ torture, cannot obscure the fact that waterboarding can cause enormous psychological and physical damage, and may even lead to death. Alfred McCoy even argues that waterboarding is the “worst form of torture” since it causes a “primal fear of death by drowning” (2009: n.p.). However, waterboarding serves, according to Bush, Cheney, Trump and scholars of international and criminal law such as John Parry and well-known attorney Alan Dershowitz, as a necessary and efficient ‘enhanced interrogation technique’ in the Global War on Terror. For this political purpose it is useful to deny the label of torture whenever expedient.

Rather than criticizing the use of waterboarding itself, there are some protest performances that join in this strange debate. In 2008, British-born author, literary critic and journalist Christopher Hitchens decided to undergo waterboarding himself under controlled conditions to confirm that the procedure is not merely simulated drowning. Hitchens came to the conclusion that waterboarding is indeed torture. “Believe Me, It’s Torture” is the title of his long report on his experiment available online on his website (including the video of the procedure) and in *Vanity Fair* magazine (2008). Hitchens confirms to his audience that during waterboarding you are “being drowned, albeit slowly and under controlled conditions and at the mercy (or otherwise) of those who are applying the pressure” (2008: n.p.).⁸⁴ Unfortunately, this experiment was not enough to

⁸⁴ Another intention of Hitchens’s experiment was apparently to explore whether waterboarding is “something that Americans were being trained to *resist*, not to *inflict* (2008: n.p., italics in the original). As we all know, inflicting has become by now the major reason for such training.

convince people of waterboarding's horrific brutality. That is perhaps so because such performances can easily be orchestrated to demonstrate exactly the opposite. Only recently US special-forces soldier Tim Kennedy has live-streamed a video of himself being waterboarded by his friends in order to prove once again that waterboarding is not torture. As Andrew Buncombe from the *Independent* reports: "Between sessions, Mr Kennedy claimed being waterboarded was not torture and was simply uncomfortable" (2018: n.p.). (With this action, Kennedy wanted to support Trump's intention to reintroduce waterboarding as an 'effective' interrogation technique in his new-inflamed war on terror and help Trump's nominee Gina Haspel, a supporter of waterboarding during the Bush administration, to take over the leadership of the CIA.)

All the debates around the issue of whether waterboarding genuinely qualifies as torture are a shocking lowering of the parameters of human and inhuman behaviour towards other humans. Not only the 'Other' is dehumanized; even the 'Self', as Tim Kennedy's example shows, is dehumanized. As George Annas points out, "[t]orture begins by dehumanizing the victim but ends by dehumanizing the torturer" (2005: 2132) as the following section will show.

Third, I illustrate how the denial of a shared humanity leads to a shared inhumanity. Annas's comment is an important observation and it makes clear that the borderline status of the victim between life and death, between humanity and eradicated humanity, calls forth a different sort of blurred border, which is that of a shared inhumanity, the potential for not only becoming *homo sacer* but also, what is even more worrying, the potential for becoming an inhumane perpetrator.

The more I found out about the use of waterboarding as a state-sanctioned method even in so-called 'democratic' nations, the more shocked I was about the degree of inhumanity that makes it possible for people to cause such physical and psychological pain to other human beings. What also shocked me was the plethora of visual *representations* of waterboarding and other cruel torture methods on TV series such as *24*, films or video games, which reinforce stereotypes and create a ticking bomb paranoia that seems to justify these actions. The power pictures have to shape national debates and trigger political actions is not limited to news reports, which claim to represent the 'reality'. Fictional portrayals of torture such as in films and TV serials of torture can have a similar impact, as demonstrated above.

Charles Fried, Harvard constitutional law professor, states that "torture is horrible, immoral, and causes the total meltdown of our human inhibitions and about how we

treat each other” (qtd. in Brady 2012: 120). This, I argue, can be transferred to those who are spectators of torture. Susan Sontag notes that the overabundance of images of atrocity has created a “culture of spectatorship” (2003: 81): “For photographs to accuse, and possibly to alter conduct, they must shock” (2003: 82), however, “shock can become familiar. Shock can wear off [...]. As one can become habituated to horror in real life, one can become habituated to the horror of certain images” (2003: 82). In the context of the 2006 photographs of Abu Ghraib, M. Angela Buanaventura has pointed out the possibility that the American public failed to respond to the pictures because they were no longer shocked that such abuse occurred at Abu Ghraib. This “lack of shock”, she claims, “can potentially be attributed to the fact that similar pictures had previously been released, coupled with the numbing effect of watching countless instances of torture in TV dramas” (2007: 132).

It is this “numbing effect” that exposes a tendency towards a shared inhumanity where acts of torture are tolerated and the suffering of the ‘Other’ can be watched without feeling empathy or having a sense of a shared vulnerability. As Sontag observes in her essay “Regarding the Torture of Others”, “the easy delight taken in violence seems to have grown” (2004: part III, n.p.). The apparently extremely widespread desire to watch the suffering of others makes one wonder whether this desire to look at atrocities reveals, as mentioned above, our potential to all become inhumane perpetrators.

How should critical thought react to this danger? Does protest action seeking to shock people into recognizing the brutality of waterboarding constitute a workable response to these problems? It seems that, despite their avowed purpose, even projects protesting waterboarding tend to perpetuate a dehumanizing victimization rather than offering any form of empowering protest. In many of these works, such as the live-performance protest in front of the Department of Justice by Iranian-American Maboud Ebrahimzadeh in 2007 or Guatemalan artist Regina José Galindo’s performance video *Confesión* of the same year, the artists or protesters put themselves in the role of the victim in such a manner as to shock the audience by the real effects of this torture, thereby causing possible physical and psychological damage to the volunteer. Waterboarding cannot be simulated without consequences. These re-enactments are also not merely simulation because the simulated waterboarding has real effects on the acting body. No clearer evidence for the perpetuation of victimization, albeit voluntary, could be found.

Even more worryingly, protest performances designed to shock may place the spectator in a structural position similar to that of the perpetrator. Among the most horrifying artistic performances of waterboarding was Steve Power's *The Waterboarding Thrill Ride* (2008) on Coney Island, where visitors to the fun fair were invited to pay a dollar to initiate and watch the performance of waterboarding. Rather than offering any sense of empowerment, these examples perpetuate victimisation by participating in the sensationalist spectacle of suffering. Some of these examples of voyeuristic spectatorship have circulated massively in the popular media, for instance, in the American TV drama *24*, already mentioned above, that shows quite explicit scenes of waterboarding and other torture methods. Unfortunately, such re-presentations, as Brady notes, merely "operate in danger of replicating the very trauma they wish to expose" (2012: 120) – not merely as a trauma experienced by the actor's body, but perhaps even as a larger insidious trauma in which the spectator participates as a proxy-perpetrator.

What then is the situation with regard to the academic critic who views, for the purpose of critical analysis, such images or performances? Having seen a few of the stylized photographs of the torture of Iraqi prisoners by American soldiers in Abu Ghraib, I was left speechless. Again and again, I find myself in this thesis confronted with the following question: to what extent am I myself participating in the perpetuation of insidious trauma by adding further layers of perpetration when replicating these victimizing examples within my own commentary? To curtail this danger, I decided *not* to view any further Abu Ghraib images or other visual performances of waterboarding (as for instance in *24* or the many YouTube videos of protest performances). I have mentioned a few of them briefly but merely as a warning in hope of triggering more critical views and productive, empowering protest, but I refuse to write about these examples in analytical detail.

If Sontag is right in claiming that "[h]arrowing photographs [...] are not much help if the task is to understand" (2003: 80), and the same may hold for other visual performances of suffering, we need, in order to make people "understand" that we are heading towards a loss of humanity, examples that deal with issues of torture such as waterboarding in empowering ways. Most of the protesting performances shown above that seek to deal critically with the use of waterboarding in the context of the 'Global

War on Terror’ tend to perpetuate victimization.⁸⁵ Against all these successive instances of perpetuating victimhood, which, I argue, continue to constitute the very fabric of insidious trauma at the moment of its multiple re-*present*-ations, I wish to turn now to the very few countervailing instances of resilience I could find.

EXAMPLE 2: An Exception to the Exception – Empowering Protest

In my search for empowering counter-examples in the context of waterboarding, I eventually found two works and a simple but clear public gesture that seem to escape to a certain extent the pattern of the perpetuation of insidious trauma.⁸⁶

In what follows, I will first (a) briefly demonstrate in the context of the TRC how powerful a single gesture, that of Yazir Henry’s refusal to continue working with the TRC, can be in refuting the perpetuation of victimization in a state of exception. I will then (b) discuss a protest performance from 2008 by an organization called *World Can’t Wait*. Although this performance cannot entirely escape the trap of the perpetuation of victimization, it still manages to ‘affect’ an empowering protest. As the name of the organisation indicates, the performance responds to the urgency of the “ticking bomb” scenario in ways that turn “inside out” (to use Espósito’s term) the logic of the state of exception. The third and final section (c) will return to the Benzien case at the South African TRC. Ingrid de Kok’s poem entitled “What kind of man” (2002) stands, I argue, as an exception to the trend of perpetuating victimization. Her poem, as I show in more detail below, emphatically refuses to re-present waterboarding, posing instead the question of a shared inhumanity.

⁸⁵ For a more detailed analysis and an extended enumeration of waterboarding performances see Sara Brady’s *Performance, Politics, and the War on Terror. “Whatever It Takes”* (2012).

⁸⁶ Two examples that do not directly deal with waterboarding but are nonetheless concerned with the use and effectiveness of coercive and most damaging interrogation techniques are worth mentioning: Cuban-American performance artist Coco Fusco’s *A Room of One’s Own: Women and Power in New America* (2006) and American artist Daniel Heyman’s series of prints, *The Abu Ghraib Project* (2007). These give a glimpse of what can be done in terms of protest without participating in a sensational spectacle of suffering. Both works renounce a re-enactment or a graphic depiction of atrocities, warn us about a false sense of empowerment by reversing roles, and highlight instead the importance of a restored dignified humanity in the face of a bombardment of images of atrocities in the media that make people numb and may turn them into potential perpetrators.

a) Questioning the State of Exception: Yazir Henry

As mentioned in the first part of this chapter, the Jeffrey Benzien amnesty hearing presented in many ways a state of exception by abolishing the TRC's usual rules of conduct. A cognate, indeed exactly mirroring 'exception', was achieved by Yazir Henry, another political activist and torture survivor, when he decided to exit the TRC sittings: "I struggled with my anger and resolved not to participate in any further amnesty proceedings" (Henry qtd. in Sanders 2007: 171). Henry objected to the manner in which his words were being appropriated by others: "The dispossession of my voice through a continuous recycling of my by now unmoored testimony was compounded by the superimposition of other voices and narratives onto my own" (qtd in Schaffer and Smith 2004: 78). Henry could not detect any effective empowerment in this form of TRC commentary. He decided that the hearings merely reinstated the trauma of silencing and perpetrated it: "The disembodiment of my testimony has made the struggle to reclaim my voice, memory and agency, harder" (ibid: 78). If the centre of the Benzien case was the re-enactment of the suffocation of a proxy victim by the torturer, in the stifling and co-optation of his voice, Henry identifies further circles of silencing. While still acknowledging the work of the TRC in general, Henry points to its limits and pitfalls and the danger of misrepresenting the testimonies in cultural appropriations. His comment points quite explicitly to the always imminent danger of being spoken for, and the accompanying risk of replicating victimization via such cultural appropriations, as shown above. Regardless of the importance of making these often hidden cruel histories known to the public and no matter how well intentioned and sensitively framed the appropriation of other people's stories may be, such a risk does exist. Henry's decision not to participate further in the discourse of the TRC marks out an affective response, an expression of agency and resilience that needs no further explanation because it relocates the subject's voice to a space outside that of the perpetuation of victimization to be found even within the supposedly liberating space of the TRC. The very act of saying, "The disembodiment of my testimony has made the struggle to reclaim my voice, memory and agency, harder" (ibid: 78) instantiates the voice reclaiming agency even as it protests against the expropriation of voice. It thus exactly reverses the perpetuation of victimization within the re-commemoration of trauma, making it the restoration of agency within the recognition of the disempowering return to trauma. It turns the space of exclusion (banishment from one's own voice) into

a space of re-inclusion of one's voice in the realm of self-determination: "I ... resolved not to participate in any further amnesty proceedings" (ibid: 78).

b) World Can't Wait: Turning the Threat Inside Out

Among the many 'spectacular' protest performances dealing with waterboarding in the 'Global War on Terror', I focus on one by an organization called *World Can't Wait* that, like numerous other performances mentioned in part one of this chapter, stages a waterboarding scene that can also be regarded as a perpetuation of victimization. In contrast to the other examples, however, this performance at least ensures that the individual playing the part of the supposed captive is not exposed to any real danger, thus avoiding to a certain extent the perpetuation of victimization – though the element of spectacle persists. As I show in the following discussion, the greatest success of this performance is that it belongs to a whole range of protest actions which are not time-limited but just as persistent and ongoing as the state of exception proclaimed by Bush since 9/11 that they oppose.

World Can't Wait (WCW) is an organisation formed in the US in January 2005 with the intention to mobilize

people living in the United States to stand up and stop war on the world, repression and torture carried out by the US government. We take action, regardless of which political party holds power, to expose the crimes of our government, from war crimes to systematic mass incarceration, and to put humanity and the planet first. (WCW 2018: n.p.)

The name of *World Can't Wait* is programmatic and already displays two aspects of their rhetoric.

First, by creating a huge network of projects and initiatives nationally, and even internationally, and by co-operating with other protest movements, the group generates 'affective ties' that have the potential to trigger change. The group's concerns are *global*, not merely geographically, but also in terms of the 'affective' ties they create. Although their headquarters are in New York, the movement has spread quickly all over the country to reach as many people as possible so as to join them in their mass resistance against a government that allows the suspension of human rights in the name of an apparent ticking bomb threat. Among their members are a wide range of people, from students, writers, artists, lawyers to politicians, united in a single common goal: to

restore a sense of humanity in a world which increasingly tends to suspend the laws that normally protect individuals from inhumane treatment. By now, the movement has even reached people across the borders of the US, which increases the effectiveness of their actions. In the picture below (Fig. 11), for instance, we see British journalist, campaigner, commentator, public speaker Andy Worthington in front of the White House, protesting along with many other people from different movements (e.g. Witness against Torture; Center for Constitutional Rights; Amnesty International)

urging the closing of Guantánamo where “enhanced interrogation techniques” are still in use. Behind him, protestors in orange jumpsuits and black hoods pulled over their whole heads (reminiscent of the iconic picture of the Abu Ghraib images) are holding a banner inscribed with the phrase “Close Guantánamo” which reminds one of the title of Parr’s protest



Fig. 11: Andy Worthington protesting in front of the White House

performance against the refugee internment camps in Australia, *Close the Concentration Camps*. The front of the lectern provides a list of all the organisations involved in this protest: from *Witness against Torture*, *Center for Constitutional Rights*, *Amnesty International*, to *World Can't Wait*. The action networks, according to the logic of ‘affective ties’, include a number of participants in this field of activism. The diverse media used by the organization also activate ‘affective ties’. Worthington is also a songwriter and musician whose protest songs are sung at concerts and demonstrations. Music and poetry have now become effective parts of WCW’s protest campaigns, which bring people from both sides of the prison camps together in empowering ways. On their website we find links to these poems written by members of WCW as well as by prisoners, who finally gain a chance to voice their experiences and claims from their own perspective.

Second, as the name also indicates, their concerns are *urgent*. In this way they respond directly to the temporal economy of the ticking bomb scenario conjured up in this Global War on Terror. The logic of the state of exception as presented by the ‘ticking bomb threat’ is once again reversed by the persistence of the organization. The

longevity and ubiquity of the movement correspond with the longevity and ubiquity of the state of exception and it will not end its mission before US politicians agree to close camps such as Guantánamo and to grant suspects the right to *habeas corpus*. Worthington says, “it is legitimate to fear that prisoners are still being subjected to a regime in which, although outright torture may well have been outlawed, the focus is still on intelligence-gathering, and not on holding prisoners to keep them off the battlefield until the end of hostilities” (see Worthington 2009: n.p.). Thus, in terms of both their geographical span and their longevity, *World Can’t Wait* turns the state of exception inside out, as instantiated in the chiasmic inversion in their own guiding motto: “When leaking evidence of war crimes is criminalized, remaining silent is a crime” (WCW 2018: n.p.). In the rest of this section, I first look specifically at *World Can’t Wait*’s waterboarding protest before explaining in more detail, in the second, closing section, how this organisation manages to turn the state of exception ‘inside out’.

Waterboarding performance

In 2008, when president Bush vetoed a bill that would have prevented the CIA from applying interrogation techniques such as waterboarding (see Quinn 2008: n.p.), *World Can’t Wait* initiated several waterboarding protest performances, often in co-



Fig. 12: Waterboarding protest performance by *World Can’t Wait* in New York (2008)

operation with other political activist groups (as shown above), all across the States from San Diego, Seattle, New York and Washington D.C. (Loo 2008: n.p.). In these public demonstrations two people, dressed in dark clothes and acting as interrogators, hold between them a ‘prisoner’

dressed in a typical Guantánamo orange jumpsuit. As the crowds gather around them, the interrogator-actors aggressively shout questions at the ‘prisoner’, demanding to know names of individuals planning attacks: “Give us the names!” (Loo 2008: n.p.). As the captive assures them of his/her innocence and insists he/she has neither names nor any other useful information to offer, the interrogators’ treatment becomes increasingly

harsh. The interrogator-actors start binding the captive-actor to a slanted board where he/she is subjected to a simulation of waterboarding. Such a scenario resembles that of Abu Zubaydah - among many others - where the victim cannot provide any information, simply because he/she is innocent, but for precisely that reason is then repeatedly waterboarded until losing consciousness.

Members of the public witness here how water was poured over a cloth covering the face and how the actor playing the part of the detainee started choking and gasping for breath (see Rowe 2013: 30). Although the performers used a plastic mask on the cloth to protect the protestor-victim from any 'real' danger, in contrast to other protest demonstrations (see Brady 2012: 133), the volunteer playing the part of the torture victim still experienced how quickly such a simulation can turn into a real danger. As Cami Rowe notes:

What began as a scripted, if striking piece of street theatre ended as a more visceral and authentically lived piece of performance art – the reactions of the activist playing the prisoner became unscripted and real, and the attention of the audience therefore shifted from the unfolding story line to the simple witnessing of the actor's physical experience. (2013: 38)

Thus even this performance tends towards the perpetuation of victimization, but it also offers affective, empowering protest.

The empowering aspects of such a protest performance action are numerous. First, the group creates networked protest by staging the waterboarding scene in several US cities around a time where such interrogation techniques are once again heavily discussed in the news, thereby reaching a much broader audience with their protest. News coverage is matched by a protest network also generating a counter coverage.

Second, and this is an important factor, after each of these performances the audience is immediately invited to ask questions and to participate in a discussion about the use of waterboarding in detention camps. As Ambreen Ali reports of the Seattle performance on 11 January 2008, the reactions after the demonstration were very diverse. Some of the spectators were so confused that they started laughing while others were left 'speechless'. 22-year-old John Lyle "countered that interrogation isn't supposed to be pleasant" (Ali 2008: n.p.) and asked: "Why do the demonstration? It's protesting by fear" and another student commented: "People should oppose torture because of the moral reasons, not because they watched this" (ibid.). This latter

comment corresponds to my own thoughts: why do we need to watch a shocking re-enactment to understand finally that waterboarding is a human rights abuse that needs to be forbidden? What does it say about our own humanity or increasing loss of humanity with regard to an overabundance of images of other people's suffering? Although I am still struggling with my own complicity in the perpetuation of victimization via a discussion of such a re-enactment which seems to oscillate between empowerment and victimization, I can nonetheless detect a powerful message in *World Can't Wait's* protest that goes beyond a mere re-present-ation. The demonstration of suffocation and speechlessness generates a discussion, a dialogue of often dissonant voices that responds to the plight of the victim and weaves it into a network of affective ties, not so much by the mere content of the responses as by the very existence of that community of speakers. This network is global, for its dialogue resonates, for instance, with that of Australian Mike Parr, who invited his audience of *Close the Concentration Camps* to attend a lecture in which he was willing to respond to people's questions in much the same way as the *World Can't Wait's* performers immediately invited the audience to participate in a discussion about this inhumane interrogation technique. The network is also multimedial, combining with the group's numerous other political activities via diverse genres (speeches, online protest, public demonstrations, music, poetry etc.), often in co-operation with other organisations.

Similarly empowering effects can be seen at work in *World Can't Wait's* choices regarding the site and time of their performances. Among all these waterboarding demonstrations, the one in Washington plays a particularly significant role, since it was staged directly in front of the White House, America's symbol of freedom and democracy. For over 200 years the White House has been a metonym of the Presidency, the United States government, and the American people. As such it represents the pride of a nation that promises to protect peoples' rights: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" (US History: n.d.). But, of course, these may de facto not be available to people who are not American citizens. As Rowe notes: "By deliberately performing between the spectator and the White House, activists are able to disrupt the ordinary meaning-making of that site and insert complications into sentiments about national character and values" (2013: 30). Such complications are laid bare by a series of recent phenomena. Since the beginning of the 'Global War on Terror' the US government has

suspended its own democratic principles and where necessary re-invented its laws. It has re-interpreted international treaties regarding the protection of universal human rights, thus countering its own supposedly universally democratic values. On the pretext of protecting America from further terrorist attacks and of dismantling al-Qaeda, the US invaded Afghanistan soon after the 9/11 attacks in 2001. Less than two years later, on 19 March 2003, Bush then announced the War on Iraq, declaring that America “will accept no outcome but victory” (qtd. by Fischer 2013: n.p.), no matter what it takes. Often justified as a “humanitarian intervention” (Roth 2006) the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have been shown by WikiLeaks to entail numerous cases of human rights abuses committed by the US army, which display the exact opposite of the original intention. The US government has merely perpetuated the continuation of a state of exception where detainees are no longer regarded as human beings. When in 2004 the scandal about the torture and abuse of prisoners in Abu Ghraib was revealed and one of the ‘torture memos’ was leaked to the press, protests against the US government increased. *World Can’t Wait*’s performance itself drives a wedge, in a concrete spatial manner, between the seat of government and its metonymic voice, and the subjects it may or may not protect. But this interval is not merely negative, because it then becomes a space of restorative dialogical voices.

The choice of venue and time of the performance are thus relevant in voicing an explicit critique of US policies. The performance took place in 2008, after Bush declared: “We need to ensure our intelligence officials have all the tools they need to stop the terrorists” (qtd. in Quinn 2008: n.p.). This announcement coincided with the fifth anniversary of the Iraq invasion (and as we know, this went on until 2011), which marks an ongoing state of exception.⁸⁷ News about the use of waterboarding in US-led dark sites not only in Iraq’s Abu Ghraib and Cuba’s Guantánamo but all around the world was increasingly revealed so that the democratic values the White House supposedly represents were discredited. *World Can’t Wait* drew the spectators’ attention to the inconsistencies and the arbitrariness of US policies. “[T]he performance of torture at the very seat of American state power,” says Rowe, “forced audiences to

⁸⁷ The Iraq War started in 2003 with the invasion of Iraq by a United States-led coalition that overthrew the government of Saddam Hussein. The war continued until 2011 and left the country and all people involved in a devastated condition (see e.g. Simpson 2005; Roth 2006). As Sebastian Fischer notes: “With the exception of the war in Afghanistan, it was America’s longest combat engagement ever” (2013: n.p.).

acknowledge and consider the many layers of implications related to the wielding of that power” (2013: 31). *World Can’t Wait*’s position between the audience and the White House turns the performance group into a critical intermediary inserting an interpretative mediating device between the government and a people who can no longer trust it. In an attempt to restore a common humanity and to remind people of the avowed obligations of American democracy in its ideal form, *World Can’t Wait* urges the prosecution of American leaders who had approved waterboarding of terror suspects (see Marcovitz 2015: 89). *World Can’t Wait*’s choice of strategic moments with historical significance also drew attention to the temporality of the state of exception that tends to become permanent. Just as the positioning of the Washington performance opened up a critical space between government and people, so it also displayed the discrepancy between single events and an endless emergency, the attendant war, and the infinite detention of some prisoners.

Turning the logic of exception inside out

According to their mission statement from 2005, *WCW*’s aim is “to create a political situation where the Bush administration’s program is repudiated, where Bush himself is driven out of office, and where the whole direction he has been taking the U.S. society is *reversed*” (*WCW* homepage n.d.; my emphasis). This desired ‘reversal’ is a good starting point to explain how this movement manages to turn the logic of the state of exception ‘inside out’.

As mentioned above, *World Can’t Wait*’s waterboarding performance as well as their numerous other acts of resistance responds to the “ticking bomb” scenario that justifies the ongoing state of exception. The slogan, *World Can’t Wait*, signals that this time, however, the world is not waiting for people such as the fictional character Jack Bauer in *24* to save America – characters who cannot wait for information urgently needed as the bomb ticks, and thus who use waterboarding and other methods to extract confessions from the terrorist ‘Other’ before it is too late. Rather, the ‘world can’t wait’ for people to protest *against* the use of waterboarding and against governments that allow “systematic mass incarceration” (*WCW* homepage n.d.) without trial. The name *World Can’t Wait* functions as a motto that signifies an urgent call for us to stop the loss of humanity by actively protesting against current policies that allow any form of inhumane treatment.

World Can't Wait turns the logic of the state of exception inside out. Rather than tolerating the exclusion of certain humans by removing them to a space outside the protection of the law, one that has no time than that of the indefinitely continuing state of emergency, it asks citizens to leave the customary space of passive inaction and to take action against the state that defines their own membership within the polity and others' vulnerability outside its protection. Thus *World Can't Wait* reminds us that we are *all* human beings, that there is no space outside the polity of human beings, but that the acceptance of torturing people turns us into inhumane perpetrators, be it via immediate involvement, or by more distant forms of complicity, such as that of inaction. As Sontag pointedly notes: "The issue is not whether a majority or a minority of Americans performs such acts but whether the nature of the policies prosecuted by this administration and the hierarchies deployed to carry them out makes such acts likely" (2004: section I) - as does the passive acceptance of the population. In temporal terms, the performance turns the apparent urgency of the ticking bomb threat and the resulting allowance of torture into an urgent call to do something actively against the power of an infinite state of exception.

World Can't Wait actively demonstrates its opposition to the temporalities of the ticking-bomb scenario. It literally alludes to such motifs as the recurring image of the ticking clock in the American TV drama *24*, where the audience is constantly reminded of a looming threat coming from the dangerous 'Other' that makes torture appear a



Fig. 13: Detail from the Gtmo clock (2018)

necessity. In response, *World Can't Wait* has created a counter-ticking-clock where the urgency of stopping this ongoing state of exception is highlighted. A separate homepage, named www.gtmoclock, features its own digital clock. The page asks the

current president of the United States to close Guantánamo, also known as GTMO after its official code, "THIS SHAMEFUL ICON OF IMPRISONMENT WITHOUT CHARGE OR TRIAL" (Gtmo clock 2018: n.p.). As the name of the homepage indicates, the site features a digital clock that informs the audience how many days, hours, minutes and seconds Guantánamo has been open. However, this homepage is

not only directed at the president of the US; it also addresses a national and international audience to support *WCW* in stopping the existence of such a dehumanizing prison camp. The message on this homepage is clear:

On January 11, 2018, the prison at Guantánamo Bay marked its 5845th day of existence, and the Gitmo Clock, first launched under President Obama, was re-launched to let the world know how disgraceful it is that the prison is still open.

January 11 is the 16th anniversary of its opening, and the clock will count how many days the prison has been open until it is finally closed for good.

Conceived by the Bush administration as a place to hold prisoners seized in the “war on terror” outside the reach of the U.S. courts, Guantánamo became a place where torture and abuse were practiced, and it remains a place where those held are not imprisoned according to international accepted norms – as criminals facing federal court trials, or as prisoners of war protected by the Geneva Conventions, who can be held unmolested until the end of hostilities – but as, essentially, what they have always been: men without rights subjected to indefinite imprisonment without charge or trial, whose release can only come about through the whim of the president.

40 men are still held at Guantánamo, and every day that the prison remains open is an affront to America’s cherished notion of itself as a country founded on the rule of law that respects the rule of law. Guantánamo is a legal, moral and ethical abomination, and its continued existence is also counter-productive, tarnishing America’s reputation abroad and inflaming anti-American sentiment. (*WCW* homepage 2018: n.p.)

World Can’t Wait then suggests how people can actively help them to end this state of exception: they can join the protest by printing one of the posters and having their own picture taken while holding up one of those protest posters. Furthermore, under the rubric “What else you can do”, they suggest writing a letter to Donald Trump, or to the senators and representatives who may have some form of political power and asking them to close Guantánamo.

These multiple protest initiatives are as ongoing as the state of exception proclaimed by Bush after the 9/11 attacks. If we intend to stop the ongoing loss of humanity, it is necessary to keep on opposing the abuse of power as best we can. As Gregory Kroger, a member of *World Can’t Wait*, announces: “we must stand up and take up the challenge to emancipate humanity and get beyond all oppressive and exploitive relations and ideas” (Kroger 2011: n.p.). It is exactly this sort of empowering protest that may effect change and, hopefully, via a recognition of a shared vulnerability and a shared

occupation of a seemingly exterior space that is in fact never outside the polity, work a restoration of a common humanity.

c) Ingrid De Kok's "What kind of man?" and the Loss of Humanity

Whereas in the previous chapter, one of the main foci was the denial of a shared humanity and the possibility of overcoming the distance between the 'Self' and 'Other' by realizing that we are all potential *homines sacri*, the concluding point of this chapter, at which I now arrive, is the necessity of reconstructing a shared humanity in the face of an ever-growing loss of humanity. We are not only all potential *homines sacri* but also potentially inhuman torturers. "What kind of man are you?" was the question Tony Yengeni asked Jeffrey Benzien at the TRC amnesty hearing in South Africa. It is this question that serves Ingrid de Kok as a starting point for a more general exploration of the psyche of humankind in a poem of the same title from her collection *Terrestrial Things* (2002: 25-27). In what follows, I explain how de Kok embeds and frames the individual case of Jeffrey Benzien's use of the wet bag in a more collective concern for the loss of humanity in states of exception such as South Africa, and the ways that the state of exception makes such inhumane acts possible. Instead of focussing on the wet bag torture method itself, the poem explores the question of a shared humanity and inhumanity or more precisely the loss of humanity in ongoing states of exception. What it discovers is that the loss of humanity is not something that marks out an extreme, peripheral site – the state of exception – but rather, that it is potentially a role that the reader too could take up, a place that all of us might find ourselves in, as much as perpetrators as victims.

What kind of man?

Tony Yengeni: 'What kind of man are you?' I am talking about the man behind the wet bag.' Captain Jeffrey T. Benzien: '.... I ask myself the same question.'

CAPE TOWN AMNESTY HEARINGS

I

- 1 It's the question we come back to.
- 2 After the political explanations
- 3 and filmy flicker of gulags, concentration,
- 4 re-education and ethnic cleansing camps,
- 5 prisons and killings in the townships and fields,
- 6 here at the commission we ask again,
- 7 can't get away from it, leave it alone:
- 8 'What kind of man are you?'

II

9 What kind of man mounts another
10 in deadly mimicry,
11 then puts a wet bag over his head
12 to suffocate him for ‘the truth’?

13 Lets her baby cry for her
14 from a nearby cell,
15 threatens to stop the crying?

16 Roasts meat on coals
17 while a man is burning on a nearby pyre?

18 Gives evidence like this
19 in daylight; but can give no account?

III

20 What kind of man are you?
21 What type? We ask and he asks too
22 like Victorians at a seminar.
23 Is it in the script, the shape of the head,
24 the family gene?
25 Graphology, phrenology or the devil?

IV

26 Nothing left but to screen his body.
27 We have no other measure
28 but body as lie detector,
29 truth serum, weathervane.

V

30 We look at his misshapen cheek,
31 how it turns away from questioning,
32 as if he’s an abused child;

33 at his mouth, its elastic pantomime;

34 at his sagging chin, glottal Adam’s apple,
35 throat no longer crisp from a morning razor;

36 at his eyes’ pouches, pitted olives, dunes;

37 at the eyes themselves,
38 how they sweat, don’t weep;

39 his ears, peaks on a listening uniform;
40 the hand with its thumb intact, its active fingers;

41 and the apparently depressed, possibly sedated,
42 shuffling lumbering cumbersome body
43 which then helpfully and earnestly
44 performs in slow motion with perfect memory
45 its training, its function: a tantric posture with wet bag
46 that just for a moment is so unbelievable
47 it looks like a pillow fight between brothers.

VI

48 Though of the heart we cannot speak
49 encased in its grille of gristle

50 the body almost but doesn't explain
51 'What kind of man are you?'

VII

52 This kind, we will possibly answer,
53 (pointing straight, sideways,
54 upwards, down, inside out),
55 this kind.

Immediately following its epigraph, Tony Yengeni's crucial question from the amnesty hearing "'What kind of man are you?'.... I am talking about the man behind the wet bag?", part I of the poem announces that this is the crucial point confronting the audience of the TRC hearing (who either personally attend the tribunal or who witness the hearing second-hand via radio, television or social media) as well as the reader of the poem. Although the epigraph, taken from the TRC amnesty hearing in Cape Town, determines the specific setting of the poem, the first and the last part both leave behind the specificity of the Benzien case and turn the question "What kind of man?" into a more general inquiry about the loss of humanity, asking: what kind of humanity can cause such suffering to other humans? This crucial shift from the individual to the collective perspective mirrors the shift from the Western single-event based trauma to the insidious trauma of the apartheid state as well as of the other states of exception.

Thus, before finding out "at the commission" (part I, line 6), what kind of man Benzien is, the speaker of the poem, using the plural pronoun "we", presents the reader with a whole list of institutionalized states of exception, from the Stalinist "gulags" (line 3) (see Hardy 2017), via the "concentration" camps of the Nazi Holocaust (line 3) (see

also Goeschel & Wachsmann 2012) that took their name from the British internment camps established for the families of the Boer combatants during the Second South African War (see Scott 2007), to the “[r]e-education” (line 4) camps of Mao’s Cultural Revolution (see Rogin 2018) or “ethnic cleansing camps” (line 4) in former Yugoslavia, to name only a few. What is pointed out here is the ubiquity and persistence of states of exception all over the world, epitomized, as in Agamben’s work, by the state of emergency as the rule, not the exception, and its paradigmatic localization that of the camp (1998: 20, 166-80). Already towards the end of part I, though, the “we” comes back to the situation in South Africa during apartheid, the “prisons and killings in the townships and fields” (line 5) (with an allusion to the “killing fields” of the Cambodian Khmer Rouge), before returning to the “here” and now “at the commission” (line 6).⁸⁸ Following this trend, the poem, from part II to part VI, becomes progressively more precise again.

In part II, for instance, an unspecific voice enquires in a series of questions (supposedly addressed to Benzien) what kind of man can commit all these cruel deeds to another human being, including the wet bag method: “What kind of man mounts another / In deadly mimicry, / Then puts a wet bag over his head / To suffocate him for the ‘truth’?” (lines 9-12). The single quotation marks around the words “ ‘the truth’ ” allude to the questionable efficiency of such an interrogation technique in gaining the desired information. What is more, the single quotation marks may also imply a critique of the TRC’s division of various categories of truth and its different rating (as already discussed in previous chapters). Are the TRC hearings effective in producing the ‘truth’? Perhaps the Benzien hearings themselves epitomized and brought to the fore the aporia in the TRC’s own founding brief. As Shane Graham points out, “the gaps and inconsistencies in Benzien’s accounts [...] call into question the nature and power of ‘truth’ constructed through public hearings” (2009: 27). If Benzien’s testimony is considered ‘factual truth’, as all the amnesty hearings are according to the TRC report, then how, the speaker wonders, can Benzien give “evidence like this / in daylight; but can give no account?” (part II, lines 18-19). Benzien’s psychologist tried to explain this by claiming that his partial amnesia is a symptom of PTSD but whether this applies to “ ‘the truth’ ” (part II, line 12) cannot be answered either. Nor can any other question be

⁸⁸ As already explained in the first part of this chapter, the unusual amnesty hearing of Benzien may itself be called a state of exception.

resolved. The further we progress through the poem, however, the more answers recede. Parts III to VI attempt to explore “like Victorians in a seminar” (part III, line 22) what type of man Benzien is to be able to inflict such inhumane pain and suffering on another human being. However, neither “the shape of the head” (part III, line 23), nor “the family gene” (ibid, line 24) nor “[g]raphology, phrenology or the devil” (ibid, line 25) is able to answer this question. Screening his “body as lie detector” (part IV, line 28) does not help either: “The body *almost* but doesn’t explain” (part VI, line 50, my emphasis) what kind of man he is. Even after further careful observation of Benzien’s “mouth, its elastic pantomime” (part V, line 33), of his eyes (“how they sweat, don’t weep”; ibid, line 38), and his “active fingers” (ibid. line 40), no single facet of the figure can possibly explain what kind of man Benzien is.

Melissa Shani Brown states that nothing can explain what kind of man he is, “because the question attempts to locate something inhuman in him, and ultimately Benzien remains human, or at least uncannily familiar” (2012: 216). This is most surprisingly shown in the description of his re-enactment of the wet bag method in part V of the poem:

41 and the apparently depressed, possibly sedated,
 42 shuffling lumbering cumbersome body
 43 which then helpfully and earnestly
 44 performs in slow motion with perfect memory
 45 its training, its function: a tantric posture with wet bag
 46 that just for a moment is so unbelievable
 47 it looks like a pillow fight between brothers. (part V, lines 41-47)

The person described here does not give in the slightest the impression of being a cruel torturer. His body has suffered physically (his movements are “lumbering”, line 42) and psychologically (“apparently depressed, possibly sedated”, line 41). Benzien is now an old man, not as agile as in the past when he committed these crimes but he can still recall “with perfect memory” despite all his patches of amnesia, the “tantric posture with wet bag” (line 45). The man as we see him at the TRC amnesty hearing is not the monster “we” imagine – this contrast is highlighted by the oppositions of adverbs: on the one hand we have vague formulations such “apparently”, “possibly”, and on the other hand precise ones such as “helpfully” and “earnestly”. Thus, what Benzien re-

enacts here on demand of his former victim - a brutal torture method he repeatedly used back in the past - looks now more like something entirely harmless, “like a pillow fight between brothers” (line 47). Susan Spearey notes that “the horror of the scene is a function of its ‘almost unbelievable’ familiarity, its quotidian character, its uncanny resemblance to forms of ‘everyday’ conflict that are naturalized and encoded as innocent” (2008: 10). Spearey’s characterization of the banality of Benzien’s brutality could equally characterize the insidious trauma of apartheid experienced by millions of non-white people on a daily basis, so horrible and yet so familiar. The brutalities the majority black population endured during apartheid were not exceptional; they became part of their daily experiences so that there might have been a kind of numbing in the perception of people’s suffering, at least from the perspective of those who committed these crimes on a daily basis. Thus the form of Benzien’s humanity in inhumanity, rather than the specific content (the wet bag method), links it to the insidious trauma of apartheid, with its own banality of everyday humiliation.

There is a looming danger of getting used to committing, but also seeing and hearing about brutalities when they turn into everyday experiences. For Benzien, the wet bag method, although *apparently* not an official specific instruction from the apartheid government as he claimed, belonged to his professional duties. He committed these crimes ‘apparently’ only to protect the apartheid state from a constant looming threat from the ‘terrorist Other’. The wet bag method thus seemed justified in that ongoing state of exception called apartheid. For the sake of protecting the nation, anything is possible and tolerated, something that now re-occurs in the name of the Global War on Terror.

As it turns out, nothing about a person’s appearance can tell us about the degree of his/her evilness. The question “What kind of man are you?” cannot be answered since anyone may possibly become such kind of inhumane *human* in a state of exception as the last part of the poem most clearly indicates: the pointer “this kind” (lines 52, 55) is already vague enough to speak of a ‘species’ and not of an individual; this is generalized even further by the “we will possibly answer” (line 52); and then subsequently blurs into a flurry of confused directional pointers: “straight”, “sideways” (line 53), “upwards, down, inside out” (line 54). Step by step, De Kok generalizes the “answer” so that it refers, potentially, to everyone, everywhere. The torturer whose inhumanity is unleashed during the state of exception gradually becomes the rule - or his inhumanity a potential state of exception in every human being.

Simon Lewis claims that in these final lines De Kok “dramatizes Hannah Arendt’s observations about the banality of evil” and challenges “the reader to shift from privileged position of observer and judge” (2003: n.p., see also Spearey 2008: 10). De Kok’s poem rehearses the inability to find out what makes Benzien evil, because it is not in his difference from us as readers (the difference that allows judgement), but in his similarity to us that, in fact, that the site where the potential for evil lies can be located. The best exemplification of this principle can be found in the notorious figure of Adolf Eichmann. In her *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1977), Arendt reported on the war crimes trial of Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi operative responsible for organising the transportation of millions of Jews and others to various concentration camps in support of the Nazis’ Final Solution. While attending the trial, Arendt observed that Eichmann, similarly to Benzien, was an ordinary, rather bland, bureaucrat, who in her words, was “neither perverted nor sadistic”, but “terrifying normal” (1977: 275). He acted without any motive other than diligently to advance his career in the Nazi bureaucracy. Apparently Eichmann “never realized what he was doing” due to his “inability [...] to think from the standpoint of somebody else” (ibid: 276). He “committed crimes under circumstances that made it well-nigh impossible for him to know or to feel that he [was] doing wrong” (ibid.). This is a good description of the state of exception where the usual functioning of the law does not apply and where it becomes possible for people to treat other human beings as if they were ‘bare life’ or less-than-human. Arendt calls these characteristics “the banality of evil” (1977). Although she was harshly criticized for apparently playing down the harm Eichmann caused to the Jews, she points out a rather complex and dangerous issue, one also picked up by De Kok: the potential that we may not only all become *homines sacri* but inhumane torturers without realizing it. States of exceptions, such as the Holocaust, the apartheid system, or the Global War on Terror, increase the likelihood of losing our humanity. As Sontag explains in her essay on the Abu Ghraib images:

People do these things to other people. [...] Not just in Nazi concentration camps and in Abu Ghraib when it was run by Saddam Hussein. Americans, too, have done and do them when they are told, or made to feel, that those over whom they have absolute power deserve to be humiliated, tormented. They do them when they are led to believe that the people they are torturing belong to an inferior race or religion. (2004: section 3)

outside of moral laws, has become one of “this kind”, that is, the human race. De Kok’s poem turns the problematic “inside out” (line 54). In the broader realm of insidious trauma, the poem thus insists, there is no place outside the human and its moral sphere.

The logic of the state of exception, which creates a blurred zone of indistinction between life and death, good and evil, perpetrator and victim, where the “outsider” is excluded from the polity (an “outlaw”) but still inside the punitive ambit of the state’s violence, and the perpetrator applies state violence but outside the rule of law, is turned “inside out”. Esposito, in his examination of “the black box of biopolitics” from the Nazi era onwards claims that “confronting it from the outside” is not enough: “Something else is required and it has to do with penetrating within it and overturning [...] its bio-thanatological principles” and “then [turning] them *inside out*” (2008: 157, italics in original). Esposito’s “inside out” takes the banished and abandoned “outside” (“bare life”), brings it “inside”, and promotes all life to the status of “social life”. For Esposito, once the “turning inside out” has been effected, there is no longer any “outside”, and no “bare life”. There is no longer any state of exception. By the same token, the outlaw status occupied by the perpetrator required to confess his atrocities before the TRC is one that potentially we could all occupy. It becomes a possible site of a flawed humanity, but a humanity for all that.

Although the poem does not offer any concrete suggestions to end the ongoing loss of humanity it “invites us into the space of ethical encounter: it plunges us into uncertainty; encourages us to engage creatively with circumstances in all immediacy, specificity and complexity; and forces us to experience the insecurity of not knowing any obvious and correct course of action to follow” (Spearey 2008: 10). Within the space of “bios”, a space of inclusion that “turns” the biopolitical space of the state of exception inside out, ethical decisions cannot any longer be taken according to inside/outside distinctions; all ethics must be decided on the basis that all of us are human because we have the potential to be inhuman, and that even when that happens, we do not leave the domain of the human. Spearey cites Brian Massumi, who states that “ethics is about how we inhabit uncertainty, together” (qtd. in Spearey 2008: 10). Spearey concludes that “to inhabit uncertainty, *together*, then, is to recognize and respond to ‘contradictory voices’ and competing claims that come to light in the course of any testimony’s articulation, and to endeavour to *recompose* without ‘resolving’ the turbulence to which such encounters give rise” (2008: 11, emphasis in original). It is exactly at this point that the empowerment can be detected. Far from replicating

victimization, De Kok's poem offers the perpetrator-status as a paradoxical site for moral choice and thus for resistant acts. By the same token, then, it also implicitly transforms the site of victimization, however hard it may be to imagine this, into a site of potential "affective ties".

MUTED MOUTHS: CONCLUSION

In contrast to PART I of this thesis where I focussed on the limits of Western trauma theory in dealing with the insidious trauma of the Global South and the inability of the Western “talking cure” to articulate and resolve insidious trauma, PART II was centrally concerned with insidious trauma. Given the entirely physical modes of muting the mouth that I discussed in the last three chapters (muzzling the mouth, taping or sewing the lips together, or filling the mouth with water to the point of suffocation) it becomes impossible to regard silence as a psychosomatic reaction to a prior trauma. Rather, the instruments of torture and coercion that I discussed in PART II demonstrate that silence is what modes of oppression, in the past and in the present, deliberately seek to produce in the most concrete manner. Silence *is* trauma, produced again and again. This is insidious trauma, ongoing today like the ongoing state of exception announced since the beginning of the Global War on Terror.

It is hence not enough merely to acknowledge the insidious trauma of the ‘Other’ caused by the Global North over a long period of time by exposing the injustices in works of art. Such depictions of trauma may only run the risk of re-*present*-ing the very same suffering these writers and artists try to reveal, thereby perpetuating, rather than alleviating, insidious trauma. What often remains hidden and *unheard* in these postcolonial texts of which I analysed several examples (Bailey’s *Exhibit A* and *B* and numerous waterboarding protest performances) are the many voices of those subjects who, despite being muted in one way or the other, continue to “talk back” (hooks 1988: 5) with - or even without - a violently muted mouth.

Insidious trauma cannot be entirely healed because it does not cease, but the way in which the multiple facets of insidious trauma are approached in my counter-examples (Lôbo’s *Iron Mask*, *White Torture*, Al Assad’s “Asylum”, Parr’s *Close the Concentration Camps*, *World Can’t Wait*’s waterboarding protest and De Kok’s “What kind of man?”) has the potential to enable “the invisible but agentic work of the imagination to reconfigure our social world” (Motsemme 2004: 910). These counter-examples thus demonstrate that even within ‘states of exceptions’ (and there are various all around the world as we have seen) where political subjects are reduced to what Agamben calls ‘bare life’, resilience can still subsist against all odds and affective ties can emerge and trigger political change.

In order to prevent a continuing loss of humanity, it may be necessary to become aware of the potential to become both *homines sacri* and perpetrators, and to understand that we have nonetheless a choice to resist. If we are to acknowledge a common vulnerability, alongside a common danger of complicity, and build upon that the necessity to restore our humanity, we may be able to “[come] together” (line 109) “for a working tomorrow” (line 112) even if “the flights of this journey” (line 113) are “mapless” and “uncertain” (line 114) as is said in the last stanza of Audre Lorde’s poem “On My Way Out I Passed Over You and the Verrazano Bridge” (1986) (from which a I have already quoted another passage in Chapter 4):

109 And I dream of our coming together
110 encircled driven
111 not only by love
112 but by lust for a working tomorrow
113 the flights of this journey
114 mapless uncertain
115 and necessary as water.

CONCLUSION: The Cut-Off Tongue

Images of the wounded mouth occur frequently in cultural works both from the Global South and the Global North. The motif is often related to some form of trauma. I began this thesis by comparing two such images: Viktor Koen's puzzle image of a battered doll's head where a piece is missing in the place occupied by the mouth, and Ingrid Mwangi's digitally manipulated photograph *Echoing the Mood* which depicts a face without a mouth. The purpose of this comparison was to explain my major argument about the use of the wounded mouth motif in Global South trauma literature and visual arts: namely, that there is a decisive difference between language-loss as a symptomatic reaction towards a single traumatic event as explained by Western trauma theorists, and the loss of language as part of an insidious trauma, caused and perpetuated by continuing forms of structural discrimination.

Let me summarize once more the two main facets of my argument. In the first part of this study, the insidious trauma of displacement and the loss of indigenous languages (tongues) were exemplified with reference to a number of works where language loss *as* insidious trauma was implicitly contrasted to individual traumas that *led to* the 'wounding of the mouth'. In Gail Jones's *Sorry*, for instance, these two configurations of trauma are incorporated in the characters Mary and Perdita respectively. In the second part of the study I then complicated the tension between Western trauma theory and Global South trauma theories by turning to the question of the inadvertent perpetuation of insidious trauma in the very act of portraying it. Thus, for instance, Ngũgĩ's reiteration of the example of Indigenous pupils punished by the colonizers for speaking their native languages by having their mouths stuffed with waste-paper risks re-inscribing that disempowerment. By contrast, Campos-Pons's video still from *No es otro día cualquiera* (*Not Just Another Day*), where a white ribbon inscribed with the English words 'identity' and 'incident' is pulled out of the mouth by the woman depicted in the image, offers a more complex response. There, a resilient refusal to accept the imposition of the language of the colonizer and a search for ways to live in an empowered fashion with the wounds of trauma are foregrounded by the text. Such empowerment is instantiated more generally, however, by Ngũgĩ's decision to write in Gikuyu, and by Campos-Pons's attempt to revive her cultural heritage while simultaneously drawing upon forms of cultural appropriation.

Mirroring the two images examined in the introduction, and cognate contrasting pairs through the subsequent chapters, which in turn echo the two-part argument, I would like to end the thesis with a final comparison, this time between two much older narratives: the famous Western myth of Philomela as presented by Ovid in Book VI of his *Metamorphoses* (1955: 401-674) and the Southern African folktale “How Tortoise Won Respect” (retold in Mhlophe 1995: 51-56). Both these tales employ yet another image of the wounded mouth to question the power of verbal language in the context of trauma: the cut-off tongue.

The two examples serve as a heuristic pair that aids me in summarizing my findings about dissonant approaches to trauma in Global South cultures, as exemplified in the various images of the wounded mouth. Numerous authors and artists, both from the Global South and the Global North, employ the image of the mutilated tongue as exemplified in the tale of Philomela to emphasise the impossible task of verbalizing traumatic experiences. Most of them, as I explain below, do so by telling their trauma narratives according to the main elements of Western trauma theory as described in the introduction. There are, however, a number of writers who seem to go beyond the application of the Western trauma model by exploring insidious trauma in terms of what I have called Global South trauma theory. In these examples, we may locate something akin to the spirit of the Southern African folktale and its motif of the severed tongue.

Ovid’s myth of Philomela recounts how Procne, after a few years of married life with Tereus, asks her husband to fetch her sister Philomela from Athens. Tereus, flaming with desire for his sister-in-law, gains the king’s permission to escort Philomela to Thrace, but on the way back he takes her to the middle of a forest, rapes her and, in order to prevent her from denouncing him, cuts out her tongue. He then leaves her imprisoned in the forest and tells Procne that her sister has died on the journey. Although Philomela’s body has become the site of masculine oppression, she refuses to accept the role of a silenced victim and does not identify with the passive role forced upon her by Tereus. Instead she becomes active and uses an embodied language to inform her sister of the atrocities committed upon her. By weaving her experience into a tapestry she demonstrates a possibility of emancipation via art, a form of embodied language that seems to elude masculine discourse. Philomela and her sister plot revenge and kill Tereus’s son but this does not seem to bring any relief of the trauma experienced. In the end all three characters are turned into birds with bloodstains on

their feathers, reminding them forever of a traumatic experience that haunts them for the rest of their lives.

In contrast to this Western myth, the Southern African folk tale, “How Tortoise Won Respect”, uses the motif of the cut-out tongue not as a coercive form of punishment and intimidation of the ‘Other’ but as an empowering defence mechanism used by the subaltern as a form of protest and resilience to oppose the oppressor.⁸⁹

In search for a new place to live far away from the threat posed by human hunters, a group of animals eventually settles in a peaceful area until one day Gongqongqo, a huge and frightening ogre, appears and claims the space for himself. He eats the animals’ crops, drinks all the water and threatens to eat them too. Even Lion, the leader of the animals, cannot scare away the monster and eventually gives in to resignation, telling the other animals to leave their new home and seek some other place to live. However, diminutive Tortoise, often not taken seriously by the others because of her size and slowness, refuses to capitulate. She presents a plan to Lion to conquer the ogre and reclaim their space. Lion eventually agrees and provides her with a sharp axe, which Tortoise hides under her shell. She then courageously goes off to face Gongqongqo. She provokes his anger and in this way tricks him into eating her, but once in his huge mouth, she chops off his slimy tongue from inside, thereby causing his death. Tortoise then hacks her way out of the monster and Lion promotes her to the status of most respected creature in the land alongside himself.

Whereas in the African folktale it is the apparent ‘subaltern’ in the disguise of a small tortoise who manages to chop off the oppressor’s tongue so as to free her⁹⁰ people from subjugation, in the Western myth of Philomela, it is the oppressor who forcibly deprives the subaltern of her voice and agency by cutting out her tongue. In both cases, the excision of the tongue marks the attempt to strip someone of the power of her/his voice and agency; in the case of the tortoise the undertaking is successful (the ogre dies), while in the case of Philomela the attempt at disempowerment fails (she tells her story via weaving), so that the apparently powerless female victim emancipates herself

⁸⁹ The whole story, which is part of Africa’s rich oral culture, can be found as a printed version in Gcina Mhlophe’s *Tales From Africa* (1995). The story, among many other tales, has also been turned into a CD, read by Mhlophe in such a manner so as to highlight the significance of orality. You can listen to the story online under <https://soundcloud.com/africancream/how-tortoise-won-respect>.

⁹⁰ Interestingly, the tortoise is female in this tale, which emphasizes the empowerment of the ‘Other’ also in terms of gender.

by finding an alternative way of communicating with her sister despite the absence of her tongue.

Although both narratives are concerned with the power of language and empowering forms of resistance on the part of the subaltern, the great majority of works that contain the motif of the severed tongue, whether from the Global North or the Global South, refer to or are derived from only the classical Western myth of Philomela. However, there are a few instances - almost all of them from the Global South - where the version of the severed tongue narrative dramatized is similar to that of the Southern African folktale rather than the Philomela myth.

In what follows, I will first mention some literary and visual texts where the intertextual reference to Philomela is quite obvious, before presenting examples that allude to a narrative pattern more akin to the sentiment of the African folktale. As it transpires, it is in these latter examples that we may detect forms of empowerment connected to an insidious trauma experienced by the 'Other' that cannot be approached or explained in terms of Western trauma theory. Similarly to many of the images of the wounded mouth reviewed in this thesis, such examples work via affect. The two examples and their respective avatars thus exemplify the two main oppositions that underpin my argument: first, classical Western trauma theory posited upon a notion of punctual, individual trauma as opposed to a Global South trauma theory attentive to the longer-term phenomena of insidious trauma (Part I); and second, artistic representations of insidious trauma that end up merely replicating and perpetrating it, as opposed to those that resist it by creating affective ties that nurture resilience and empowerment (Part II).

How do the various cognates of Philomela and the Tortoise tale respectively resonate with the explorations of what we might call Western as opposed to Global South trauma theory, as investigated in Part I?

Ovid's narrative about a woman's traumatic experience of extreme violation (the rape and the subsequent excision of the tongue) and her ultimate decision to bear witness to this atrocity despite the absence of a tongue has provided many writers, filmmakers and artists with an ideal intertextual reference to explore the oppression of the female 'Other' in patriarchal systems; it has allowed them to investigate how women subvert these traditional power systems by having recourse to means of communication that go beyond masculine discourse.

In some works, the reference to the Philomela-myth is quite explicit, as for instance, in Shakespeare's play *Titus Andronicus* (c. 1594), where Lavinia is first raped by Chiron and Demetrius and then deprived of her tongue and hands so as to prevent her from telling her story. Lavinia even points with her stumps at the Philomela-passage in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to make her fate known to her father, uncle and nephew (Act IV, scene 1). Julie Taymor's postmodern feminist film adaptation of the Shakespeare play, entitled *Titus* (1999), refers explicitly to the Western trauma concept to approach Lavinia's trauma by using flashback-scenes where Lavinia "acts out" – both literally and in the terms imagined by Western theory – her trauma (see Aebischer 2004). Emma Tennant's feminist short story "Philomela" (1975) follows closely the plotline of the myth, but opts to narrate the traumatic event from Procne's homodiegetic perspective rather than from the authoritative voice of a heterodiegetic male narrator, thereby empowering the female character of the story.

In other works, such as Dennis Scott's Jamaican play *An Echo in the Bone* (1974), J. M. Coetzee's South African novel *Foe* (1986), Ken Loach's British/Nicaraguan film *Carla's Song* (1996), André Brink's South African novel *The Other Side of Silence* (2002), and Newton I. Aduaka's Nigerian film *Ezra* (2007), the intertextual reference to Philomela may be implied but not explicitly marked.⁹¹ Here too, the severing of the tongue often follows another traumatic event, which may be rape or other forms of physical torture (such as the severing of the female or male genitalia) in the context of slavery, colonisation and civil war. In Brink's *The Other Side of Silence*, for instance, the protagonist Hanna X experiences severe maiming of her sexual organs before being mut(ilat)ed and in Aduaka's *Ezra*, the protagonist's sister is first raped and then deprived of her tongue which makes her later on an unsuitable testifier at the Truth Commission.⁹² In both Loach's *Carla's Song* and Coetzee's *Foe*, there is a vague suggestion that the mutilated 'Other' may have also been deprived of his male genitals. The (apparently) mut(ilat)ed characters in these last two texts both reject any attempts to approach the core of their traumas.

⁹¹ See more about the marking and non-marking of intertextual references in Jörg Helbig's *Intertextualität und Markierung: Untersuchungen zur Systematik und Funktion der Signalisierung von Intertextualität* (1996: 87-91, and 155-161).

⁹² In contrast to many other films on child soldiers in African civil wars written and directed by Western filmmakers, *Ezra* is much more complex in the way it presents the postcolonial civil war situation and the complexity of trauma, which – as the film implies – cannot be approached and explained via Western trauma therapy. Significantly, Ezra's sister is not able to testify about what she has witnessed and experienced at the Truth Commission according to the usual rules of conduct since she has no longer a tongue to "talk" and "cure" (according to Herman's Western talking cure).

Of these works, Scott's *An Echo in the Bone* and Coetzee's *Foe* are the ones that most obviously escape the traditional Western trauma concept while foregrounding and laying bare the insidious trauma of the loss of language in their work.

In Scott's play *An Echo in the Bone*, which is set during the traditional nine-night ceremony held in honour of the spirits of the dead, a series of dreamlike sequences take us back to the time of slavery, plantation life and to the murder of a white estate owner. In an earlier incarnation Rattler, one of the slave characters, has had his tongue cut out on board a Middle Passage slave ship. The loss of the colonized subject's tongue is associated here with the legacy of the Slave Trade, and, within the specific Caribbean context, with the loss of African languages. The motif of the severed tongue thus plays with the loss of the tongue in both meanings of the word: as the organ that produces speech and as the language one speaks. It instantiates the way the loss of language in insidious trauma is not simply an effect of trauma, but constitutes the very process of an ongoing trauma without end.

In Coetzee's *Foe*, the insidious trauma experienced by slaves, as exemplified by the figure of Friday, can also not be explained or even approached in terms of Western trauma theory. The novel circles around the mystery of Friday's severed tongue and the impossibility of the Western subject's narrating and explaining the insidious trauma of the 'Other'. It is particularly in *Foe* that I locate the idea of empowerment via a disruption of the dominant discourse as exemplified, for instance, in the Southern African folktale, even if Coetzee does not refer specifically to such a narrative. It is as if, in Coetzee's novel, the Western tongue - its power to explain and penetrate the mystery of the other - is cut out of the narrative enunciation.

If we are to read Gongqongqo's tongue as a metonymy of the still dominating discourse of the Global North, then we may discover that there are indeed numerous examples mentioned in this thesis that similarly resist the dominant discourse of the Global North, chopping it off so to speak. To use once again Espósito's terminology, the Global South image of the severed tongue turns the logic of the Philomela-myth "inside out". Coetzee's *Foe*, for instance, takes the imposed mutism of Friday and, via the conceit of the absent tongue, "strives to remember the silencing of this other, the history of forgetting of which Daniel Defoe's novel is itself a part" (Durrant 1999: 439).

This "history of forgetting" is also highlighted in works such as Lôbo's *Iron Mask*, *White Torture* and Jones's *Sorry*, albeit in a very diverse manner. Lôbo's *Iron Mask*, *White Torture* responds to the "history of forgetting" by recalling in a multi-

semiotic bundle of modes of communication a continuing history of black female empowerment that has been silenced in dominant Western discourses. Jones, as a privileged white Australian, is, similarly to Coetzee, careful about how “to remember the silencing of this other, the history of forgetting”. Throughout her novel there are passages that hint at the unacknowledged insidious trauma of the Stolen Generations, and hence the forgotten crime of the successive Australian governments without going too far into the depth of the Indigenous people’s psyche, thereby avoiding appropriating the Other’s voice.

How much do such attempts counter amnesia and recall trauma, in some cases replicating it, and, in others, conversely, offering forms of empowerment, as investigated in Part II?

Like Coetzee, Jones, Miller and Parr are aware of the danger of speaking on behalf of the ‘Other’ as many privileged white artists and writers of ‘postcolonial texts’ indeed tend to do, as for instance, Bailey in his performance installation *Exhibit A and B*. It is not sufficient to reveal the cruel histories of the past as imposed upon the Global South at the hands of the Global North (that would be a postcolonial approach – to focus on the relationship between colonizer and colonized) but to realize how relevant it is to think about how to approach such issues in a dialogue with those who are actually affected and those who share similar experiences across the Global South. There is a tendency to replicate structures of victimization despite the best of intentions when protesting against forms of exploitation, oppression and dehumanization. This aspect is most explicitly highlighted in the last three chapters of the thesis.

Like the image of the cut-off tongue, the wounding of the mouth in the last three chapters is forcibly inflicted upon the subject from outside in a quite literal manner. The focal point here was to explore how insidious trauma is dealt with in cultural appropriations and how easily such cultural appropriations can fall into the trap of replicating forms of victimization that contribute to the perpetuation of an insidious trauma. Numerous works of art, music, literature, and protest activities employ images of the wounded mouth to thematize the insidious trauma of the discriminated ‘Other’ at the hands of the Global North; they seek to reveal the many cruel hidden histories behind the deprivation of voice and agency in the context of slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism. Although these works are doubtless motivated by goodwill, they nonetheless display a tendency to perpetuate the very same victimization they try to expose.

By contrast, however, I show that there are many other works, often from the Global South and the diaspora, that employ the image of the wounded mouth not merely in order to reveal stories about victimization at the hands of the oppressor; rather, they divulge numerous silenced histories of powerful resistance and resilience coming from the oppressed ‘Other’ despite (or even via) their wounded mouths.

Thus, to return to the pair of images that structure this concluding section: the Southern African folktale is *not* a story of continuing victimization, where the ‘Other’ is once again subjected to bare life (although, as we have seen, Philomela also refuses this imposed status); instead, it is a story of powerful resistance where the oppressor is defeated once and for all and the subaltern is freed from his/her inferior position.

This resisting figure recurs in several of the works mentioned in this thesis where not only the Other’s history of suffering is revealed, but also his/her continuing history of resistance and the possibility of living on with the wounds of trauma in empowering ways. These narratives of resistance do not occur in the dominant discourses of the Global North. They are mostly silenced, even in so-called ‘postcolonial’ texts. Such perpetuation of victimization is evident, as shown above, in Bailey’s performance installation *Exhibit A and B*, or in the many protest performances which re-enacted genuinely life-threatening waterboarding scenes.

The empowering examples in my thesis, from Jones’s *Sorry*, Miller’s *REwind*, Searle’s *Mute*, Lôbo’s *Iron Mask*, *White Torture*, Parr’s *Close the Concentration Camps*, Al Assad’s “Asylum”, to the waterboarding performance by *World Can’t Wait* and De Kok’s powerful collection of poems entitled *A Room Full of Questions*, manage to escape to a large extent the perpetuation of victimization and display instead empowering forms of protest that may tie people together in affective ways.

By the same token, these texts also elude the language-based assumptions of Eurocentric trauma theory. In contrast to the classical Western trauma approach to the healing of trauma that seeks to reconstruct individual subjectivity via some form of verbal expression (for instance the so-called “talking cure”), the focus in these Global South narratives lies in the recovery of the collective, allowing different possibilities of becoming in which the voicing of resilience and resistance is not restricted to Symbolic language.

Let us return a final time to the Philomela/Tortoise pair of images. Whereas Philomela manages to tell her traumatic story via the means of a tapestry, thus situating it within the realm of visual iconicity, Friday’s bodily language in Coetzee’s *Foe* cannot

be deciphered at all. His repetitive flute tunes, his dancing, and the final flow of wordless sounds coming out of his mouth remain a mystery. In this respect, Friday's silence resembles Mary's wordless Indigenous customs and her cat's cradle in Jones's *Sorry*, Searle's silent weeping in *Mute* or Nomonde Calata's heart-breaking cry at the TRC hearing. Neither the other characters in the novels, nor the reader or the spectators of these audio or visual performances, gain access to the traumas of these Others' sufferings that are embedded in larger insidious traumas of Indigenous peoples. These artworks gesture towards the inscrutable 'Other' who resists any interpretation or *represent*-ation within the terms of Western trauma theory.

Friday's silence, like the tongue-tiedness and muteness of the other subjects presented in my empowering examples, can thus be read as a form of resistance. In this way, as Durrant suggests, Coetzee's *Foe* "differs from other postcolonial rewritings of canonical texts [...] in that it does not attempt to recover the voice of the colonized other" (1999: 439).

Each of the works I examined in this study, whether visual, textual or musical, is exceptional and embedded in a specific historical, political and social context. They were carefully composed by artists coming from South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, Australia, Brazil, Cuba and Iran but despite their diversity there are numerous similarities among these cultural contributions from the Global South (and the diaspora) that *tie* them together, thereby offering a powerful interconnectiveness that may effect positive change in a world that is in danger of heading increasingly towards a loss of humanity.

APPENDIX

1) *"Tongue-Tied"* by Ingrid de Kok from *Terrestrial Things* (2002)

- 1 "Do you promise to tell the truth,
2 the whole truth and nothing but the truth?"
- 3 Someone's been hurt.
4 But she can't speak.
5 They say she's 'tongue-tied'.
- 6 Like an umbilical neck throttle.
7 No spit, sound, swallow.
8 Voice in a bottle.
- 9 Now she's speaking underwater,
10 To herself, to drowning,
11 To her son, her lost daughter.
- 12 Her tongue's a current
13 Washing over dead fish,
14 Abandoned rope and tackle.
- 15 "They came for the children, took, then me,
16 and then, then afterwards
17 the bucket bled. My ears went still.
18 I'm older than my mother when ..."
- 19 The gull drags its wing to the lighthouse steps.
20 "That's the truth. So help. Whole. To tell."

2) *"The Archbishop chairs the first session" by Ingrid de Kok from Terrestrial Things (2002)*

THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION.
APRIL 1996. EAST LONDON, SOUTH AFRICA.

- 1 On the first day
- 2 after a few hours of testimony
- 3 the Archbishop wept.
- 4 He put his grey head
- 5 on the long table
- 6 of papers and protocols
- 7 and he wept.

- 8 The national
- 9 and international cameramen
- 10 filmed his weeping,
- 11 his missed glasses,
- 12 his sobbing shoulders,
- 13 the call for recess.

- 14 It doesn't matter what you thought
- 15 of the Archbishop before or after,
- 16 of the settlement, the commission,
- 17 or what the anthropologists flying in
- 18 from less studied crimes and sorrows
- 19 said about the discourse,
- 20 or how many doctorates,
- 21 books and installations followed,
- 22 or even if you think this poem
- 23 simplifies, lionizes
- 24 romanticizes, mystifies.

- 25 There was a long table, starched purple vestment
- 26 and after hours of testimony,
- 27 the Archbishop, chair of the commission,
- 28 laid down his head, and wept.

- 29 That's how it began.

3) *"The transcriber speaks" by Ingrid de Kok from Terrestrial Things (2002)*

1 I was the commissioner's own captive,
2 Its anonymous after-hours scribe,
3 Professional blank slate.
4 Word by word
5 From winding tape to hieroglyphic key,
6 From sign to sign, I listened and wrote.
7 Like bricks for a kiln or tiles for a roof
8 Or the sweeping of leaves into piles of burning:
9 I don't know which:
10 Word upon word.
11 At first unpunctuated
12 Apart from quotations and full stops.
13 But how to transcribe silence from tape?
14 Is weeping a pause or a word?
15 What written sign for a strangled throat?
16 And a witness pointing? That I described,
17 When officials identified direction and name.
18 But what if she stared?
19 And if the silence seemed to stretch
20 Past the police guard, into the street,
21 Away to a door or a grave or a child,
22 Was it my job to conclude:
23 'The witness of silence. There was nothing left to say.'?

4) *"Sorry Song" (1998; 2007) by Kerry Fletcher*

- 1 If we can now say that we're sorry
- 2 To the people from this land
- 3 They cry, they cry, their children were stolen
- 4 They still wonder why
- 5 Sing, sing loud, break through the silence
- 6 Sing sorry across this land
- 7 We cry, we cry, their children were stolen
- 8 Now no-one knows why
- 9 We sing with our hearts, respect for each and everyone,
- 10 Together with hope burning strong.
- 11 Sing, sing loud, we've broken the silence,
- 12 Let 'sorry' start healing our land.

5) *South Africa's national anthem "Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika" (1997)*

Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika Maluphakanyisw' uphondo
lwayo, Yizwa imithandazo yethu, Nkosi sikelela, thina (Xhosa and Zulu)
lusapho lwayo.

Morena boloka setjhaba sa heso,
O fedise dintwa le matshwenyeho, (Sesotho)
O se boloke, O se boloke setjhaba sa heso,
Setjhaba sa South Afrika - South Afrika.

Uit die blou van onse hemel,
Uit die diepte van ons see, (Afrikaans)
Oor ons ewige gebergtes,
Waar die kranse antwoord gee,

Sounds the call to come together,
And united we shall stand, (English)
Let us live and strive for freedom,
In South Africa our land.

English translation of Xhosa and Zulu version

Lord bless Africa
May her glory be lifted high
Hear our petitions
Lord bless us, your children

English translation of Sesotho version

Lord we ask You to protect our nation
Intervene and end all conflicts
Protect us, protect our nation
Protect South Africa, South Africa

English translation of Afrikaans version

Out of the blue of our heavens
Out of the depths of our seas
Over our everlasting mountains
Where the echoing crags resound

6) *"Beasts of No Nation" (1989) by Fela Kuti*

Ah- Let's get now into another, underground spiritual game
Just go to help me the answer, go to say, "Aiya-kata"- Oh ya
O'feshe-Lu

AIYA-KATA *(after each line)

O'feshe- g'Ba

O'feshe-Woh

AIYA-KATA *(after each line)

O'feshe-Weng

Aiya kata

Aiya Koto

Aiya Kiti

Aiya Kutu

O'feshe-Lu

AIYA-KATA *(after each line)

O'feshe- g'Ba

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Oh-----...

Basket mouth wan start to leak again, oh-
BASKET MOUTH WAN OPEN MOUTH AGAIN, OH
Abi** you don forget I say I sing, ee-oh **(is it not)
BASKET MOUTH WAN OPEN MOUTH AGAIN, OH
Oh, I sing, I say, I go my mouth like basket, ee-oh, Malan Bia-gbe-re
(2x)
Basket mouth wan start to leak again, oh-
BASKET MOUTH WAN OPEN MOUTH AGAIN, OH
Fela, wetin you go sing about?
DEM GO WORRY ME... *(after each line)
(3x)
Dem go worry me, worry me-- worry, worry, worry, worry
DEM GO WORRY ME *(After each line)
Dey wan to make us sing about prison
Dem go worry me, worry me-- worry, worry all over da town
Dey wan to know about prison life
Dem go worry me, worry me-- worry, worry all over da town
*(repeat stanza)
Photos
Fela, wetin you go sing about?
DEM GO WORRY ME
Dem go worry me, worry me-- worry, worry, worry, worry
The time weh I dey, for prison, I call am "inside world"
The time weh I dey outside prison, I call am "outside world"
Na craze world, na be outside world
CRAZE** WORLD *(after each line) / **(crazy)
Na be outside- da police-i dey
Na be outside- da soldier dey
Na be outside- da court dem dey
Na be outside- da magistrate dey
Na be outside- da judge dem dey
Na craze world be dat
Na be outside- Buhari dey
Na craze man be dat
Animal in craze-man skin-i
Na craze world be dat
Na be outside- Idia-gbon dey
Na craze man be dat- oh
Animal in craze-man skin-i
Na craze world be dat
Na be outside- dem find me guilty
Na be outside- dem jail me five years
-----I no do nothing
Na be outside-dem judge dey beg ee-o

Na craze world be dat, Na craze world be dat
Na be outside- dem kill dem students
Soweto, Zaria, and Ife
Na craze world be dat, ee-oh
Na craze world be dat,
Na be outside- all dis dey happen
Na craze world be dat, ee-oh
Na craze world be dat, ee-oh
Na craze world be dat, ee-oh
Na craze world be dat, ee-oh
Na craze world be dat, ee-oh...
Make you hear this one
War against indiscipline, ee-oh
Na Nigerian government, ee-oh
Dem dey talk ee-oh
"My people are us-e-less, My people are sens-i-less, My people are indiscipline"
Na Nigerian government, ee-oh
Dem dey talk be dat
"My people are us-e-less, My people are sens-i-less, My people are indiscipline"
I never hear dat before- oh
Make Government talk, ee-oh
"My people are us-e-less, My people are sens-i-less, My people are indiscipline"
Na Nigerian government, ee-oh
Dem dey talk be dat
Which kind talk be dat- oh?
Craze talk be dat ee-oh
Na animal talk be dat

7) *"On My Way Out I Passed Over You and the Verrazano Bridge"*⁹³ (1986) by Audre Lorde

1 Leaving leaving
2 the bridged water
3 beneath
4 the red sands of South Beach
5 silhouette houses sliding off the horizon
6 oh love, if I become anger
7 feel me
8 holding your heart circling
9 the concrete particular
10 arcs of this journey
11 landscape of trials
12 not to be lost in choice nor decision
13 in the nape of the bay
14 our house slips under these wings
15 shuttle between nightmare and the possible.

16 The broad water drew us, and the space
17 growing enough green to feed ourselves over two seasons
18 now sulphur fuels burn in New Jersey
19 and when I wash my hands at the garden hose
20 the earth runs off bright yellow
21 the bridge disappears
22 only a lowering sky
23 in transit.

24 So do we blow the longest suspension bridge in the world
25 up from the middle
26 or will it be bombs at the Hylan Toll Plaza
27 mortars over Grymes Hill
28 flak shrieking through the streets of Rosebank
29 the home of the Staten Island ku klux klan
30 while sky-roaches napalm the Park Hill Projects
31 we live on the edge
32 of manufacturing
33 tomorrow or the unthinkable
34 made common as plantain-weed
35 by our act of not thinking
36 of taking
37 only what is given.

⁹³ The gaps in the poem are in the original.

38 Wintry Poland survives
39 the bastardized prose of the New York Times
40 while Soweto is a quaint heat treatment
41 in some exotic but safely capitalized city
42 where the Hero Children's bones moulder unmarked
43 and the blood of my sister in exile Winnie Mandela
44 slows and her steps slow
45 in a banned and waterless living
46 her younger daughter is becoming a poet.

47 I am writing these words as a route map
48 an artefact for survival
49 a chronicle of buried treasure
50 a mourning
51 for this place we are about to be leaving
52 a rudder for my children your children
53 our lovers our hopes braided
54 from the dull wharves of Tomkinsville
55 to Zimbabwe Chad Azania
56 oh Willie sweet little brother with the snap in your eyes
57 what walls are you covering now
58 with your visions of revolution
59 the precise needs of our mother earth
60 the cost of false bread
61 and have you learned to nourish your sisters at last
62 as well as to treasure them?

63 Past darkened windows of a Bay Street Women's Shelter
64 like ghosts through the streets of Marazan
65 the northeastern altars of El Salvador
66 move the belly-wise blonded children of starvation
67 the once-black now wasted old people
68 who built Pretoria
69 Philadelphia Atlanta San Francisco
70 and even ancient London – yes, I tell you
71 Italians owned Britain
72 and Hannibal blackened the earth from the Alps to the Adriatic
73 Roman blood sickles like the blood of an African people
74 so where is true history written
75 except in the poems?

76 I am inside the shadow dipped upon your horizon
77 scanning borrowed Newsweek where American soldiers

78 train seven-year-old Children boys
79 to do their killing for them.

80 Picture small-boned dark women
81 gun-belts taut over dyed cloth
82 between a baby and a rifle
83 how many of these women
84 activated plastique near the oil refineries
85 outside Capetown
86 burned their houses behind them
87 left
88 the fine-painted ochre walls
89 the carved water gourds still drying
90 and the new yams not yet harvested
91 which one of these women
92 was driven out of Crossroads
93 perched on the corrugated walls of her uprooted life
94 Strapped to a lorry
95 the cooking pot banging her ankles
96 which one
97 saw her two-year-old daughter's face
98 squashed like a melon
99 which one writes poems
100 lies with other women
101 in the blood's affirmation?

102 History is not kind to us
103 we restitch it with living
104 past memory forward
105 into desire
106 into the panic articulation
107 of want without having
108 or even the promise of getting.

109 And I dream of our coming together
110 encircled driven
111 not only by love
112 but by lust for a working tomorrow
113 the flights of this journey
114 mapless uncertain
115 and necessary as water.

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