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I'm not going back to the Township; Re-imagining 'trauma' as tragedy.

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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Abstract

In the place of wound, healing must take place. But how do you heal if you're presently living in a wound? How do you heal if you have lost touch with the other?
This research responds to trauma through the tragic form of theatre, it understands tragedy as a means in performance to try to foster healing using the practice of performance as a mode of research. It argues that as a practice, theatre making in the South African context is affected by traumatic experience and to engage with trauma, requires social and historical relations to be considered. The research focuses on how African oral traditions, modern poetics and music might be used as a process of re-imagining the tragic form and utilising it to better understand how theatre making can hold space and safely lead the process of healing without re-traumatizing the participants.

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Nothing is impossible, even blind men can see in their dreams.

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Introduction

In the place of wound, healing must take place. But how do you 'heal' if you are presently living in pain, a reoccurring wound? As a theatre-maker, my challenge is posing that question on the floor through the practice of performance as a mode of research. This has led me to re-search a language in performance that re-imagines (disrupts) the tragic form of theatre to try and forge healing. My points of investigation have included: poverty as a performance of the everyday and Makhafula Vilakazi's poetics as a case study; interrogating the structural setup of the township as a site of trauma; writings on myth, legends and modes of African storytelling; the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its ineffectiveness in fostering a sense of healing through remembering; trauma theory and collective amnesia (confronting the 'monster').

My research argues that as a practice, theatre-making often aligns with trauma theory and for trauma theories to be effective, social, and historical relations must be considered. The research takes a qualitative approach focusing mainly on oral traditions, modern poetics, and songs as a process of re-imagining the tragic form and utilising it to better understand how theatre-making can hold space and safely lead the process of healing or function as a process of the documenting thereof.

Look into the wind, listen to the fire tell you about the sky.

Witness a Phoenix burst into flames,

out of your oesophagus.

There he is, dangling on a plastic noose. Dying.

Mirror gunshots in his eyes

He's burping cries of a new-born baby.

His nostrils are flooding with sewerage.

His armpits are a dumping site for new-born babies.

Do not mistaken him for a fly, he is still human.

His stomach still gives haunting howls.

His body is a decaying site for trauma.

His Legs began crumbling the day he was born.

His skin, a moving billboard for famish.

Do not wonder why he keeps shaking

It is you who took away his dreams

It is your father that fed him nothing but nightmares

He is kicking like an animal

He is dancing to the strings of your violence

Do not mistaken him for a fly, he is still human.

Stop looking at him with disgust

He is drinking his brother's blood

He is scrapping for that you do not need

He is waving just to be seen

Look at him….

This is your design

Your prayers have been answered.

Entse ele motho, is a Sesotho proverb meaning 'he/she/they is/are still human. It is used in cases where one is faced with a trauma- inducing experience/series of 'bad' events experienced by a single person. The proverb is used as a plea for mercy to God/Ancestors/Universe, as a reminder that one human being can only take so much pain. In the beginning of my research, I interrogated the effectiveness of using the concept of 're-visiting' trauma to un-archive the suffering incurred by Black people (main study being performers) from the township, and hopefully foster a healing process. Later, I continued looking at the effectiveness of using the concept of Re-visiting/Re-telling, but this time it was based on personal accounts/trauma on stage to un-archive the suffering incurred by Anele, a performer from Delft, a township on the outskirts of Cape Town.

All my adult life I have been a person who does things according to a plan; often I would see my plans working out. The beginning of 2020 when I started this research was like any other year, it was no different. But Covid-19 would change all of that. Like most people in the world, I found myself trapped, at home without a plan. I was without work, without a

plan, without hope. I found myself staring straight into poverty's mouth, mentally and emotionally at the brink of a breakdown. I often scream to God, my Ancestors, the Universe, "*Kentse kele motho*" (I am still human). Nothing in this world was making sense, until one day during one of the hard levels of lockdown, I was forced to discern what it means to be black and poor? To be in a place (the township) where you are by default, subjected to live like an animal. This is how my research interest was sparked: how do we un-archive bodily trauma in the performer as a healing process?

During our lockdown MA studio online with Prof Jay Pather, we had to choose key words we associated with our research and to create three images for each word to see what this would conjure in us, as practitioners. Initially I had the words famish, violence and human. For the images, I decided I needed to create a relationship between myself and the architecture of the township. I could not get to the township, so I began interrogating the spatiality of the Woodstock and Salt River areas, as some parts of these areas are structured like a township. I was looking at architecture around the Woodstock and Salt River areas as I felt their colonial style architecture posed some sort of violence.

Then we had to create a 1minute 30 second video that spoke to our research and our bodies being in motion. According to Visser (2015:252): "The metaphor of trauma often used in trauma theory is that of a sudden, sharp piercing of a membrane, as, for instance, by a sharp object implanted in the psyche, where it remains in its original form, hidden behind the screen of consciousness, but making itself known through a series of symptoms". For this given task, I did not want to go to any township in Cape Town but rather poke the symptoms inside of me. I needed to recreate the township trauma in me, without physically making myself experience it again. I needed a sharp piercing of the membrane.

I decided to shoot this video at the Salt River station bridge, because of its architectural design that for me resembled prison bars. Salt River is a suburb that over the years has been occupied in the majority by Coloured people with Cape Malay roots, and other people from all over the world. For some reason, this suburb for me emulated all the symptoms of a township. The suburb has over the years been going through an urban regeneration process which then began a process of gentrification; gentrification breeds displacement, displacement is a site of trauma. Gentrification in the Salt River area is creating a township effect of poverty, like how those who cannot afford the exorbitant prices of staying in the upper side of the area, are forced to move to the lower side or are even displaced to townships like Delft, far away from the economy.

> *Queen Elizabeth, ngina 16 years ngagcina Uk'gibeli taxi, Ngiyi'shlahla sase mjondolo, ku nikezwana ngam ama direction.* |Queen Elizabeth, it's been 16 years ever since I rode a taxi, I am the township tree, I have become a living landmark for directions. (Makhafula, 2014)

In creating this video, I listened to the poem, *Glen Dlamini*, lingering in the background, my movements at first were not choreographed, I just felt the space and then holding onto those hard steel bars of the bridge, I imagined myself train-surfing my way out of the township. The rhythm of my feet were guided by this wanting to get out. Ngyehla' I stuff! In this poem, Makhafula articulates well the dangers of being displaced and not being able to be a part of the economy. You are stuck in a never-ending cycle of poverty, alcoholism, abuse. The township is an organizing mechanism of trauma, and I'm not going back to the township.

For the 3rd task in our studio, we were asked to create a moving installation; to shoot a 2–3-minute video using an object and architecture as the main points of focus that speak to our research and our bodies again being in motion. For this task I had to think of an object that held a visceral meaning, something close to me. The idea of memory through an object is sparked when I think of laundry pegs, they remind me of sunny weekend days at home, my mother, washing away our sins. I used to marvel at my mother as she used her hands to meticulously wash a mountain of dirty laundry because we did not own a washing machine (a process which would have long term negative health effects, she lives with arthritis now). During my childhood, I could only concentrate for so long, so I used to play with pegs. I would imagine myself flying out of the township, I could hear these pegs sound like a Boeing that used to pass through our skies every Saturday midday. Pegs held a memory of hope for me, that lay beyond this crammed landless space. I will one day fly out of this hellhole of trauma. As a child, I found refuge in pegs. For this task, I took pegs and went up to Rhodes memorial above the University of Cape Town, where a statue of Rhodes stands tall with an emptiness in its eyes, overlooking the beauty that is Cape Town. My first encounter with the statue and noticing its gaze over the city, made me rather uncomfortable, unsettled by the thought of how Rhodes is one of the major perpetrators of marginalisation and displacement of (Black) people on the coast and beyond.

For this task, we were asked to look at how our bodies move in an environment that is objectified, to re-imagine the object and look at what it does in relation to the body in space, to look at how the object and environment conspire. I began the video playing with the pegs, going back to my childhood. Flying. Until I was hit with the reality of this ghost of Rhodes that still lingers in the air. I start by plugging the pegs on my shirt and trying to shake them

off (bringing myself back to reality, Buya!). As I continue with my movement, I decided to take off my shirt as if I could smell this stench of colonialism on me. Like my mother, I will wash away these atrocities.

Historical and Artistic Context

Poverty, Trauma, and the Township

> "*Part of the original theory's Eurocentrism is its exclusive focus on the event-based model of trauma, which does not account for the sustained and long processes of the trauma of colonialism*" (Visser, 2015:2).

As a practice, our way of working with theatre-making in South Africa in the aftermath of colonialism and apartheid is affected by trauma theory to some degree. So, in my research through practice, I am trying to contribute by looking at postcolonial trauma theory through the lens of theatre and performance.

> Modernism has been used during the 20th century to support and justify political aims and agendas. Although social inequality in South Africa has roots in its colonial past, it was in the 1950's that institutional segregation was formalized resulting in race-based spatial structures and inbuilt inequalities. (Haarhoff, 2011:184).

The township in South Africa is a spatial structure masterminded by the apartheid regime to inflict trauma on Black people. The township is an archive of traumatic history. This archive packages the pain and poverty of people who live in the township while Sandton glitters. The archive is not limited to the physical structures but living there is an extension of these structures.

I am reminded of the year 2020, a year in which the world as we knew it came to a standstill, the deadly novel coronavirus hitting everything in its way. It was a year in which the have-nots were reminded that their lives amount to nothing. The township became barren, there was nothing you could do if you were not lucky enough to have some sort of 'grant'. This plague automatically archived famine, struggle, mental illness, alcoholism, gender-based violence and stillness. Its in the stillness that one day, as I was doing my normal 'chilling' and basking in the sun with a few friends of mine, I noticed three kids walking and just minding their own business as they gladly laughed and played without a worry in the world. To be a child again. On the other side of the street, I saw two of my friends coming in our direction, one holding a recyclable container filled with potato chips (slap chips). The container was slightly opened to cool down the delicious content soiled in knock-off tomato sauce. As my friends were walking, something told me to keep my attention on the little boy in the middle. As soon as the young boy noticed the two gentlemen walking in the opposite direction, from a distance, something in him changed. He had a very concentrated focus about him; he even stopped engaging with his friends. His eyes were dead set on those succulent chips. As the two gentlemen approached closer, the little boy ran as if there was a

dog unleashed. He ran as if his life depended on it and without a warning the little boy threw himself at the gentleman, his tiny little hand darting into the container of chips and coming out with a handful. His hand was dripping the pink sauce and the chunk of chips his little hand would allow him to take. With his hand up in the air as if celebrating some sort of victorious feat, the boy at once sat down (a ritual we have been taught as a black person in the township, you do not eat whilst walking/standing) and he devoured that handful of chips without any care in the world. As I was still shocked by what was transpiring, the gentleman whose chips had been expropriated, started kicking the little boy on the back while he was busy sending an army of curses at the young one. The boy had no care in the world, he didn't flinch. He just sat there and enjoyed the little meal he had 'worked' for. Why would someone so young allow themselves to take what does not belong to them? Why would he 'loot'? Something hit me in that moment, what if he knows that where he is going, there won't be anything to eat? What if wherever he comes from, he has been living off a promise? As the boy dug into the handful of chips with bared teeth, and the lashing of boots landed on his back, I realized something, that this is inhuman behaviour. The little boy had turned into an 'animal', his survival instinct had kicked in. It was either eat or die. My heart sank, how can a mere 7-year-old already be living on a survival instinct? As I was watching this unfold, I heard different comments from people on the side-lines. One person asked: "who's child is this? What type of mother would allow their child to starve like this?" As I tried to decode this question, I asked myself again: "Why does this person assume that it is the mother who is struggling to put food on the table? What of the father?" Again, as I found answers within, I was hit with the reality that most households in the township are run by single women. Of course the reasons vary, but the township's setup from the 1950s was to have black men work menial jobs and for the women to look after their children. Many years later, as the world was brought to a standstill by a virus, the will to survive had not changed, how the world treats black people has never changed. The township is an organizing mechanism of trauma.

Performance of testimony and the TRC'S Ineffectiveness in South Africa

"Testimonial theatre is a genre wrought from people bearing witness to their own stories through remembrance and words" (Farber, 2008:19). According to Anton Krueger (2010:99): "The aim of the TRC, as defined by the 1993 constitution, was the promotion of national unity and reconciliation in a spirit of understanding the divisions of the past". There were sixteen truth commissions in the world before South Africa's, but the South African version

of the truth commission was the first to take place in the public eye (Cole, 2010: xii). South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was the first truth commission ever to employ an amnesty provision in its work. Conversely, the Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation did not have the legal authority to grant amnesty, though an existing amnesty law put in place by the former military regime effectively protected perpetrators from prosecution at that time (Minev, 2008:3). Previous truth commissions were conducted behind closed doors and became known to the public through the publication report (Cole, 2010: 9). Before the introduction of the TRC, there were two known commissions in South Africa that happened publicly during the transition phase namely, the Human Rights Violations Commission (HRVC) and the Amnesty Committee (Cole, 2010:4). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was meant to foster a sense of healing through remembering and talking about the apartheid experience which would ultimately lead to the 'Rainbow nation' the then South African Government had envisaged post-1994. But as leading human rights lawyer, Yasmin Sooka (2021) comments, the TRC has been a focus of justice gone wrong. The establishment of the TRC was based on a compromise; there was a conditional amnesty deal that was planned, and which included reparations and victim negotiations amongst other things. According to Sooka, the amnesty compromise was to offer a smooth transition of power between the old apartheid government and the new incoming government, but it overlooked the fact that former apartheid president F.W. De Klerk, never agreed to declare the apartheid state as a violation of human rights. The intergenerational trauma has been 'taken over' by families of apartheid victims and the failure to prosecute has disillusioned many up to today. According to Cole: "The power of the TRC was its ability to make visible that which had been unseen" (Cole, 2010:6). However, in her presentation, Sooka makes reference to two cases that transpired during apartheid and were tabled at the TRC, but no prosecution took place, and no form of catharsis has been afforded the victims' families. The first case is of Mpumalanga born, MK and Student activist, Nokuthula Simelane, who disappeared in 1983 whilst on an ANC mission from eSwatini (formerly known as Swaziland) to South Africa. She was arrested and transported to Norwood in Johannesburg where she was tortured and killed and is believed to have been buried in the North-West Province (SAhistory Online: 2021). When the TRC was instituted, Simelane's family filed her case with the TRC hoping the case would be solved. Wellem 'Timol' Coetzee and four other white men who were all part of the Soweto Intelligence Unit (SIU), also known as the "Soweto Death Squad", all applied for amnesty in connection with her kidnapping and

torture. The gruesome details of her torture were presented at the TRC but none of the men confessed to her killing and no form of catharsis was afforded the victim's family.

The second case is that of anti-apartheid activists, Matthew Goniwe, Sparrow Mkhontho, Sicelo Mhauli and Fort Calata who after their deaths became known as the Cradock Four. On 27 June 1985, on their way back to Cradock from Port Elizabeth, the four were arrested at a roadblock set up by the Security Branch, assaulted, and murdered. In 1987, a first inquest concluded that the Cradock Four had been killed by 'unknown persons' and no one was prosecuted for their assault or murder. A second inquest in 1993 found that the police had caused the Cradock Four's deaths. However, no individuals were named responsible. Again, no one was prosecuted. In 1999, six former police officers involved in the Cradock Four's arrest and murder appeared before the Amnesty Committee of the (TRC), but none of them were granted amnesty. Again because of a failure to prosecute to this day and no responsibility taken by the perpetrators, the families of the victim have been left reeling and catharsis has remained absent.

28 years after the first democratic elections and the spectacle that was the TRC, the country still reeks of inequality and the people are still affected by the atrocities of apartheid one way or the other. "Mythological or timeless stories are generated to represent complex and volatile scenarios that speak to what has been unspeakable in South Africa" (Farber, 2008:12). Yael Farber has created plays based on the lives of the cast members she has worked with. Amongst all her plays, she created three of them based on the effect apartheid had on the performers' lives and she calls this method 'performance of testimony'. This involves acknowledging the past through sharing one's personal story on stage, aided by the audience bearing witness to the performer's experience with the intention of questioning but not trying to offer a solution. The three plays Faber has created in this manner are *WOMAN IN WAITING* (2000*)* which tells the story of Thembi Mtshali, who as a child was separated from her mother who worked as a maid in the suburbs of Durban. Later, as a mother herself, she too is forced to leave her child to seek work in the affluent white neighbourhoods of South Africa. *AMAJUBA: LIKE DOVES WE RISE* (2001), here five actors perform their own stories, providing different personal perspectives on life under the apartheid regime. Then there is *HE LEFT QUIETLY* (2002*)*, the story of Duma Khumalo, one of the Sharpeville Six, wrongly accused of murder. Khumalo speaks of his experience of death row and the preparations made for his own death before receiving a last-minute reprieve. These plays bear testimony to apartheid, through the performer's perspectives and experiences (Farber, 2008:9). Unlike verbatim or documentary theatre, these stories are not drawn from reportage.

In the process Farber uses poetry, metaphor, and songs to garner text that bears witness to the actual lived experience of the performers. The first step in Yael Farber's process is to let the performers give versions of their memories based on the given subject of their lives. Whilst the performers talk, Farber starts digging deeper by asking specific questions around those memories; a Christmas day in their childhood; the colour of their dress; what did their shoes look like? By doing this, a story will emerge through the finer human details. "When gathering material, the person telling their story should not consciously contrive a compelling narrative" (Farber, 2008:20). Farber spends most her time with her cast discussing childhood songs, writing letters to family members to say things they would never have had the opportunity to say, and in the mornings of every rehearsal, they would tell her about the dreams they had the previous night. Because she usually has a shorter time to create new work, the gathering of material, shaping it into text, then staging and rehearsal of the work usually happens concurrently. Testimony of the performers' plays an important role in the process, because through these testimonials, the audience can bear witness to the lived experiences of the performers. Speaking and listening to each other can form a part of healing, hence it is imperative for Farber to document these testimonials in the process. But what is it in this creative process that Farber believes aids in some sort of healing to the performers? As much as she doesn't blatantly claim that her method brings any sort of healing, there is a strong suggestion that she believes it does create a sense of healing through talking about one's experience. Nonetheless, it is clear that there is still some confrontation and healing that needs to take place for the country to be united and fruitful for everyone residing in it. As much as we live in the present, the past still haunts us. In this case, haunting is about feeling or emotion.

Oral traditions and poetics: Like a dream.

Mandla Mbothwe defines liminality as the state of moving from one state of being to another, where a person in a liminal state is in a process of becoming but is not yet; for s/he is not in a present fixed point and nor is s/he in a future fixed point (2008:12). When one is in a dream state, time is not linear, there is a continuous ever changing and shifting of space. Mbothwe's theatre seeks to speak to the hearts and spirit of people; a theatre in which the line of demarcation between audience and performers is blurred; in which the spiritual world and the world of reality coexist – a world of liminality. His idea of a dream play is inspired by Swedish playwright and director, August Strindberg, Ben Okri's poems and the early work of director Brett Bailey. From Strindberg's A Dream Play (1901), he takes the moving from

realism to a more expressionist theatre, from Okri his ability to link dreams and storytelling in the African tradition, and from Bailey, his fascination with the myths and beliefs of the Xhosa people.

> Our parents taught us in the spirit of ubuntu and through the art of storytelling, singing, poetry and cultural rituals, that this power was always with us to protect and guide us, and to punish us when we went astray. (Mbothwe, 2008:28)

Mbothwe also makes use of oral poetics in the construction of his dream plays, he draws from these Xhosa oral traditional performance forms and his conception of the *African Dream Play* lies in a belief that it might provide a means of reconstructing the spirit of *ubuntu* through theatre (2008:5). His work stems from the 'wound' of colonisation and apartheid and reflects and highlights the importance of finding healing through performance. Dreaming is an ability all humans are capable of, so with reimagining dreams on stage and the liminality being a marginalised space that holds the possibility of potential forms, structures, conjectures, and desires, is it safe to say that through dreams on stage it is possible to create a neutral safe space in theatre that aids a process of healing? The visceral, myths and the modes of African storytelling used by Mandla Mbothwe aid in helping to understand the effectiveness of dreams in theatre.

Research Journey

The Minor Project - *Nomayini*

I found myself introspecting after an encounter with George, a homeless man who carried nothing but an old blanket. He asked me for something to eat, anything. *Nomayini*. In that moment when I could smell the hunger and despair in his eyes, I kept wondering (re-looking) what exactly is it to be human? If we as (Black) people must suffer like this? To be reduced to begging for anything. This encounter reminded me of a poem, *Glen Dlamini* from the 2014 debut album titled, *I am not going back to the township* by Soweto born law-firm director and poet, Matodzi Ramashia alias Makhafula Vilakazi. The poem is a letter from Glen Dlamini, a character Makhafula narrates as self in the moment, to Queen Elizabeth whom he refers to as my English *sgogwana;* a term used in the township to refer to a 'cougar' (an informal term used to describe an older woman who prefers dating much younger men). Glen writes this letter with the "hope" that it will find its way into the Queen's heart; he writes a plea as a love letter. He shows the Queen, how the prolonged and cumulative trauma brought on by colonialism still reeks in the township till this present day.

> *Ang'vatelwa nga nex, Ngikhohl'we naku Census. Ma'k lahleka ama hosepipe, k'shoda ama bhodlela I number one suspect u- Glen.* (Vilakazi, 2014*)*

Glen mentions that he is regarded as nothing by society, he even gets forgotten during a census. When hosepipes and bottles go missing, the number one suspect is him. This is one of the many stanzas that have stuck with me ever since I first listened to the album in 2014 and painfully enough, eight years later, this is still a reality for people like George. In his work, Makhafula is able to capture the brutality of life in the township and looks at redefining our (Black) identity by scrutinizing history and the effects of historical events on Black Africans. He articulates struggle in a hauntingly captivating way, using a mixture of Tsotsitaal, isiZulu, SeSotho and English as a medium for his writings.

Part of my artistic statement for the minor project reads: "I ask 'Society' to discern, how it is possible that a (Black) person (In a Township) is subjected to violence in all its forms, and 'Society' keeps moving as if nothing is wrong?". Instead of just concentrating on an individual who had nowhere to stay, I saw a collective similarity in us. Displacement. To be displaced is to be inherently traumatised.

My minor performance begins with Makhafula's poem *Ngamla*, a term used for black men who have acquired wealth usually through the BEE system. In the poem, he places

himself as a car washer who doubles as Ngamla's personal assistant. Using tsotsitaal in this poem, Makhafula articulates the inhuman treatment a black man suffers in the township if he is economically disadvantaged. This type of treatment is a phenomenon, a performance, that I believe is universal; a man who cannot provide (financially) is deemed worthless. In the township, poverty is a performance that is prevalent, usually seen, or experienced when one cannot add value (to society) financially and is made to do menial tasks, e.g., an old Man made to be an errand boy during family gatherings, even their offspring suffer the same fate. They are marginalized during play time.

> *Woza bozza yamina, Nomayini eyenzekayo ngamla yami, e khuphul'ubu sober ngamla Range rover, noma yi rizler ngamla thiza, four iris my better brother yaris.* |(*Come* this way boss, please give me anything that would make something happen, anything that will disrupt my sober state). (Vilakazi, 2014*)*

Here the car washer calls out for the Range Rover-driving BEE mogul and asks him for any spare change. He needs to feed his drug addiction; he would be grateful for anything he gets. For a majority of black men in the township to survive they need not be sober, reality is too painful to bear. How Makhafula is able to weave tragedy into text so violently yet so carefully is a skill I aim to master with my writing as well. Writing a tragic text with such creativity seems to help distance the writer from the trauma, the repetitive process of writing (especially where re-visiting of trauma is needed) tends to numb one from the trauma. To speak about it, is to naturally unharbour oneself, to repeatedly go through the process, is in a way fostering a sense of healing.

I use the poem *Ngamla* as a pre-set (on repeat) in the staging of my minor project. Performed in the P4 studio (a black box theatre), I am centre stage, wearing a well-tailored silver suit, sitting comfortably on a couch with a laptop on my lap. I am juxtaposing the everyday hustle and bustle of the car washer to a middle-class Blackman "Fat cat" who needs to slave through to keep his "middle class" status, for there is a thin line between middle class and being poor for a black person in South Africa.

The medium project: *Salungano*

*'I am not going back to the township ngoba ngigwaziwe, ngishayiwe, nginokhiwe kwenele ngiyanisaba (*I am not going back to the township because I have been stabbed, beaten and robbed. Enough now, I am scared of you all *Accessdiary*, 2018).

Anele is a weaver who after losing his family (partner and child) moves to Delft: a township in Cape Town. Unlike other weavers, he decides to build a nest atop a streetlight pole, which heightens his perspective on the hardships of loneliness. Through memory he remembers his partner, through dreams he can touch his child.

> *We always asked for warm water, its cold here.*

This process, like that of Farber, starts with taking on the real stories of the performer. Anele Kose who is the performer and main study in this project, was arrested and taken to prison in October 2005, after committing a crime that would see him getting sentenced to five years. Neimeyer (2006:68) urges clinicians to help trauma victims' "re-story" their lives. For my medium project, I built a nest using wool as representation of *ibhuma* (ritual space), where the wool coming out of the nest resembled an umbilical cord: where one comes from. But because of the activity that frequents this nest, it becomes a settlement. A township, a grave to bury the memory of pain. Through my movements of knitting, I try to create a newness. This is not to remind ourselves of pain, but to remind us that we are capable of weaving ourselves back again.

> *Ekasi, sivuka ngama thonsi e gazi (*we wake to droplets of blood in the township*)*.

Here Kose begins narrating a story of the township whilst sitting on top of a haybale and holding on to a polka dot design dress. The polka dot dresses on stage are a signifier of his partner's visceral presence after she passed on at a hospital moments before Kose reached the emergency room where she was. The first time he articulates this incident, it is with tears in his eyes. He remembers how she had sent him a text message, asking Kose to bring her something loose to wear at the hospital because she had been admitted wearing jeans and her legs had started swelling. He hurriedly took her polka dot dress to the hospital with him. As he was entering the facility, he noticed the ellipses sign (recipient of a message sees this when a message is being typed) was flashing on his messenger application from his partner, only to be told she had passed on by a nurse he met in the corridor. Anele then kept wondering and asking himself what is it that she wanted to say, the ellipsis had now been etched in his memory. Throughout the beginning of our process, I had tasked Anele with re-telling this story. Sheikh (2008) argues that clinicians may assist in the meaning reconstruction by listening carefully to their clients' stories and helping them reframe narratives in more life affirming ways. It is important to note that I am not claiming to be a

clinician or trained in the practice, but I do believe a similar pattern occurs when making theatre of this kind. The whole purpose of re-telling was to compare and analyse the emotions he carried when he told it the first time, to the 20th time when I realised that through constant re-telling and re-visiting of this ordeal, he started re-constructing his own meaning of loss.

In his re-telling of this ordeal, he highlights how his decision to commit this crime was influenced by poverty and perpetuated by the violence he witnessed daily in the township, and what he deems a necessity to help at home. Kose used the money to build his family home. But it is a decision that still haunts him. In November 2021 as we began the interview process, Kose mentioned that he now suffers from a condition that inflicts a permanent cold sensation all over his body because of incarceration and being placed in solitary confinement after what he says was an act of protecting himself from being victimized by fellow inmates. The space he was confined in had no direct sunlight and was constantly freezing, and he had to endure these living conditions for eight weeks straight. So, every time the warders brought food, he always asked for warm water. In his telling of this story, he narrates it as if he is telling a fairytale. I am intrigued by how his way of telling such an ordeal, at times protects him from an emotional trigger that he would succumb to when he narrated this story in a more documentary manner. This act of distancing through stylisation seemed important to any sense of healing he achieved through the performance process. However, it was important for me to make him understand that I am not a therapist nor claim that this process will help him heal from his trauma. Rather it was more of an exploration in using theatre making tools to try and see if they can foster a sense of healing for him.

When you start weaving
your hands are bound to look like they are peeling. Do reel them in, as if you are crocheting yourself inside of them
Come, come everyone and pray with me
Come, come everyone and knit yourself tightly unto my palms Become one with me, follow the thread.
Home is only a cotton field away.
So, when you start weaving, summon the ocean
Try by all means to whisper.
Remind it that.
It is only your kind who dared to knit facing upside down.

For the beauty of the world is only visible from an obscure perspective of drowning men
Do not leave them lying down
For every time you breathe?
Remember a legion is being woven into your lungs
When you start weaving
You will be blinded by that you do not see
Your hands are now starting to feel like they are healing Beware
They have started hovering your nest as it nears completion But relax
You are building a home in solitude
Still.

The above poem is sparked by my interest in the male Cape-weaver bird (biological name: *Ploceus Capensis*) through my observation of how the bird intricately weaves its nest for seven days, hanging upside down to attract a potential partner. It got more interesting when I realized that these theatrics sometimes did not yield the expected results; the female weaver (potential partner) would inspect and test the rigidity of the nest by pulling it apart from the inside and if she did not like it, then the male weaver would have to repeat the process of weaving. In my medium project, I used weaving as a metaphor of re-telling and connecting in the performer's testimony/story.

My medium project named *Salungano*: *story of a township weaver,* derives from the Vhavenda oral tradition of storytelling which employs a heightened level of semiotics in its form. According to Walsh (2017), semiotics connects the literary text to the "universe of signs" and thus to the network of sign systems that interact to imbue the text with its, historically based meanings. *Ngano* is a Tshivenda word for fairytales. Family members gather around *tshivhasoni* (fireplace) in autumn and winter to enjoy the harvest after toiling in the fields in spring and summer. Storytellers take turns to relate *Ngano*. The storyteller starts by saying "salungano *salungano",* meaning 'like *a fairytale like a fairytale',* and the listeners respond by saying *"saalungano"*.

The characters in the *Ngano* are usually humans and animals as signifiers of context for what the *Ngano* is about. Animals are given a voice and portrayed as interacting with humans and talking like humans. Animals such as a rabbit/hare (*Muvhuda* in Tshivenda) bears the fantastical name *Sankambe* in the *Ngano* and can be portrayed as mischievous and intelligent, whilst a baboon (*Pfene*) is portrayed as stupid and cunning and bears the

fantastical name *Mudzhou*. This is just an example of how Vhavenda use animals as signs in relation to making meaning in storytelling. Rananga (2008) mentions that storytelling began with the aim of transmitting the whole culture of the people from one generation to another. These tales were told as a means of recording some historical event (5).

Remember, we are a people of song!

"The greatness of a story is more on the telling than in the tale. The true art resides in the nature of the telling" (Okri, 2015).

"Nostalgia-noun: a wistful or excessively sentimental yearning for return to or of some past period or irrecoverable condition" (Webster, 2022).

I reflect on my childhood, a stern watcher of birds, especially cape weavers, because I had an unexplainable fascination with their call. Because I used to go plough with my grandmother, a lot of time my mind would wander, and I was always interested in watching birds and creating narratives in my head. These narratives were a form of escape for me, escape from a world I felt was just harsh. Through these narratives, I started making meaning of the type of life I wanted or deserved or should be living. I knew through those narratives that this reality is but a fleeting experience.

My medium project performance began on a pre-set with Kose and I singing *iGwijo*; synonymous with the Xhosa people, but a practice of collective harmonized singing deeply embedded in cultures across all South Africa. *iGwijo* in essence is a form of storytelling through singing without any use of an instrument by using the elements of call and response. In the pre-set, Kose and I are singing along to *igwijo* (*ulele*), a song about siblings comforting each other during adverse times. The first time I heard of this song, was through stumbling upon a video on YouTube of South African soldiers who seem to be at a military camp. I was taken by the sonicscape these soldiers were able to convey and how witnessing this performance brought up a communal pleading/grieving which I Instantly felt even through the screen.

> Part of these songs' potency resides in their being so cathartic across a range of human emotions: they can express joy, determination, and victory, but also devastation. A Gwijo 'performance' can celebrate, protest, resist or reclaim. Ultimately though, it draws on the power of the collective to attain a kind of fierce grace, a coming together in intensity. (de Tolly, 2020)

The intention of using *igwijo* is its ability to unite. This is an invitation to the audience, to us, the performers, ancestors, God. We are a people of song and the commonality of experience through singing *igwijo* becomes cathartic. Already in the beginning of the performance, the

catharsis brought upon singing together is a kind of weaving. According to de Tolly (2020), collective singing co-regulates our nervous systems with our fellow singers, reduces cortisol levels and releases a cascade of naturally occurring feel-good chemicals such as oxytocin and serotonin. Through group singing, we enter into more optimal brain wave states. All this means we feel safer, healthier, and more at peace for singing together.

Nostalgia is a phenomenon that disregards the present; by repeatedly living in memory, you are able to construct your own desired 'meaning of life'. During the process I tasked Anele to find a song that reminded him of his childhood, a song that reminded him of innocence. After going through an array of songs together, Kose finally, with a burst of laughter, said *yiyo le!* (this is the one). Here he affirms the nursery rhyme, *Kheth'omthandayo*, where children normally stand in a circle, do bodily gestures and clap hands simultaneously whilst singing. Like *Igwijo*, these nursery rhymes are sometimes in a form of storytelling through singing without any use of an instrument by using the elements of call and response. The purpose of using this nostalgic tool is to revisit a time where he had no memories of trauma, to create a different memory of his partner. In the performance, he imagines playing with her as kids, where they play a game to choose each other through a nursery rhyme. This would end up being Kose's favourite part of the performance because here he could re-create a memory able to conjure happiness in him. His memory of her is a positive one. He starts weaving dreams through the narrative of playing, he weaves a home he wants through memory.

Towards the Final project

The fourth stage: Tragedy from Aristotle to Soyinka

Tragedy is a form of performance synonymous with the Western form of drama. It is most often associated with the works of writers such as Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. The aesthetics of the classic tragic form are outlined in the *Poetics* by the Greek philosopher Aristotle. The tragic form is then developed in the renaissance period by writers such as Shakespeare. According to Hans-Thies Lehmann (2016): "Tragedy exists as the articulation of tragic experience in various alloys, all of which display different forms of theatricality" (4). In the classic Aristotelian articulation, the hero has a tragic flaw which leads him on a disastrous course of action which ultimately leads to a recognition of his flaw and a turning point in the action which results in a catastrophe – the hero's demise. Aristotle in his *Poetics* examines the dramatic elements of plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle, and song which combine to produce pity and fear in the audience and ultimately a form of catharsis. In this way, tragedy is fundamentally focused on the individual heroic figure.

In comparison, in *The fourth stage* (1976), Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian playwright and cultural theorist, dissects the tragic form of drama in the context of Yoruba theatre though ritual and orality/orature. The Kenyan author, Ngugi wa Thiong'o defines 'orature' as "works of imagination produced by word of mouth" (1998: 103) requiring "no mediation by the written sign" (105). According to Ngugi, orature is not "a branch of literature but … a total aesthetic system, with performance [as opposed to writing] and integration of [multiple artistic] forms as two of its defining qualities" (1998:117). For Ngugi, "Mime, dance, masks, music, story-telling: all these features of contemporary theatre are directly borrowed or developed from the traditions of orature" (112).

It is important to note that for centuries it has been assumed as a result of a Eurocentric bias, that writing and literature is more legitimate than orality/orature. For Ngugi:

> The dominant social forces … become identified with the civilized and the written. With colonization the same binary opposition was exported to Africa, with the written and the civilized being identified with Europe as a whole, while the rural, the oral, and the ahistorical were identified with Africa. The product of the oral no longer belonged to history because quite clearly the colonizer did not want the colonized to have any claims to any history as the basis of his resistance and affirmation of humanity. (1998: 108)

This is a narrative I believe Soyinka challenges in his understanding of tragedy from the Yoruba perspective. Soyinka outlines three different stages of existence: the living; the dead; and the unborn and then adds a fourth stage. The fourth stage is the stage of transition between these other three stages. In the fourth stage, through 'symbolic' action, the celebrants of a ritual move in between the different realms of existence by means of trance, song, movement, and dance. According to Dennis Sweet, the tragedies of Sophocles *et al*, required the observer to maintain a conscious awareness of everything happening on stage and to think about it (1999: 355). For Soyinka, Yoruba tragedy involves not the creation of 'awareness' but an immersive participation in a ritual that connects us with the ancestors or the supernatural as it is commonly known in Western academic terms. He speaks of the archetypes, reasons, and effects of the Yoruba tragedy, and mentions the Yoruba's belief in the metaphysical and how that has come to be represented on the modern stage. This is seen through his reference to the mythical gods like Ogun, god of creativity, guardian of the road, god of metallic lore; and Obatala, god of creation, and their comparison to the mythical Greek deities such as Apollo and Dionysus whom he believes idealistically might be similar. However, for Soyinka, the Yoruba tragedy is about the spiritual more than the aesthetics of the drama. According to Soyinka, the tragic hero, in Yoruba tragedy does not just remain in the physical realm but transcends to the cosmic realm where he relates with the gods.

In this act of transcendence, the ritual actor is supported by a chorus that chants, sings and moves as a collective. Soyinka makes an interesting point about the difference between the music in Yoruba tragedy and the music in European tragedy. He suggests that the European concept of music (in tragedy) does not wholly show the relationship of music to ritual and drama as does the Yoruba: "the true tragic music, unearths cosmic uncertainties which pervade human existence, reveals the magnitude and power of creation, but above all creates a harrowing sense of omni-directional vastness" (Soyinka, 1976:148). In this he mentions the "possessed" lyricist as a vessel that transcends into a different realm during performance, and who will chant unknown mythopoetics in the ritual and is transported thereby (unknowingly in his conscious state) into the liminal space. This is he what he refers to as the 'fourth stage', the vortex, the home of the tragic spirit.

> The singer is a mouthpiece of the chthonic forces of the matrix and his somnambulist 'improvisations' – a simultaneity of musical and poetic forms – are not representations of the ancestor, recognitions of the living or unborn, but of the no-man's land of transition between and around these temporal definitions of experience. (Soyinka 1976: 148).

This aligns with my argument in the previous section that “we are a people of song” and that *igwijo* has the ability to unite the performers, the audience, the ancestors, and God. In this way the commonality of experience through singing *igwijo* becomes cathartic and points to the idea that the African conception of tragedy is fundamentally more collective than focused on individual experience.

"S'bindi uyabulala, s'bindi uyaphilisa"

In my thesis production, I imagine the possessed lyricist as the core storyteller. The production concept is derived from the isizulu idiom "S'bindi uyabulala, s'bindi uyaphilisa", loosely translated as: Courage kills, Courage saves. I propose working on a re-telling of the tragedy, *Prometheus Bound*, by Aeschylus. The tragedy is based on the myth of Prometheus, a Titan who defies the god Zeus by stealing fire and giving it to mankind. In response, Zeus punishes him by chaining him to a cliff and sending a bird to devour his liver. The punishment continues *ad infinitum* as his liver grows back every day and again the bird returns to eat his liver.

It is important to note that the dangers of history (both documented and oral) can be easily construed and manipulated to fit a particular narrative or ideology. The story of Prometheus is one that I realized I am familiar with thanks to my grandmother. As I frequently went to the fields to plough with her she would narrate different stories (*dzingano)* to my twin sister and I. One such story was titled *U vhulaiwa musanda,* which directly translates to’ being killed in the royal house’. But as mentioned earlier, Tshivenda is highly semiotic in form; signs are used in relation to making meaning in storytelling. The title of the story loosely translated actually means ‘being called to the royal house’. In this story, we have Sankambe (Hare) who is the King (Musanda’s) favourite. After there has been a drought in the community, Vha-Musanda decides that no one will cultivate crops until all necessary rituals are performed and the ancestors are appeased. He decrees that if anyone defies this call they will be punished. The villagers soon start running out of food and begin starving. Sankambe notices how unfair it is that the villagers are running out of food whilst in the royal house they eat as much food as they want. One day he sets up a meeting with the villagers under the pretence that he was ordered to do so by the King to let them know that he has retracted his command and that the people can go cultivate their crops and be merry. Upon hearing what Sankambe did, Vha-Musanda decides that Sankambe should be brought to justice, but Sankambe has already fled his place of birth and settled at a nearby village. The

king's messenger is sent to bring back Sankambe so he can be punished. The messenger tells Sankambe that: "*Ni khou vhulawa musanda, ni khou do lisiwa tshivhindi",* which directly means*: "you are being summoned at the royal house and you shall be killed".* But because Sankambe is not familiar with the royal language, he agrees to come back with the messenger, thinking *u do lisiwa tshivhindi* - he would be fed lots of liver courtesy of the King. Upon his return, he is captured and placed in a lion's den where every day the lion consumes his re-occurring liver for centuries to come.

This story is similar to the myth of Prometheus. For my thesis production, I aim to have the actors tell stories using the arc of the Prometheus myth as a basis. I will tell the story of a group of township dwellers who have gone three months without electricity due to loadshedding and the lack of service delivery. This one night they sit around a fire talking about their different hardships brought about by the lack of power and contemplating ways to steal electricity from their affluent neighbours. They take turns in narrating a series of different stories around the central theme: courage saves, courage kills inspired by the Tshivenda proverb *"Ndi kholomo ya musanda, wa i khada u a lifha, wa i litsha u a lifha"* Loosely translated: "It's a Royal cow, you take care of it, you are guilty, you leave it you are guilty" - which in simple terms means getting caught between a rock and a hard place. This re-telling follows its historical context, it challenges authority and poses the question: "who has the liver to save us?"

For example, one of their stories is about Bongani from Slovo Park in Alexandra who gets electrocuted by a local substation, after his community was protesting for electricity and he decided to fix the electricity illegally. City power decides to open a criminal case of breaking and entering and vandalizing state property which amounts to treason. He goes to court after spending time in the hospital in chains. And then there is the story of Nelly, a woman who leaves her three children to go protest at the local clinic which ultimately gets shutdown. There is no way to even access the main road. As they are protesting, she is told by one of the protesters that her child has been burnt whilst using a paraffin stove and there is no way for her to get to her child as she is stuck in the picket line outside the clinic.

Soyinka's article makes a comparison between the Yoruba tragedy and that of the Europeans, meaning that his initial idea of investigating this phenomenon was influenced by the European tragedy as defined by Aristotle and propagated by others. Does Soyinka transform the tragedy into something his own – something essentially African? Or it is just another plain adaptation of Eurocentric ideas? Either way I believe that Soyinka highlights

the importance of African orature and ritual practice as legitimate forms equal to any of the European forms that have seethed through academia and been held up as the ultimate truth.

Conclusion

In this explication, I have looked at the effectiveness of using the concept of Re-visiting/Re-telling personal trauma on stage to un-archive the suffering incurred by Black performers from the township, and hopefully foster a healing process. I have engaged with trauma theory and how as a theatre and performance scholar I can utilise it to better understand the psychology of a performer. I touched on the ways in which both Mandla Mbothwe and Yael Farber use the concepts of testimony and liminality and the visceral as a method of directing, to launch a healing process for the suffering incurred by Black people in the past. I then gave a detailed analysis of the process of my research from my minor project through the medium project and on to the final project. I ultimately make a link between the tragic form of theatre and applying trauma theory in the theatre to foster healing which I hope will be realized in my final production at the end of the year. In my research I argue that as a practice, theatre making in the South African context is affected by traumatic experience and to engage with trauma, requires social and historical relations to be taken into account. My research focuses on how African oral traditions, modern poetics and music might be used as a process of re-imagining the tragic form and utilising it to better understand how theatre making can hold space and safely lead the process of healing without re-traumatizing the participants. I'm not going back to the township.

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