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Thinking Through the Politics of Shame as a  
Contemporary Form of Colonial Discourse:  
Analyzing Media Representations of the 'Baby  
Tshepang' Rape Case.

Mini-dissertation

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree:

Master's in African Studies

Centre for African Studies

Faculty of the Humanities

University of Cape Town

2010/11

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# Acknowledgements

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I would like to take this opportunity to thank the following people:

Erin Bosenburg  
Thokozani Mhlambi  
Ingrid Meintjes  
Heidi Grunebaum  
Jane Bennett  
Nick Shepherd  
Barbara Dutton  
Mandla Mlangeni  
Harry Garuba  
Bongani Kona

Much appreciation to all!

University of Cape Town

# Abstract

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In 2001, the rape of baby Tshepang triggered a media frenzy in the small community of Louisvale, located in the Northern Cape. An overarching theme of shame dominated how journalists represented the event. The label 'A Town of Shame' stuck onto Louisvale through the mobilization of colonial and gender discourse. Quickly the town was known for its 'barbarism' and 'savage' existence; a town with no future and a disgrace to the country. Essentialist thinking about woman was used to condemn and blame the mother of baby Tshepang, concretizing the myth that rape is always the fault of women.

Looking at the content within newspaper articles about the rape of baby Tshepang this thesis identifies key themes and patterns of troping that pegged Louisvale as Other. This thesis works with Sara Ahmed's (2004) thoughts on shame, Helen Moffett (2003, 2006) and Jane Bennett's (1997) work on gender and rape, as well as Achille Mbembe's (2001) notion of facticity within colonial discourse. A reoccurring theme in this thesis is that the construction of a self and Other binary does not lead to critical thought about rape and instead pushes us further away from engaging with the specificities and complexities of the event.

Another layer of this analysis is to consider fictional writing as opening new ways of thinking about infant rape. Works by Lara Foot Newton (2004), Ashraf Jamal (2002) Njabulo Ndebele (2003) and Jane Bennett (2008) are discussed as possible ways of moving away from binaries and stereotypes when thinking about rape and towards a meaningful engagement.

# Introduction

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In October of 2001, a nine-month old baby was raped in Louisvale, a township of Upington in the Northern Cape of South Africa. The event incited a media frenzy and stirred up numerous public debates around issues of morality, masculinity, domestic violence, child abuse, myths regarding HIV and AIDS and government irresponsibility. This incident also forced South Africans to face the terrifying reality of baby rape in their country. Six men, all later found to be innocent of the charge, were arrested<sup>1</sup>. Widely assumed to be guilty, the six men became the focus of much hate and resentment; people crowded around the Upington police station protesting that the men be castrated and/or hung. After the rape was reported, demands to have the men castrated or killed became a common response within newspapers<sup>2</sup>. The baby, renamed Tshepang (meaning 'have hope' in isiXhosa) survived and was cared for at the Kimberly Hospital where she received letters of support and gifts from around the country. In January of 2002, it was established that the man guilty of her rape was David Potse, supposed ex-boyfriend of baby Tshepang's mother.<sup>3</sup> After this development was reported, public expressions of blame, shame and anger shifted towards the sixteen year old mother. Wanda<sup>4</sup> was to leave the township of Louisvale, which she did.<sup>5</sup>

Over the course of three years, more than eighty newspaper articles on this case were printed in South Africa alone. Journalists from around the world traveled to Louisvale to report on the event. An image of Louisvale as a place of barbarism was constructed and the label 'town of shame' remained long after the departure of the media.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> William Bird. *Media Representation of baby rape: the case of 'Baby Tshepang,'* (2004).

<sup>2</sup> "Sentence Rapist to Death Says New Nationalist Party," *Pretoria News*, (9<sup>th</sup> August, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> *Mail and Guardian*. (4<sup>th</sup> November, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> The name of baby Tshepang's mother has never been released. Some articles have used the alias Wanda in order to protect her identity.

<sup>5</sup> *Mail and Guardian*, (4<sup>th</sup> November, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> William Bird, (2004).

The aftermath proved to be life changing in devastating ways for some of Louisvale residents as trauma rippled through the town. The six men who were originally arrested for the rape continued to face hatred and feelings of alienation. While incarcerated, all men lost their jobs. After their release, finding new employment was extremely difficult.<sup>7</sup> Another resident, who featured very little in the media, was David Potse's implied girlfriend, Lya Booysen, who was also severely affected by the event and the after effects. According to Booysen, Potse left their home after physically abusing her. Booysen found Potse in a shack where Wanda lived and witnessed the rape of baby Tsepang. She lit a match, saw Potse raping the infant and ran. Months later, Booysen went to the police to report what she had seen. After Potse's arrest, Booysen's children were taken from her and placed in foster care.

Louisvale, situated outside of Upington, is the home of mostly "Coloured" people. What little work available is found either on wine farms or in factories. The town of 6000 people was designed in a manner not unique to many small settlements within South Africa. Its purpose was to provide farms with cheap labour while keeping its visibility minimal. Apart from the rape of baby Tshepang, Louisvale is a township that goes largely unknown by the outside world. In the weeks following the rape of baby Tshepang, Louisvale experienced slight economic gain as journalists, politicians and government officials created a small market for locals to sell their goods. Shebeens were closed and social workers were busy determining whose children were safe to remain in Louisvale and which ones should be placed in foster care.<sup>8</sup> An article written four years after the event suggests that the people of Louisvale were still grieving in efforts to overcome the rape of baby Tshepang and the stigmatization that followed.<sup>9</sup>

In this thesis, I consider how the media image of Louisvale as a 'town of shame' was constructed within colonial and gendered discourse. My argument assumes that there can be no true or correct representation. In saying this, my interest lies in exploring the representation that is offered in the newspapers and to ask what these images do and how shame acts as a contemporary form of projecting colonial and sexist ideologies. I argue that

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<sup>7</sup> "Six still bear 'child rapist' stigma," *Cape Argus*, (28<sup>th</sup> October, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

norms within mainstream journalism can perpetuate barriers of understandings as newspaper articles are designed to offer ‘facts’ and present to the public what ‘really’ happened. Such expectations, to a certain degree, establish what can and cannot be said. It can be argued that all writing, in some way, negates certain possibilities and no argument is free from perspectives and interests.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, I have not asked if negation or manipulation occur but rather assume that it does and ask what possibilities do particular knowledges create and what limitations are imbued within these possibilities.

Feminist activists and academics have challenged the ways in which rape narratives are ‘heard’ by the public.<sup>11</sup> Extensive research has been dedicated to exploring the patriarchal framework in which rape survivor’s narratives are ‘heard’. Such framework operates to construct women as always already responsible for rape.<sup>12</sup> However, when the rape of an infant or child occurs these methods of blame fall through. One cannot argue that an infant or child was asking for it, or wearing provocative clothing. The common ‘no means yes’ myth crumbles when the rape survivor is a child. However, as I will argue, such modes of blame do not disappear completely in the case of a raped child but are, rather, transferred onto the mother and in this case an entire town.

Shaming becomes a powerful technique in the representation of rape. What makes this case interesting is that an entire town felt the effects of shame<sup>13</sup>. Jill Bennett argues that in places where massive trauma has occurred, place names can become a memory of that trauma in ways that fix certain notions of place that make little room for the subjectivity of the people who dwell there. Shame is always a relational experience.<sup>14</sup> It is mobilized in the processes of creating a distant Other in opposition to the responsible and moral self. Looking at the

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<sup>10</sup> Susan Hekman. “Posthumanist Performativity: towards an understanding of how matter comes to matter,” *Material Feminisms*, (2008).

<sup>11</sup> A few examples are Jane Bennett, Helen Moffett, Lynn Chancer. Julia R. Schwendinger, Susan Brownmiller.

<sup>12</sup> Jane Bennett. “Credibility, Plausibility and Autobiographical Oral Narrative: some suggestions from the analysis of rape Survivor’s testimony,” In Ann Levett, Amanda Kottler, Erica Burman and Ian Parker. *Culture, Power and Difference: Discourse Analysis in South Africa*, (1997).

<sup>13</sup> Neighbors of baby Tshepang have given testimony of the personal shame that they felt after the town of Louisvale received an overwhelming amount of attention. See “‘baby Tshepang’ Town Still Confronts Devils,” *IOL South Africa Online News*, (18<sup>th</sup> December 2004).

<sup>14</sup> Sara Ahmed. *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, (2004).

newspaper responses and representations of the rape of baby Tshepang, I explore the relationship between the shaming gaze and the shamed. A close examination of the ways in which we publicly respond to traumatic events can offer insight into how 'we' the 'empathetic and moral citizen' takes form. Apart from the newspaper articles, I have looked closely at Lara Foot Newton's play *Tshepang: The Third Testament* as a tool of exploring the issues of shame, as her work seems to be a response to the media representation as much as to the event itself.

I am interested in what possibilities are created when rapists are stigmatized as barbaric and monstrous non-humans. When rape is seen as a condition of poverty and blackness, as it is the dominant discourse, who then can commit rape? The believability of rape cannot be separated from the race, class and gender of the survivor as well as the accused.<sup>15</sup> Again, discursive binaries of self and Other emerge and this paper works to unveil the ways in which the different pieces I am analyzing deal with, by operating within or challenging, this dichotomy.

The final part of my thesis deals with difficult issues surrounding rape that are evaded through the perpetuation of a dominant discourse, which through its rule bound qualities, tightly controls how rape is discussed. Whenever such a limiting framework of understanding is perpetuated, it is on the back of much negation. Put another way, when negation occurs something must fill its place.<sup>16</sup> The bulk of this project looks at what is being said and what the prevailing discourse does in terms of representation. The concluding question of my project is, what can the violence done onto the bodies of infant babies, unsexed, small and vulnerable, tell us about current gender constructions? To begin to address this question, the writings dedicated to the baby Tshepang case are insufficient. Instead, I draw upon writings by Ashraf Jamal, Jane Bennett and Njabulo S. Ndebele. Their strength lies in asking difficult questions about rape while provoking feelings of discomfort, which discourages the reader from taking a position of moral superiority. The ways these

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<sup>15</sup> Helen Moffett. "Rape, Race and Rhetoric." Seminar paper presented at the Centre for African Studies, (8<sup>th</sup> May, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> Anthony Bouges. "Trauma, Representation, Freedom and the Radical Imagination," Seminar presented at the Centre for African Studies, (11<sup>th</sup> August, 2010).

writers have engage with the subject of rape, I argue, has the potential to force the reader to reflect, question or even to simply sit with unease.

## Why Write About Rape?

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Perhaps it is necessary to begin with a defense of the very act of writing about rape. Dissecting rape discourse insists on a closer look at who speaks and who is heard. In a thoughtful analysis of the representation of rape in canonical texts from the West, authors Higgins and Silver state,

the process of unraveling the cultural texts that have obsessively made rape both so pervasive and so invisible a theme- made it 'unreadable'- is multilayered. It involves listening not only to whom speaks and in what circumstances, but who does not speak and why it requires that we listen for those stories that differ from the master(?s) story: that we recuperate what has been left out... the act of reading rape involves more than listening to silences, it requires restoring rape to the literal, to the body.<sup>17</sup>

Deconstructing rape discourse intrinsically grapples with how violence done onto the bodies of mostly women and girls is silenced in complicated ways. A reoccurring thread in my argument is to move away from the notion that certain people are without a voice or need to be 'given a voice'. Such standpoint undermines the lived experience of marginalized people. The event of not being heard has more to do with what narratives we are ready to hear and from which voices we are comfortable listening too. Addressing the unspeakability of rape involves multi-tasking; balancing, on one hand, the difficulty that language can fail to translate traumatic experience and on the other, that this does not relieve us from the task of listening. Stanley Cavell argues, "a conversation of social suffering must include a study of the societies silence towards it".<sup>18</sup> Deconstructing the language commonly used to talk about rape cannot ignore what is not being said. Perpetuating societies silences regarding rape acts as a form of violence that is epistemic, as well as, systematic.

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<sup>17</sup> Lynn A. Higgins, Brenda R. Silver. *Rape and Representation*, (1991) p. 3-4.

<sup>18</sup> Staley Cavell. "Comments on V. Das's Language and Body: Transactions in the construction of pain" In *Social Suffering*, edited by A. Klienman. (1997) p. 94.

How we think about rape is informed through different perspectives and projects of knowledge production. Sharon Begley, a researcher of psychology, is currently conducting research on whether or not a ‘rape gene’ exists.<sup>19</sup> This project is particularly interested in countries in which a ‘rape culture’ is the norm, South Africa being one of these ‘cultures’. Such research carries potentially dangerous consequences. Attaching rape to genetics risks further concretizing the stereotype that rape is innate to black men. Such research goes against a careful concentration of context, history, patterns of gender-based violence and relations of power that I argue need to be central in any study that looks at rape.

Another way in which rape is brought into the South African public and academic realm is through shocking statistics. Scholarly articles as well as information provided by the popular media often cite shocking statistics about rape in South Africa. “Every 30 seconds a woman is raped,” “Women are more likely to be raped than learn how to read,” “25% of men admit to rape.” Such sensationalism offers no insight regarding the context in which rape occurs and leaves the impression that rape is an ‘act of fate’ or the consequence of being at the wrong place at the wrong time.<sup>20</sup> Such statements may grab attention and sell newspapers but do not evoke the critical thought that is necessary in dealing with the issue.<sup>21</sup>

Within feminist writing in Africa, rape is often talked about using a militaristic tone. This does not occur by chance nor is it the outcome of hyperbole. It is argued, that rape exists as a silenced gender war.<sup>22</sup> The notion of phallic-centered violence, a term coined by Awa Thiam in 1978, assumes that even in times of ‘peace’, where a country is not at war, women’s lives are still guided and affected by violence.<sup>23</sup> Rape is what this violence looks like. Jacques Depelchin, a scholar in African studies, asks how it is we can talk of a post-colonial present when rape has so much power over the lives of women on the post-colony.<sup>24</sup> His question

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<sup>19</sup> Sharon Begley. ‘Why Do We Rape, Kill and Sleep Around?’, *Newsweek*, <http://www.newsweek.com/2009/06/19/why-do-we-rape-kill-and-sleep-around.html>

<sup>20</sup> Helen Moffett, (2002).

<sup>21</sup> Jane Bennett, (2007).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Awa Thiam. *Speak Out, Black Sisters: Black Woman and Oppression in Black Africa*, (1986)

<sup>24</sup> Jacques Depelchin, *Reconnecting the Disconnect*, UWC Conference: Re-imagining Postcolonial Futures, District Six Homecoming Centre, (2009).

brings gender-based violence into current debates around issues of freedom and how it is experienced.

Feminist researchers and activists have carried out much needed work on the representation of rape survivors and society's willingness to 'hear' rape narratives. An analysis of the representation of the rape of baby Tshepang adds to this body of work in interesting ways. This case has allowed me to explore rape representation with regards to unspeakability, the construction of the shameful Other and the empathetic self as well as often negated issues of gender and power. What is said about rape and how it is said shape the ways in which we engage with the issue. In order to explore how rape comes into discourse as a thesis project I needed an archive to analyze. After seeing Lara Foot Newton's play *Baby Tshepang: The Third Testament* I began to look at the rape of baby Tshepang as a possible case study. I have found close to sixty newspaper articles, nationally and internationally, on the case as well as a number of other forms of response such as scholarly articles, short stories, speeches from governmental meetings, animations and poetry. It became clear that this was a case where people, in a range of forms, chose to publicly respond. The media is capable of influencing the ways in which a response is calculated and therefore it is important to carefully consider what 'information' is being perpetuated within the media.

## Methodology

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This research project primarily takes the form of analyzing print media. The bulk of my primary sources are newspaper articles, which I have been collecting from the UCT library, the National Library in Cape Town as well as from the Internet. Analyzing newspaper articles has assisted me in locating key themes and identifying the patterns of troping that occur within these articles. Newspaper articles have also informed other pieces within my archives such as Lara Foot Newton's play *Baby Tshepang: the third testament*. Foot Newton's play is as much a response to the rape of baby Tshepang as it is a response to the media representation. Lara Foot Newton's work intentionally goes against the grain of mainstream representation of rape and speaks directly to the images created in the media. Foot Newton highlights the politics of shame within this case and therefore has provided me with a tool

to think through and about the representation of the baby Tshepang rape. What Foot Newton has done is to illuminate the construction of the shameful Other and the empathic Self within the media handling of this case. Each character in *Tshepang: the third testament* is a reflection on the violence of the media and I have used Foot Newton's characters to pry open the subject of shame and what it does to the ways we 'hear' the rape of baby Tshepang.

My approach is not to view newspaper articles in the media as the 'wrong' form of representation or suggest that Foot Newton 'got it right' but rather to ask the question, what do particular representations do?<sup>25</sup> Feminist scholar, Susan Hekman's construction of a 'new ontology' provides a useful methodological approach. They argue that we "know our world through the concepts and theories we have formulated"<sup>26</sup> and different concepts will produce different views of the world. These views do not constitute the world but depict it, therefore representation is always a form of manipulation. I have been interested in the consequences of newspapers as a form of writing about rape and how they limit or foreclose ways of understanding the event that took place. The act of reporting such an event, I believe, would produce a level of unspeakability and any representation would probably offend in some way. The task I undertook was to problematize the media reports and not to condemn them in their entirety.

Helen Moffett points out in her article, *Race, Rape and Rhetoric: Constructing narratives of Sexual Violence in Post-apartheid South Africa*, the discourse which operates in the media around issues of rape is 'a profoundly Foucaultian narrative'. However, such discourse is more closely related to his writing on madness than sexuality.<sup>27</sup> Foucault's *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* examines the ways in which madness (mental illness and disability) has been constructed in a manner in which the mentally ill have come to represent a distant and monstrous Other in opposition to the civilized and reasonable self. I argue a similar process has created a shameful Other, which encompasses rapist, the mother of baby

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<sup>25</sup> Much of my framework mimics the methodology Jill Bennett presents in her analysis of 'trauma art' in *Empathetic Visions: Affect and Contemporary Art*, (2005).

<sup>26</sup> Susan Hekman. "Posthumanist Performativity: towards an understanding of how matter comes to matter", *Material Feminism*, (2008) p. 100.

<sup>27</sup> Helen Moffett. (2002).

Tshepang and even the town, Louisvale, which stands in opposition to a moral and empathetic self. The rules society binds around its population that distinguish a mad man from a sane one are framed within a discourse of morality and cleanliness. Foucault discusses how notions of madness become knowledge. This knowledge, established as truth, dictates societal attitudes towards madness. Discourses of madness appear to make sense and to have formulated in a rational and 'natural' process.<sup>28</sup> By tracing the histories of madness, Foucault illuminates particular key junctions in time where knowledge about madness became normative. A temporal understanding of a particular discourse illuminates how libraries<sup>29</sup> of constructions (whether gendered, colonial, able-ist, class related or heteronormative) are recycled through time. Understanding the discourse that surrounds rape unveils the way rape is conceived and the presuppositions that often determine a believable rape narrative. The pertinent question, using Foucaultian thought, is not, should rape be stigmatized but rather how is rape stigmatized and what consequences does this create for the people involved.

Foucault offers a close reading of the history of discourse of madness. A similar project on rape within South Africa is needed. The rape of baby Tshepang would then become part of an archive as of key historical junctures within the history of rape. Although Foucault is often criticized for his role as the most influential philosopher of the 'discursive turn' within post-structuralism, I argue that he never forgets the body within his analysis.<sup>30</sup> Foucault does not forget about the body because he *cannot* forget about the body. The physical body is always an underlying factor in his work even if he does not explicitly say so. The criticism that Foucault has turned everything into a text that can be read ignores one of Foucault's most crucial arguments and that is that modern modes of controlling people have come into being through the control of populations, through bio-power. His argument that we have normalized the death of certain bodies for the benefit of others demonstrates that the body is enmeshed into Foucault's method of deconstructing discourse. I wish to draw the same

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<sup>28</sup> Michael Foucault. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of reason.* (1971).

<sup>29</sup> I am referring to library in the sense V.Y. Mudimbe did when coined the term 'colonial library', a collection of constructed images in which are borrowed and re-used that cite colonial knowledge. See V.Y. Mudimbe. *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge*, (1988).

<sup>30</sup> For a feminist critique of Foucault see Susan Hekman, "Posthumanist Performativity: towards an understanding of how matter comes to matter", *Material Feminism* (2008).

correlation in my research, which is that the body is always in consideration within analyzing discourse of rape. As authors of *Rape and Representation*, Higgins and Silver state, "...the politics and the aesthetics of rape are one."<sup>31</sup>

For the most part my resources consists of newspaper articles printed within South Africa. Outside of the mainstream media, I have chosen to include Lara Foot Newton's play *Tshepang: The Third Testament* as a fundamental aspect of my research as it has allowed me to think about and through the politics of shame. I have also included short stories by Jane Bennett and Ashraf Jamal as well as an excerpt from Njabulo Ndebele's novel *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* in order to address issues of gender and power, which are not articulated in the rest of my archives. My interest in the case of Baby Tshepang is centred around public response therefore my archives include:

- Newspaper articles from The Mail and Guardian, The Cape Times, The Cape Argus, Pretoria News, The Sowetan, City Press, The Star, The Sunday Times, The Sunday Independent, Daily News, The Citizen, The New York Time, CNN Online and the BBC Online
- The address by Jacob Zuma to the Moral Regeneration Movement Meeting
- Lara Foot Newton's play *Tshepang: The Third Testament*
- Jane Bennett's short story *Disarmament*
- Ashraf Jamal's short story *Empty*
- Njabulo S. Ndebele *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*

## Chapter Outline

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The first chapter gives an overview of the theoretical frameworks within which my work engages with. The chapter is further broken down into two main sections. The first section examines the politics of shame and Othering. This section attempts to operationalize the term shame and to demonstrate how it works to isolate, stigmatize and conceal. This section looks at many aspects of the process of Othering such as the notion of nothingness,

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<sup>31</sup> Lynn A. Higgins, Brenda R. Silver. *Rape and Representation*, (1991).

Othering as a process of dehumanization, Africa as the West's oppositional Other, the role of the media and the idea of ethical journalism. The second area of literature I have considered deals with the deconstruction of rape discourse by South African feminists.

The second chapter examines the newspaper representation of the baby Tshpang rape case. The first section of this chapter looks at how the media representation of this case displays colonial notions of Africa in contemporary forms. Louisvale is presented as a barbaric place of no future. The image of a town that cannot function is explained through a description of the people's uncritical belief in arbitrary myth, their lustful nature and hopeless conditions of poverty. By examining the representation of baby Tshepang's mother I have argued that the language used to judge her reflects harmful gendered norms and silences her subjectivity. The second section of this chapter explains how the above image of Louisvale constructed a 'town of shame'. I have used Lara Foot Newton's play *Tshepang: The Third Testament* to think through this as well as to offer an alternative representation that challenges this image of shame.

The third chapter focuses on a move from spectacularization to humanization. This chapter, through the work of Njabulo Ndebele, Ashraf Jamal and Jane Bennett, looks at infant rape from a different angle than the media allows for. When considering how rape influences the ways we think about the bodies of women, the writings of Ndebele, Jamal and Bennett offer new possibilities of wrapping our minds around the event of infant rape.

# Chapter I: The Theoretical Milieu

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## Shame as a Process of Othering

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Shame, within the politics of emotions<sup>32</sup>, is most commonly studied from the perspective of what it means to feel and carry shame. Shame is explained as a relational experience where the person or people experiencing shame do so before others.<sup>33</sup> The act of recognition is important to consider when understanding how shame operates to construct another as a disempowered Other. The desire for recognition is to feel visible.<sup>34</sup> Processes of Othering, as well as shaming, involves manipulating the visibility of some, by making certain people invisible and then allowing their so-called visibility to manifest in a predetermined and strategic fashion.<sup>35</sup> This is not to argue that there exists a true subjectivity that is being hidden but rather to illuminate how shaming acts to maintain particular stereotypes of marginalized populations. The processes of Othering are neatly hidden, and must be hidden, within social structures in order for stereotypes to appear normative.<sup>36</sup>

Within the language used to study emotions it is argued that certain emotions ‘stick’ to particular bodies and ‘shape their surfaces’.<sup>37</sup> Ahmed highlights this in her statement, “different figures get stuck together and how sticking is dependant on past histories of association that often work through concealment. The emotionality of texts is one way of describing how texts are ‘moving’, or how they generate effects.”<sup>38</sup> Ahmed asks us to consider the multi-directional processes that the language of emotions takes us on and how this movement is influenced by past and often unacknowledged histories. She continues, “I am tracking how words for feelings, and objects of feeling, circulate and generate effects, how they move, stick and slide. We move, stick and slide with them.” This analytical

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<sup>32</sup> Sarah Ahmed. (2004), Catherine Lutz, Lila Abu-Lughod. (1990).

<sup>33</sup> Sarah Ahmed. *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, (2004).

<sup>34</sup> David Theo Goldberg. “In/Visability and Super/Vision,” (1996).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Sarah Ahmed. (2004), Gregory J. Seigworth & Melissa Gregg. (2010).

<sup>38</sup> Ahmed. (2004) p.13.

approach to emotions within texts has allowed me to uncover what the processes of shaming does, how it sticks and what knowledges inform whom it sticks to. In tracking the creation of ‘a town of shame,’ I am able to explore what ways of knowing Louisvle allowed for its history to be concealed while the social ills born from its history are presented as essential aspects of its being.

Creating a ‘town of shame’ stuck shame onto a place, shaping how it was perceived, not only to the outside world but also within the town itself. Goldberg observes that, “once internalized stereotypes may manifest incrementally as self-loathing, self-denial, self-effacement... If stereotypes reduce black people to but dull shadows of themselves, then social structures hides them from view, erases them, almost altogether.”<sup>39</sup> The nothingness of Othering is not simply living a life that is invisible to the world but damages the self-worth of those affected. Franz Fanon’s seminal work *The Fact of Blackness* is still one of the most effective descriptions of this process. The connection between the politics of shame and nothingness are highlighted in Fanon’s writing. Fanon describes the process of lacking an ontological resistance to the gaze of whiteness in his explanation of what he calls the zone of non-being.<sup>40</sup> Within this text Fanon states, “Shame. Shame and self-contempt. Nausea.”<sup>41</sup> These three words triangulate, giving an intimate reading of the process I am exploring. Fanon expresses his shame that he feels before others, which is followed by self-contempt as the shame becomes internalized. Nausea, a sentence in itself suggests that shame, more than just a passing emotion, has stuck to his body harming it and causing it to harm itself.

Shame is often experienced as a desire to hide.<sup>42</sup> To experience shame is to feel exposed or found out under the gaze of another. Shame is not an emotion that can be felt independent of others. Ahmed argues, “shame certainly involves an impulse to ‘take cover’ and ‘to cover oneself’. But the desire to take cover and to be covered presupposes the failure of cover, in experiencing shame, one desires cover precisely because one has already been exposed to others. Hence the word ‘shame’ is associated as much with cover and concealment, as it is

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<sup>39</sup> David Theo Goldberg. (1996) p. 194.

<sup>40</sup> Frantz Fanon. *Black Skin, White Mask*, (2008).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. p.116.

<sup>42</sup> Ahmed. (2004) p.103.

with exposure, vulnerability and wounding”.<sup>43</sup> Shame involves a level of self-recognition as well as the desire to not be seen. This process of self-recognition exists within pre-established dominant notions about morality. One finds themselves shameful before others as they exist outside ‘normality’. Once one is cast into a zone of abnormality, the road to redemption, within this framework, entails denouncing the aspects of self that have been brought into question.<sup>44</sup> The failure to meet the standards or ideas of others, which causes one to feel ashamed, usually leads to a dual effect; one wants to feel dignified in the eyes of others while simultaneously wanting to take cover from the gaze.<sup>45</sup>

Exploring shame as a process has exposed the uneven relations of power that exist between those who gaze upon (i.e. the media and its readers) and the people experiencing the effects of shame. How does one answer back to the shame? What are the social consequences of ‘hiding’ within this context? Given that the links are already established between concealing a history of violence, gender based and colonial, and nothingness, what does shame do? If recognition is denied through processes of Othering, shaming being one of these processes then it seems crucial to analyze shame as a way we encounter others. Another area of literature that informs my research is, broadly speaking, on the notion of the Other. This research has considered Othering and how it encompasses the potential for violence. Within this exploration it is worth briefly considering what it means to name the other the Other. Sarah Ahmed asks, “(h)ow is the other recognized in the very event of being named the Other?”<sup>46</sup> This is a question of ethics and as Ahmed states ethics is not based on morality but rather has to do with encounters; how we encounter and what encounters do. Interrogating encounters, as they are never static, allows for Othering to be seen as an ongoing process. The Other should be understood as coming into being rather than an always already alien object. In naming another the Other, I wish to look at the self/other relationship as a process whereby the term the Other operates as a philosophical tool that unearths uneven relations of power. Using this particular language is not without its discomforts. Do we participate in Othering when we maintain its use as a philosophical tool? Although this debate will not be addressed, I do bear this in mind.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid p.104.

<sup>44</sup> Donald L. Nathanson. *The Many Faces of Shame*, (1987).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Sarah Ahmed. *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-coloniality*, (2000) p. 142.

Africa has long stood as the West's Other, the colonized as the colonizer's binary opposition.<sup>47</sup> Nigel Gibson states, "The colonizer is represented as everything good, human and living, the colonized is bad, brutish and inert... In this situation, the colonized inhabits a zone of non-being."<sup>48</sup> Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* offers a clear example of such dialectic. Lessing tells a story of colonial farm life in a manner that clearly defines the self (white settlers) from the Other (African people). Within the Manichean allegory Lessing presents Mary and Dick Turner, impoverished white farm owners and Moses, a farm helper, often referred to as 'the native.' Moses exists throughout the story without reason or history. One analysis of *The Grass is Singing* describes Moses as the "archetypal ("Hegelian") African who is useful primarily as a mirror to reflect back the whites' conviction of racial superiority."<sup>49</sup> Within this story the distance, physical and existential, between the self and Other is so rigidly defined, to enter the in-between space can unsettle the very essence of the self. Dick disgusts Mary as he begins to mimic the mannerisms of the natives. Near the end of the story it seems to be Mary's closeness with Moses that leads to her demising mental state. It is the kinesic interplay between self and Other that tampers with the norms of this binary relationship. Dick and Mary only speak to Moses in a demeaning and harsh manner but their very movements and gestures lessen the distance between them and 'the native'. They are not only no longer acceptable within the white community but have severed themselves off from themselves. The insanity they both reach by the end of the novel is also a result of their disturbed ontological state as poverty pushes them away from the standards of whiteness. However, in saying this, it is also their whiteness that protects and re-inscribes their superior position over the natives.

Here we can see how the self needs the Other within the self's own definition or as Ahmed asks, "...the question of being, can it be posed without a detour through the other?"<sup>50</sup>

Lessing demonstrates this dependence in a manner that also exposes the violence of colonial

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<sup>47</sup> Achille Mbembe. *On The Postcolony*, (2001), V.Y. Midimbe. (1988).

<sup>48</sup> Nigel Gibson. "Jammin' the Airways and Tuning the Revolution: the Dialectics of the Radio in L'AnV de la Revolution Algerienne," In *Fanon: A Critical Reader*, (1996) p. 273.

<sup>49</sup> Catherine Fishburn. "The Manichean Allegories of Doris Lessing's 'The Grass is Singing,' *Research in African Fictions*, (1994) p.4.

<sup>50</sup> Sara Ahmed. *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*, (2000) p.138.

mentality. Through an exploration of the self/other relationship within the media portrayal of the case of baby Tshepang I am arguing that this dialectic that Lessing describes so clearly, is being reinstated in ways that have largely gone unnoticed. Lessing's character Moses is invented as the very embodiment of the foreign and strange. His actions belong to the realm of Otherness and it is this very Otherness that is used to define his humanity. History or current conditions are considered secondary when the Other is understood through their supposed irrationality and strangeness.

Colonial discourse relies on the notion of facticity in the construction of the African as Other. Mbembe states, "By *facticity* is meant that, in Hegel's words, 'the thing *is*; and it *is* merely because it *is*... and this simple immediacy constitutes the *truth*'. In such a case, there is nothing to justify"<sup>51</sup> The idea that barbaric imagery signifies something African needs no explanation as it is already justified through an intrinsic 'truth'. Mbembe continues, "Speaking rationally about Africa is something that has never come naturally... deployed in a framework of a meta-text about the animal, to be exact about the beast, its experience, its world and its spectacle."<sup>52</sup> The dependence on facticity within western knowledge production to understand events in Africa has maintained colonial ideologies. Violent claims, which associate Africa to savagery, can be made void of any rational argument or evidence. And it is these conditions, the ability to state 'truth' without substance that has made the process of debunking stereotypes such a struggle.

I argue, as many others have done, that when the Other is denied his/her alterity, their story and history become a dark figure of nothingness. Achille Mbembe asks,

But what does it mean to do violence onto what is nothing? Or what does it mean for one who has been enwrapped, or has enwrapped himself/herself, in the pure terror of the negative, been consigned to the work of a slave, to give himself/herself to a premature death, a death without apparent meaning?<sup>53</sup>

The notion of the Other does not *prima-facie* connote nothingness. It is through a violent representation that the Other becomes a less human. Mbembe asks us to consider

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<sup>51</sup> Mbembe. (2001) p. 3-4.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. p. 1.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. p.174.

simultaneously what it means to do violence onto nothing and for one's death to have no meaning. However meaningless, no one can deny a dead body was once a living human. Therefore nothingness, within my analysis, is not to be taken without complication. I have applied this term because of its strength as a powerful instrument in thinking through the conditions where a death (or life) exists without apparent meaning. If the self needs the Other, the Other can never be total or absolute nothingness. To consider what it means to do violence onto nothingness, the apparent meaninglessness of one's death speaks to both the dehumanizing state of nothingness as well as an unwillingness to completely deny the body of the dehumanized.

Jessica Benjamin, who offers a theory of Othering informed through a feminist standpoint focuses on the problems of the self/Other relationship by highlighting how the self recognizes the Other. Benjamin raises a concern popular within feminist discourse that looks at how we can go about respecting multiple differences.<sup>54</sup> Benjamin states, "to articulate the conditions for recognizing the other, we must understand the deepest obstacles within the self, and acknowledge that this ideal of autonomous knowing has served to obscure those dynamics..."<sup>55</sup> How we encounter the Other, whether in text or face-to-face is affected by power inequalities. We cannot ignore our histories and current social conditions of privilege and penalties within how we hear the voice of the Other. The two polar offences are to either assimilate difference or to stigmatize it. This is to understand difference through one's own life experience or to dismiss the Other as alien. The potentiality for violence exists in both and that is why, as Benjamin stresses, there is the need to explore the in-between space of these two approaches to hearing another's voice.

Journalism is an area of constant encounters. The politics of these encounters are very seldom part of the story that gets told. Aryn Bartley explores the idea of ethical journalism through a consideration of what he calls the inevitable limitations of substitution. He argues that it is possible for journalists to acknowledge their own subjectivity and position of privilege within their reporting of violent events. This involves a careful and subtle

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<sup>54</sup> Jessica Benjamin. *Shadow of the Other: Intersubjectivity and Gender in Psychoanalysis*, (1998).

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. p. 84.

positioning of ones self in the backdrop of the story being reported.<sup>56</sup> To practice ‘ethical journalism’<sup>57</sup>, Bartley argues, one has to acknowledge that the experience and circumstances of the Other belong to the Other. Lisa Farley states that when encountering the alterity of the Other, possibilities exist in accepting that we do not understand and that the unintelligibility of the Other’s suffering cannot be reduced to a version of the Self.<sup>58</sup> Recognizing one’s own privilege, such as the privilege to leave the violent environment, resists usurping the story of the Other and accepts that to be a reporter is never to put yourself in the place or ‘shoes’ of the Other.

Both Bartley and Farley offer a reading of the Other that resists relying on binary understandings. The impossibility of substitution in which Bartley argues must be understood alongside the recognition that resisting usurpation does not infer an oppositional approach. The Other’s experience as unintelligible should promote a turn towards accepting that difference is a matter of alterity and not opposition. One cannot feel the Other’s pain however this does not suppose the Other is alien to the Self. Farley, in thinking about how we encounter Others, states that there exists a problematic identification where, “the self and other can only be ‘held together’ as opposites, and so any sense of implication in the life of the other is made *in opposition*”.<sup>59</sup> Dismantling binaries calls for an opening up to the idea that we may learn from accepting that we do not know. Possibilities for deeper and more meaningful engagement can exist in the in-between space that can only be explored through refusing an oppositional approach.

Another complication involving Othering within journalism is the problem of speaking about others. A fine line exists between speaking about others and speaking for others. As Linda Alcoff states,

when one is speaking about others, or simply trying to describe their situation or some aspect of it, one may also be speaking in place of them, that is, speaking for them. One may be speaking about others as an advocate or a

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<sup>56</sup> Aryn Bartley. “The Hateful Self: Substitution and the Ethics of Representing War,” *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* (2008).

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Lisa Farley. “Useless Suffering: Learning From the Unintelligible and the Re-Formation of Community,” *The Journal of Inclusive Scholarship and Pedagogy. Special Issue: Teaching Through Testimony* (2004) p. 325.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. p. 327.

messenger if the persons cannot speak for themselves. Thus I would maintain that if the practice of speaking for others is problematic, so too must be the practice of speaking about others, since it is difficult to distinguish speaking about from speaking for in all cases.<sup>60</sup>

Such concern is valid especially when particular subjects are already characterized by nothingness. To speak about nothing would intrinsically to speak for nothing as nothing has no voice to speak of.

It is the location of the speaker that Alcoff brings to the centre of the debate. The very event of speaking about someone in an oppressed position carries the potentiality of furthering their silence. Because journalists often hold a cultural license to speak about others, their writing is validated through the respectability they are granted as journalists. Alcoff is not speaking about journalists in particular, however her argument applies, she states, “the rituals of speaking that involve the location of speaker and listeners affect whether a claim is taken as a true, well-reasoned, compelling argument, or a significant idea. Thus, how what is said gets heard depends on who says it, and who says it will affect the style and language in which it is stated, which will in turn affect its perceived significance (for specific hearers)”.<sup>61</sup> These claims are often granted to journalists through societal norms that marginalized people do not have access to. My thesis operates to problematize, rather than to undermine the journalistic writing on the rape of baby Tshpang.

## Spectacularizing Trauma

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According to Guy Debord, spectacularization is the act of splitting an event from its social and historical context while maintaining a manufactured focus on humanity.<sup>62</sup> When it comes to spectacularizing events in Africa, the spectacle operates on the back of what has

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<sup>60</sup> Linda Alcoff. “The Problem of Speaking for Others,” (1992) p.6.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. p.13.

<sup>62</sup> Guy Debord. *The Society of the Spectacle*, (1983).

already been established as truth. According to Debord, “the spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images.”<sup>63</sup> Newspapers have a vested interest in being marketable. The ability to alarm the reader while allowing them to feel they understand the event (i.e. the use of stereotypes to explain complex situations) can be a useful marketing strategy. The success of the spectacle is determined by its ability to become a commodity while simultaneously promoting dominant paradigms. Such process is much more subtle than the conscious marketing of propaganda. The spectacle operates within the discursive framework it participates in creating and has the power to make stereotypes abundantly true. The success of a spectacle lies in its ability to remain uncontroversial as it makes sense within the discourse it promotes. Debord continues, “the attitude that it (the spectacle) demands in principle is the same passive acceptance that it has already secured by means of its seemingly incontrovertibility, and indeed by its monopolization of the realm of appearances.”<sup>64</sup>

Within trauma studies, efforts have been made to find new ways of approaching writing about trauma. These efforts have offered both limitations as well as possibilities in understanding the pain of others. Cultural theorists Jill Bennett and Dominick LaCapra have looked at the politics of empathy and the possibilities that exist when empathy is understood as a reflexive process. In moving away from total objectification when writing history LaCapra states, “as a counterforce to numbing, empathy may be understood in terms of attending to, even trying, in limited ways, to recapture the possibly split-off, affective dimensions of the experience of others”.<sup>65</sup> Bennett suggests a move away from ‘crude empathy’ where we usurp the experience of others and towards empathy that, “entails an encounter with something irreducible and different, often inaccessible”.<sup>66</sup> In a similar light, LaCapra has coined the term *empathic unsettlement* which functions to, “describe the aesthetic experience of simultaneously *feeling for* another and becoming aware of a distinction between one’s own perception and the experience of the other”.<sup>67</sup> The process of becoming aware sets in motion the reflexivity required for encountering the trauma of others while resisting

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid. p.12.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. p.15.

<sup>65</sup> Dominick LaCapra. *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, (2001) p. 40.

<sup>66</sup> Jill Bennett. *Empathic Visions: affect and contemporary art*, (2005) p.10.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. p.8.

colonizing their position. Thinking through the politics of empathy reduces the likelihood of spectacularization as reflexivity forces one to consider the position of the subject as well as the self. In this case, the spectacle relied on binary thinking. Empathic unsettlement holds the possibility of dismantling binaries because, as the term explicitly states, it unsettles.

## Deconstructing Discourse of Rape in South Africa

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The media often relies on raced and gendered stereotypes as a means of explaining violence, especially rape.<sup>68</sup> One reason for this is that the media has an interest in being easily believed. It needs to be both credible and plausible for it to be received as representing ‘truth’. Reporting rape within South Africa has done a disservice to women as it often perpetuates stereotypes rather than challenges them.

In the event of re-telling a story of rape one is confined to a rigid and inflexible framework.<sup>69</sup> The literature I have examined on this subject tells us that for a rape narrative to be believed it must first be plausible.<sup>70</sup> What makes a rape narrative plausible is based on whether or not it makes sense to those listening. In other words, can the listeners imagine the event within the tight confines that rape narratives ought to fit within. As Jane Bennett states, “the plausibility of a story in itself is a function of its hearer’s readiness to make sense of its organization at multiple levels. The plausibility of narrative relies on the symbolic relation of what gets ‘said’ and cultural assumptions about how the world works.... I am considering more the intricacy of narrative plot and a hearer’s evaluation of the story as ‘likely’.<sup>71</sup> If hearer’s fail to makes sense of a narrative’s organization, one’s story loses its plausibility. A believable rape narrative is a stereotypical one. The organization of a believable rape narrative, which will be discussed below, ‘makes sense’ because it has been repeated as not *one* way rape occurs but *the* way rape happens.

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<sup>68</sup> Hilary Nicholson. “Gender as a Dynamic Concept in the Media” In *Gendered Realities: Essays in Caribbean Feminist Thought*, Edited by Patricia Mohammed, (2002).

<sup>69</sup> Hellen Moffett. (2003), Jane Benett. (1997).

<sup>70</sup> Jane Bennett. (1997).

<sup>71</sup> Jane Bennett. (1997) p. 12.

The rapist and the rape survivor must match the social construction they have been issued for a 'real' rape to take place. Therefore the believability of a rape narrative has less to do with the rape survivor's story than the inflexible framework in which rape is understood. Stepping outside this framework penalizes the rape survivor by forcing their narrative into the realm of the unlikely.<sup>72</sup> The arguments made by Bennett and Moffett have provided an alternative framework for my analysis. Journalists often work within a dominant paradigm in order to trigger a quick response from the public. In saying this, the journalist's account of a rape works within the already existing stereotypes of rape as they have a vested interest in their stories 'being heard'.

In South Africa, but not unique to South Africa, the dependence on stereotypes when talking about rape often acts as a form of denialism and pushes the problem of rape into a space of Otherness. In order to talk about rape in a meaningful way, feminists and other social scientists have had to firstly engage in a project of exposing sexist, racist, classist and homophobic constructions of understanding and explaining rape. The difficulty lies not only in challenging the way rape is commonly understood but looking at what conditions, what ways of knowing, already exist that allow such generalized and harmful explanations of rape to be accepted as truth.

Feminists have argued that the way rape is commonly talked about in South Africa operates as a technique of normalizing gender-based violence.<sup>73</sup> Rape has become such a mundane crime that the act itself, unless sensationalized and loaded with hyperbole, is no longer an interest to the public. This has been achieved through stereotypes of race, gender and class that have less to do with the act of rape itself and much to do with the continuation of colonial discourse and patriarchal power.<sup>74</sup>

Patterns of troping within discourses of rape (always the fault of the woman, only uneducated poor men rape, rape necessarily lies outside of representation and language)

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<sup>72</sup> Hellen Moffett. (2003), Jane Bennett. (1997).

<sup>73</sup> Jane Bennett. (1997), Helen Moffett. (2003), Mmatshilo Motsei. (2007).

<sup>74</sup> Jenny Sharpe. "The Unspeakable Limits of Rape: Colonial Violence and Counter Insurgency," (1994).

create a limited space for rape to be understood.<sup>75</sup> Only particular rape narratives, which fit within this confinement, are deemed credible and plausible. Within the legal and public discourse, who is rape-able and who is capable of committing rape depends on how closely the rape narrative fits the stereotype. Reflecting on a rape in South Africa that did receive much media attention Helen Moffett states,

So there was this tremendous public interest in and concern with a rape narrative that could be tolerated, that was “palatable” (and ultimately “heroic”) – the victim was a brave, virtuous, Christian, young, attractive, articulate white middle-class woman who’d been head-girl of her school, whereas her assailants were two unemployed, under-educated, criminal, drug-taking and utterly vicious creatures who have cold-bloodedly planned their attack, and who never at any point in the subsequent trial showed the slightest signs of remorse or regret.<sup>76</sup>

The characteristics Moffett lists above describe what can be considered a credible and plausible rape narrative within the prevailing discourse. In many ways the rape survivor and the rapist must stand in complete opposition to one another for the narrative to be heard as rape. If the woman raped was wearing ‘revealing’ clothes, was drunk, out at night or is ‘promiscuous’ the credibility of her narrative would disappear. As it would have if she knew the perpetrator, if he was respected within his community or wealthy and attractive. Such ways of understanding rape completely ignore that rape is happening in all communities, irrespective of socio-economic conditions<sup>77</sup> and that rape usually occurs between two people who know each other.<sup>78</sup>

A complicated trajectory of the way race enters the narratives of rape in South Africa has led to further difficulties in speaking about rape and other forms of sexual assault. Sarah Nuttall

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<sup>75</sup> Jane Bennett. (1997), Jill Bennett. (2005), Moffett (2003).

<sup>76</sup> Helen Moffett. (2002) p.5.

<sup>77</sup> This is not to say that rape is occurring at the same rate in all communities or that rape looks the same across class differences. For example women in middle and upper class communities have the means to protect themselves from stranger and gang rape in ways that women in working class communities often do not have access to. Due to low rates of reporting rape within the family (this includes women raped by their husbands), date rape and other forms of rape where the survivor knows the perpetrator, the statistical data needed to compare geographical locations is unreliable.

<sup>78</sup> Helen Moffett. (2002).

argues an interesting point that conjoins current cultural obsessions with surveillance (i.e. hidden cameras and nanny monitors) to mythical notions of the black man that reproduce images of the lustful beast. Nuttall explores the language used to promote the production of chastity belts for babies and how such products were being pitched within a racist framework. Nuttall's concern is that imbued within notions of protection, especially of children, an image of black masculinity projects the potentiality of danger. This image of blackness as always already dangerous has informed the ways in which protection, surveillance and technology intersect. In this case, which bodies need protection and which bodies need to be policed is not free from colonial anxieties. As I mentioned earlier, it has been the duty of scholars who work towards a debunking of harmful rape stereotypes to question what are the conditions and ways of knowing that allow such images to flourish in the social imagination. I mention Nuttall's argument as an example of how raced notions of blackness as the lustful and dangerous Other are normalized in the dominant discourse regarding safety and protection. We did not get to this understanding of danger and safety 'naturally'. If we trace colonial constructions of black masculinity we will see that this image has a history of serving the desires of white supremacy.

During apartheid rape was not seen as a 'fundamental social problem'.<sup>79</sup> One way rape did enter into the apartheid project was to prohibit sex across racial boundaries. Deborah Posel states,

Driven by typically colonial anxieties about rapacious black sexuality, the apartheid state accumulated an extensive armoury of regulations and prohibitions to control the practice and transaction of sex, its public representations and performance. Within these political and legislative structures, sex within the domestic domain was deemed a 'private matter'... So, sexual violence was typically not a site of political concern, unless the perpetrator was black and the victim white, in which case, the public outrage was virulent. Sex across the black-white racial divide was forbidden, and miscegenation intensely stigmatized.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Deborah Posel. "Sex, Death and the Fate of the Nation: Reflections on the politicalization of Sexuality in post-apartheid South Africa," (2005).

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. p.128.

This way of thinking about rape functions to formally institutionalizing rape as issue of race rather than a matter of gender-based violence, which in turn silenced acts of sexual assault and rape that occurred between two people of the same race. Tracing the trajectory of representation of rape in South Africa, we can see that racist notions used to explain rape are far from eradicated. Rather, the ways rape has been talked about in the public realm in post-apartheid South Africa has continued to entrench racial stereotypes.<sup>81</sup>

The State v. Zuma trial of 2005 stands as a key historical juncture with regards to gender and violence in South Africa. Although feminists were not in favour of the judgment, they saw it as an opportunity to reflect on current conditions of gender and violence in the South African context.<sup>82</sup> A reading of Judge Willem van der Merwe's judgment exposes just how colonial constructions of African men pervade into current ways of thinking.<sup>83</sup> To render Zuma credible, Zuma's defense team mobilized well-worn stereotypes of an 'African man' as innately sexually irresponsible. Zuma's performance and public statements further confirmed this<sup>84</sup>. Despite what possibilities can be imagined in terms of gender equality when a politically powerful man faces legal accusations of rape, most feminist agree that the discourse of rape mobilized in this case limited the potentiality for gender peace by further concretizing a discursively violent discourse of rape.<sup>85</sup>

Much less writing has been dedicated to looking at the representation of infant rape. Existing literature addressing this topic that does not fix infant rape as a problem of poverty and alcohol is sparse. Helen Moffett and Deborah Posel's work on 'baby rape' has been most informative. Posel's work draws current and historical connections between silence, secrecy and sexual violence. A trajectory of sexual control within South Africa is tightly linked to the state's ability to police bodies. During apartheid, sexuality could be regulated

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<sup>81</sup> Helen Moffett. (2003).

<sup>82</sup> Mmatshilo Motsei. (2007), Jane Bennett. (1997).

<sup>83</sup> V. Reddy. "Real Men Stand up for the Truth: discursive meaning in the Jacob Zuma rape trial. (2006).

<sup>84</sup> Zuma's statements that when a woman wears a kanga she wants sex and a shower after sex is a reliable HIV preventative further entrenched a colonial image that African men are innately sexually naïve.

<sup>85</sup> Jane Bennett. (1997).

through the legal system. Laws protected racist notions that affirmed only particular bodies were rape-able. In a similar manner only certain bodies (black male bodies) were capable of rape, projecting an image of rape as something white men did not do.<sup>87</sup> Sexual abuse of children was kept in secrecy especially within white communities. Posel states, “Police were reluctant to venture into the supposedly ‘private’ spaces of ‘the home’, as the domain within which, as far as possible, men should be left to discipline ‘their’ women and children without legal interference”.<sup>88</sup> The silencing of sexual violence meant that it did not happen; it could not be found.

Today, nationalist rhetoric operates to police sexuality in similar ways. Only a particular kind of person, one that is closer to animal than citizen, is capable of raping a child or baby. Such rhetoric was especially popular during the Zuma initiated governmental moral regeneration meetings, which took place in November 2001, shortly after the rape of baby Tshepang. During this time, talk of the moral citizen proliferated and ‘baby rape’ was approached as a problem of societal moral degeneration.<sup>89</sup> Posel states, “sexual violence, then, had become a trope of social violation, moral frailty and the challenges of governance more widely. Rape now exemplified the most fundamental political and moral challenges confronting the nation...”.<sup>90</sup> This challenge was met with language that classified men who rape as monsters and villains. Rapists existed out there, they were someone or something ‘beyond the bounds of humanity’.<sup>91</sup> Within this discourse meaningful conversations that attempted to unpack notions of masculinity, manhood and gender-based violence could not be heard. Researcher, Rachel Jewkens, notes that in South Africa rape is tied to manhood in very complex ways.<sup>92</sup> Deep questions of access to power and the construction of ‘man’ are needed but negated when the debates centres on racial stereotypes of savagery and the moral self.

The representation of baby rape differs from that of a woman because when a woman is raped the rapist is often erased from the narrative. When a baby is raped the rapist becomes

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<sup>87</sup> Deborah Posel. (2005).

<sup>88</sup> Deborah Posel. “Baby Rape’ Unmaking secrets of sexual violence in post- apartheid South Africa” (2005), p.25.

<sup>89</sup> Mike Baltey, Traggy Maepa. *Beyond Retribution: Prospects for Restorative Justice in South Africa*, [www.iss.co.za/pubs/Monographs/No111/Chap1.pdf](http://www.iss.co.za/pubs/Monographs/No111/Chap1.pdf)

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. p 37.

<sup>91</sup> Helen Moffett. (2003).

<sup>92</sup> Celean Jacobson, “In South Africa rape is linked to manhood,” *Mail and Guardian*. (9<sup>th</sup> July, 2009).

a savage. Moffett states, “the monster narrative has particularly serious consequences for the reporting of rape of children. If there is one thing that might garner general consensus, it is the notion that anyone who rapes a child is by definition a monster”<sup>93</sup> Sticking with the stereotype seems to be the only way media has been able to speak the unspeakable. Create insiders and outsiders, depict an ‘us versus them’ situation and then, at least, ‘we’ are innocent.

Within reporting of baby rape another common theme is to blame the mother.<sup>94</sup> Only a particular ‘kind of woman’, ‘kind of mother’ would let such an atrocity happen to their child. Criminologist Jeanne Flavin, whose work has focused on the reproductive rights of women in prison, argues that a woman’s role as dutiful mother often overshadow other aspects of her humanity. Once a woman is deemed ‘unfit’ to rear her children she is easily the target of public scrutiny. Flavin argues, “the inherent unfairness of a system that expects low-income and drug-dependent pregnant women to provide their fetuses with the health care and safety that these women themselves are not provided and have not been guaranteed”.<sup>95</sup> It is along the same line that I argue that the representation of Baby Tshepang’s mother carried unwarranted expectations. Unreasonable on the bases that she was to provide protection she herself did not have access to, and unfair because the criteria used to criticize her was based on an essentialist construction of woman and mother.

<sup>93</sup> Helen Moffett. (2003), p. 6.

<sup>94</sup> Helen Moffett. (2003).

<sup>95</sup> Jeanne Flavin. “Punishing Pregnant Drug-using Women: Defying Law, Medicine and Common-sense.” *Journal of Addictive Disease* vol. 29. (2010) p.231.

## Chapter II: Analyzing the Media

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### Mobilizing Colonial Discourse: How the Media Relied on the Sign of the Barbaric to Explain the Rape of Baby Tshepang

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An insidious depiction of the town, Louisvale, is offered in many of the newspaper articles about the case of baby Tshepang. The explicitness of the image that constructs Louisvale as a place of shame and disgust varies, but is non-the-less present in almost numbing repetition. Even articles that hint towards an understanding that naming Louisvale a 'town of shame' is problematic offer very little to counter this image. Within the media, the harmful and dangerous consequences for Louisvale that this label carries are never explored. This analysis will look at how shame operates as a grand or umbrella trope. Through a deconstruction of the ways shame was cast onto the town and its people, sub-tropes can be identified. Tracing the trajectory of these sub-tropes, I argue that the genealogy belongs within a colonial discourse of Africa as Other. Notions of place as poverty stricken, barbaric, savage, without future, innately sexually irresponsible and unfixable have subtly and not so subtly contained the ways in which Africa is brought into discourse in exhausting but nonetheless powerful ways. Within the operation of shame in this particular case, but not unique to this particular case, we can also find its gendered biases. For example, the stereotype that rape is always already the fault of the woman or that women 'ask for it' links the woman's body to shame will be further discussed in my analysis. I also wish to stress the interface between colonial and gendered discourse within this representation, which do not exist as two separate parts of a whole but rather are entangled in a justification of one another.

A quantitative study conducted by the Media Monitoring Project (MMP Africa Division, 2004) in partnership with the NGO, Gender Links, which looked at the representation of the rape of Baby Tshepang in newspapers notes that, 'by far the most dominant theme in the

media coverage of the Baby Tshepang case was moral outrage”.<sup>96</sup> The MMP study acknowledges that moral outrage was constructed through naming Louisvale a ‘town of shame’ and that repetitive use of offensive language such as ‘semi-human,’ ‘barbaric,’ ‘savage’ and ‘brutal,’ was commonplace. However, due to the nature of the study it does not attempt to look at what morality means through the use of such language. What the MMP study does offer, running parallel to my own observations, is indication that all key themes within the newspaper articles about baby Tshepang work within a framework of well-worn images of Africa. An article in *Fair Lady* magazine also picked up on the media’s repetitive use of potentially dangerous language within the reporting of the baby Tshepang case stating, “across the globe people were outraged, horrified and angry. Newspapers and magazines described the alleged rapists as semi-human and barbaric, and the people living in Louisvale as poverty-stricken, unemployed, drunks, who were dirt poor and pitiful. Louisvale was branded a ‘town of shame’, and some reports suggested that the rape of this infant happened because of poverty, alcoholism and moral degeneration.”<sup>97</sup>

As I have been arguing, the newspapers I have analyzed often talk about rape in a manner that superficially makes sense of what has been termed an ‘unbelievable act’. The image of the savage, abject poverty and alcohol abuse, within the permitted rape narrative, are believable explanations for rape. Elaine Salo notes, “while all men are capable of rape, the reason why they rape are diverse, and informed by whom they rape, as well as their own and their victims’ structural location in society.”<sup>98</sup> To begin to understand the diverse reasons of rape we must firstly, as Moffett states, ‘debunk the distracting and dangerous myths arising from our past that continue to hijack the debate on rape.’<sup>99</sup> I do not deny the correlation between the impoverished conditions of Louisvale and rape however perpetuating stereotypes and relying on dehumanizing language moves us away from the contextual specificities.

The public rhetoric of moral outrage in response to the rape of Baby Tshepang relies heavily on the sign of the barbaric. Before discussing the significance and historical specificities of

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<sup>96</sup> William Bird & Nicola Spurr. ‘Media Representation of baby rape: the case of ‘Baby Tshepang’ (2004) p 36.

<sup>97</sup> “A Community Raped”, *Fair Lady Magazine*, p.2.

<sup>98</sup> Elaine Salo, “Guns and Sexuality on the Cape Flats” (2000).

<sup>99</sup> Helen Moffett. “These Women, They Force Us to Rape Them: Rape as Narrative of Social-control in Post-apartheid South Africa,” (2006).

this sign, I offer a few examples of its use with reference to this case. An article about the baby Tshepang case printed in *The Cape Argus* read, “In Louisvale the line between humans and the animal kingdom become blurred”.<sup>100</sup> In a similar tone *The Sowetan* stated, “Men of South Africa, why do we allow lust and greed to turn us into beasts without emotions...”<sup>101</sup> The *Sunday Independent* states, “We have grappled as a nation to understand this barbarianism.”<sup>102</sup> The repeated image of the barbaric offers insight into how newspaper journalists ‘made sense’ of this story. Making sense of infant rape placed South Africa in a precarious situation. The national and international media attention on the rape of Baby Tshepang forced infant rape to the forefront. South Africa was expected to provide an explanation and to do so quickly. The urgency was apparent in the language of the media, which referred to the situation as a ‘state of emergency’.<sup>103</sup> South Africa has no choice but to confront what was seen as a growing trend of sexual abuse towards children.<sup>104</sup>

Other examples looked like this;

- Baby Tshepang town still confronts devils... this is a place known to the civilized world only for the infamous rape...<sup>105</sup>
- Even animals don't do to their young what you did to Baby Tshepang.”<sup>106</sup>
- How do we punish rape monsters?<sup>107</sup>
- The people of Louisvale say that they feel raped too. That the monster was self spawned.<sup>108</sup>
- Healing moral sickness – Why have we become sexual cannibals?<sup>109</sup>
- If hell had a place on earth, it would be this small platteland town. Not only because of the scorching heat, but because life here for the 4 500 inhabitants is a daily nightmare.

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<sup>100</sup> *Cape Argus*, (February 14, 2002).

<sup>101</sup> ‘How Do We Punish Rape Monsters’. *Sowetan*, (15 November, 2001)

<sup>102</sup> *Sunday Independent*, (November 25, 2001).

<sup>103</sup> “SA Facing Child Rape Crisis,” *CNN.com*, (26 November 2001).

<sup>104</sup> Posel. (2005).

<sup>105</sup> “Baby Tshepang Town Still Confronts Devils,” *IOL South Africa Online News*, (18 December 2004).

<sup>106</sup> “Unrepentant Rapist of ‘Baby Tshepang gets Life,” *IOL South Africa Online News*, (26 July, 2002).

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> “Things Fall Apart,” *Mail and Guardian*. (November 9, 2001).

<sup>109</sup> *The Star*, (December 8, 2001).

Within the media representation, Louisvale exists below humanity, described as a ‘nightmare’ and ‘hell on earth’. It is easy to dismiss such writing as strategic exaggeration and an attempt to boost sales through grotesque imagery. However the repetition of such language tells us something about how we think towards and respond to the context of infant rape. Here we can see how a grammar of rape is centred around the notion of the non-human. Cannibals, devils, beasts, monsters, barbarians and animals all stand in opposition of the human in which we can reason with. These images, through their use and repetition, have come to represent what is foreign to the human, setting apart savagery from civilization.<sup>110</sup> In many ways the savage trope has been used to define humanity by creating parameters around what and who falls within the category of the human.

The government’s response was to convene a meeting titled, ‘The Moral Regeneration Movement National Consultative Meeting’ headed by Deputy President Jacob Zuma. In the opening address Zuma stated, “There is a consensus that there is something seriously wrong in our society. We are still haunted by the news that six adult men having raped a nine-month-old baby, and there are many other cases, which display barbarism and moral decay of the worst kind.”<sup>111</sup> Zuma echoes the media, offering credibility to the discursive framework. This apparently new trend of infant rape is publicly understood to belong within a discursive framework of savagery. An acceptance manifested towards the possibility that ‘moral decay’ and ‘barbarism’ of black men could explain infant rape.

Infant rape was, as it still is, confined to its unspeakability and therefore pertains an element of mystery as we struggle to make sense of it. Had Tshepang been a woman and not an infant such imagery would have not been necessary. Within the organization of believable rape narratives, poor, black and uneducated men rape women; such a narrative is plausible. However, to make sense of the rape of an infant the rapist has been transformed into the extreme Other, as far away from humanity as possible. In order for the story to be ‘heard’

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<sup>110</sup> Mbembe. (2001).

<sup>111</sup> Jacob Zuma. “Address to the Moral Regeneration Movement National Consultative Meeting,” (23 November, 2001).

the rapist was turned into an animal and the society that created such a monster must not belong within the civilized world but rather to civilization's binary opposition. The rapist of baby Tshepang and Louisvale exist in isolation to 'us'. Through this discourse a man who rapes a baby becomes the antithesis of human rather than a reflection of the deeply complicated ways in which gender, violence and the access to power interact in the world we live in.

Additionally, the location of the Baby Tshepang rape being in Africa opened up the doors to the 'colonial library' granting journalists full borrowing privileges. This is not to say that the trope of the animal is not being mobilized to talk about infant rape in other parts of the world. The reporting of an infant rape in Pennsylvania, United States in 2008 reflects a similar grammar of rape, with the term monster repeatedly used.<sup>112</sup> A difference, however, is found in the representation of the places where each rape occurred. The town in Pennsylvania and the people who dwell there were not ostracized, labeled or blamed. In fact, they are not even mentioned. Louisvale was brought into baby Tshepang's rape narrative as a central character. One article states, "Louisvale...stole baby Tshepang's innocence". Another reads, "Baby Tshepang was raped here" below we see a picture of Louisvale. The image of a town known for destitution and baby rapists is entangled within the representation of this case. The rape of a nine-month-old baby is now plausible, we have a familiar narrative, one of barbarians and savages, one we have heard since the days of Conrad,<sup>113</sup> dark things happen in the heart of darkness.

## Louisvale as a 'zone of non-being'

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When considering the representation of Louisvale and its geographical location as a place in Africa, the trope of nothingness operates with double meaning. Nothingness or non-being signifies a societal worthlessness as well as an actual absence<sup>114</sup>. Louisvale exists within this

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<sup>112</sup> "Pennsylvania Man Charged with Raping 5-month Old Baby," *Digital Journal*, (15 March, 2008).

<sup>113</sup> Joseph Conrad. *Heart Of Darkness*, (2006).

<sup>114</sup> David Theo Goldberg. (1996).

‘zone of non-being’<sup>115</sup> straddling its perceived lack of civilization and invisibility. Louisvale, like many small towns of South Africa were not designed to be seen. Its function is to house farm and factory workers out of sight of the white middle class. Poverty, unemployment, high levels of alcohol consumption and domestic violence are a reality of life in Louisvale, they are also the conditions that make it invisible. It is the actual state of affairs, the conditions of poverty that the world would rather overlook. It exists only in negativity and is therefore denied much recognition. The world became aware of Louisvale through the rape of baby Tshepang, illuminating the very conditions that made it invisible.

An article from 2004, when South African political commentator and journalist Michael Schmidt returned to Louisvale, demonstrates the kind of language used to capture the town. He opens his article with the words,

A dust devil gyrates across the stoep of the bottle-store in Louisvale Road, south of Upington in the sun-blistered Northern Cape, obliterating the drunks and their inchoate pain for an instant. This is a place where the dreams of its 6 000 dirt-poor residents come to die, asphyxiated slowly in the 38-degree haze. This is a place known to the civilized world only for the infamous rape, on October 27, 2001, of the nine-month-old girl nicknamed Baby Tshepang...<sup>116</sup>

We can see how an image of this town centres around its disparaging conditions and lack of possibilities. The nothingness that characterizes Louisvale is no longer due to its invisibility, it now exists but with a media spotlight shining on its lack of anything constructive, valuable or functional. It is a place where people and/or dreams are never realized. In a similar tone, other articles express this sentiment:

- Poverty, unemployment and despair are a way of life in Louisvalewag: A road to nowhere in a town of shame.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Frantz Fanon. *Black Skin, White Mask*, (1967).

<sup>116</sup> “Baby Tshepang Town Still Confronts Devil,” *Cape Times*, (18<sup>th</sup> December 2004).

<sup>117</sup> “A road to nowhere in a town of shame,” *Weekend Argus*, (November 10, 2001).

- Sultana Road is a dirt road, which stretches for no more than 300 meters. But all the pain and shame of Louisvale is centered on this small street, in this small town... and on this small, closed community.<sup>118</sup>
- Cheap wine fuels their journeys from reality and drunkenness is a solace in their misery.<sup>119</sup>
- Alcohol and, increasingly, drugs offer the only escape from poverty, unemployment, rape, violent crime, teenage pregnancy and a howvroue (mistress) system. Many are uneducated and illiterate.<sup>120</sup>
- Baby Tshepang will not be returning to her birthplace - the place that snatched away her innocence and left her with scars that could last her lifetime.<sup>121</sup>
- They are just two of the 4 500 people who live in Louisvaleweg township, outside Upington, a place of despair, where men boast about their "houvroue", or mistresses; where sex with under-age girls is accepted; and where there's little money, and most of what there is gets spent on booze and drugs.<sup>122</sup>
- Where horror never ends: The dirt-poor town notorious for baby rape lives under a shadow.<sup>123</sup>

My argument is not that the media is reporting false information or that serious societal problems are not present. However, when poverty, alcohol and illiteracy are used to explain rape, void of any real analysis, we move further away from a meaningful engagement. I wish to return to the article by Michael Schmidt, in which I will need to quote quite extensively. This article is important in understanding the dominant approach taken by the media,

Tshepang's mother said she had not received a summons to go back to court to review the matter and she feared Tshepang would spend her fourth birthday - the Day of Goodwill next week - far from home. Welfare, she said, was concerned that, if Tshepang were returned to her, she would live with

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<sup>118</sup> *Weekend Argus*, (10<sup>th</sup> November, 2001).

<sup>119</sup> "Troops turn out at baby-rape court: public fury bubbles over," *Cape Argus*, (6<sup>th</sup> November, 2001).

<sup>120</sup> "Baby Tshepang Goes to a Safe Loving Home," *The Citizen*, (20<sup>th</sup> January, 2002).

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> "Baby Tshepang's Father Talks of his Anger," *The Star*. (8<sup>th</sup> November 2001).

<sup>123</sup> *Cape Times*, (24<sup>th</sup> March, 2002).

her mother and grandparents in their corrugated iron shack. "What is wrong with a zinc house? She was born in a zinc house. We can't help that we are too poor to afford a stone house. Besides, we have bought proper beds and cupboards." Tshepang's grandfather said he was still owed R75 000 of the R100 000 settlement agreed by the state in June for his wrongful arrest. "If they pay it to me, I'll buy a proper house in the town" which should satisfy welfare as a suitable home for Tshepang, he said... "

She complained that she must "walk to Upington, which is about four-and-a-half kilometres, to visit the social worker, but she drives past our house in her government car without stopping to speak to me". Her immediate plan is to complete her schooling. But she knows from hard experience that will be no easy prospect. "I washed floors and did odd jobs here and there to pay my school fees. When I fell pregnant I had still not paid off my school uniforms, so I had to sell them." Today, things are just as tough. She earns a pitiful R100 a month working in a hide-curing factory on the outskirts of Upington...

This article is a total of three pages in length and although it is the only article to feature Tshepang's mother, it does not engage with her words. She makes a legitimate argument, however, it is overshadowed by Schmidt's obsession with poverty and destitution. Baby Tshepang's mother asks, 'what is wrong with a zinc house?' She also comments on her position regarding the unfair treatment she receives from the social worker. Why are her words not received as insight into the specificity of the context? It would be somewhat of an overstatement to say that her words go unacknowledged as they are present. However, they seem to appear in print as on display rather than a source of information. Her quotations are placed within this article to validate Schmidt's observations of poverty. Situated outside of civilization, as Schmidt notes earlier in this article, Wanda's subject position was easily evaded. When an already marginalized voice speaks but is eclipsed by an inability or unwillingness to 'hear', as this example demonstrates, it is the journalist who becomes the *speaking being* and speaks about/for others.

If journalism involves reporting the experiences of other people then they must speak about others. Conflating speaking about others and speaking for others is not always possible, the two are not always the same. However, in this case I argue that the ways in which Wanda was spoken about determined the way her voice was heard and therefore spoke for her. As Linda Alcoff has pointed out, speaking for others is potentially disempowering especially when a gap in access to power exists between the two subjects. The manner in which Wanda's position is described is tainted with an impression of hopelessness. Alcoff notes, "...meaning must be understood as plural and shifting, since a single text can engender diverse meanings given diverse contexts. Not only what is emphasized, noticed, and how it is understood will be affected by the location of both speaker and hearer, but the truth-value or epistemic status will also be affected"<sup>124</sup>. The way in which Schmidt speaks about Wanda not only shifts the way her words are heard but further entrenches Wanda's voice as unknowledgeable as he, situated 'objectively' outside, tells us of truth.

Wanda's voice would not offer a true representation of Louisvale nor would it necessarily have been emancipatory. Assuming this would be to essentialize, however, to hear Wanda's voice would have been important in itself. Alcoff makes this point stating, "ignoring the subaltern's or oppressed person's speech is to continue the imperialist project. But if a privileging of the oppressed's speech cannot be made on the grounds that its content will necessarily be liberatory, it can be made on the grounds of the very act of itself"<sup>125</sup>. It is not the content of Wanda's voice that I am arguing for but her location and positionality. What are the politics of living in a zinc shack, a structure many South African call home? And how does rape intersect? Privileging lived experience should not be seen as a move to hear a more 'authentic voice' but, rather as going against the grain of silencing already marginalized voices.

## The 'Virgin Myth' or a Media Myth?

Other reoccurring themes that mimic colonial discourse are that of relentless sexual

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<sup>124</sup> Linda Alcoff. "The Problem with Speaking for Others," (1992) p.12-13.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid. p. 20.

irresponsibility and an unquestioned belief in absurd fable. In the portrayal of the rape of baby Tshepang these tropes go hand in hand. Despite research that provides much evidence of this, the media claims that South African men rape infants because of a belief that sleeping with a virgin cures AIDS.<sup>126</sup>

The argument often looks like this;

- Some 21 000 cases of child rape were reported to police in South Africa last year. The attacks have been fuelled by a myth that sex with a virgin will protect a man against AIDS or even cure him of the incurable disease that afflicts one in nine of the population.<sup>127</sup>
- The attacks are fuelled by a widespread rumour that having sex with a virgin cures AIDS, which reportedly affects one in nine South Africans. Traditional healers, or witchdoctors, are blamed for spreading this idea, and encouraging child rape.<sup>128</sup>
- There is the belief by HIV positive men that sleeping with babies or virgins they will be cured. This myth finds fertile ground in our society because we are a country in denial about HIV/AIDS.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Moffett states, “the myth that sex with a virgin can cure HIV/AIDS and the claim that this is a fueling factor in the rape of children also warrant brief mention. Studies have not yet clarified the extent to which this dangerous myth has credence in Southern Africa. It has also not yet been established what proportion of rapes are motivated by this myth. There is no doubt that it is put forward as a reason or ‘excuse’ in a number of cases of child rape, although when these claims are made by rapists who have been charged, especially those who blame traditional healers for their actions, it is hard to establish how genuine they are. However, it would appear that this trend may not be as prevalent as feared.” *Speaking the Unspeakable*, (2002), p.10. Also, an article in BBC Online states, “Studies have shown that the virgin myth does not adequately explain the trend in infant rapes. Dr Saths Cooper, who led the study, presented the findings at parliament's hearings on the spate of sexual abuse against children and babies. He was among a number of imminent researchers who presented their work to the task team on Wednesday. Cooper said they also found little evidence that the myth that raping virgins cured AIDS was a primary reason for raping babies. In other studies of rape of slightly older children, the myth is seen as a significant factor. (“Revenge Rapes’ SA New Trend” *BBC Online*. (14<sup>th</sup> March, 2002).

<sup>127</sup> “Baby Rapist Accused to be Set Free,” *Routers*, (17<sup>th</sup> January 2002).

<sup>128</sup> “Life For South African Baby Rapist,” *BBC*, (26<sup>th</sup> July, 2002).

<sup>129</sup> *City Press*, (4th November 2001)

- They are just two of the 4 500 people who live in Louisvaleweg township, outside Uppington, a place of despair, where men boast about their "houvroue", or mistresses; where sex with under-age girls is accepted; and where there's little money, and most of what there is gets spent on booze and drugs.<sup>130</sup>

Many news articles used the case of baby Tshpang, taking advantage of its vulnerability to spectacularization, to introduce the issue of infant rape in South Africa on the whole. Many of these articles, especially ones printed in newspapers outside of South Africa, state that some South African men believe sleeping with a virgin will cure AIDS. They also inform the reader that 'witchdoctors'<sup>131</sup> are partially to blame. As stated above these claims are made with little or no research into how widely these myths are actually believed and practiced. The evidence that connects infant rape to HIV/AIDS is currently lacking. Research does show that this myth is responsible for the rape of older girls and therefore needs to be treated with urgency and debunked.<sup>132</sup> Until the research is more reliable and a link can be established between infant rape and curing HIV/AIDS, this myth should be treated as a possibility and not the source of the problem. This myth has become central within the vocabulary of infant rape in South Africa, limiting the possibilities for alternative conversations.

Sticking with my argument that the reportability of infant rape depends on the perpetuation of colonial discourse, the theme of 'facticity and arbitrariness'<sup>133</sup> emerges in my analysis at this point. According to Mbembe, Africa, within the imagination of dominant Western epistemology, is summed up and characterized as a traditional and simple society. Despite ongoing criticism towards such discourse, Mbembe argues that because of the pervasive power of colonial discourse this presupposition lives on. Returning to Mbembe's quote cited earlier, "By *facticity* is meant that, in Hegel's words, 'the thing *is*; and it *is* merely because it *is*... and this simple immediacy constitutes the *truth*'. In such a case, there is nothing to

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<sup>130</sup> "Baby Tshepang's Father Talks of his Anger" *The Star*. (8<sup>th</sup> November 2002).

<sup>131</sup> I wish to note that such language is problematic. The term witch doctor is attached to particular connotations of Africa as a place of arbitrary belief and nonsensical traditionalism. It must also be noted that infant rape is occurring in parts of South Africa where 'traditional healers' do not feature within the culture.

<sup>132</sup> Helen Moffett. *Speaking the Unspeakable*, (2002).

<sup>133</sup> Mbembe. (2001) p.3.

justify... By *arbitrariness*, is meant that, in contrast to reason in the West, myth and fable are seen as what, in such societies, denote order and time."<sup>134</sup> The articles analyzed depict an image of a place where rumors trump reason and lives are lived according to arbitrary, and in this case deadly beliefs.

The offence lies in the language as well as what gives such language credibility. The assumed facticity that Africa is a place of sexual naivety continues with an appearance of commonsensical knowledge. 'The thing *is*; and it *is* merely because it *is*.' We hear that in this place it is acceptable to have sex with young girls and that men believe sex with virgins cures AIDS and we hear it with a certain familiarity that allows it to be. It is the conditions of understanding, the existing knowledges, that allow for this. The arbitrariness of myth can go unexplained when we talk of events in Africa. Sexual irresponsibility is explained, not through research or investigation, but through the mobilization of stereotypes. Moffett states, "I suspect that this explanation (men rape to cure AIDS) for the epidemic of sexual violence of children has been eagerly seized upon because it fits neatly with the variation of the 'monster' stereotype that paints the rapist as a barbarian or superstitious savage."<sup>135</sup> Unfortunately, it seems that in the efforts to talk about infant rape we refer to the colonial library rather than to the context and its many political, social, racial and gendered complexities.

## Capital Punishment and Castration: Violence onto Nothingness

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Within this paradigm, talk of castration and capital punishment enters into the infant rape debate with little contestation. From letters to newspaper editors to governmental bodies, death and/or castration were seen as appropriate punishment for infant rapists. Judge, Hennie Lacock, who sentenced Potse to life in prison, spoke in favour of capital punishment for infant rapists. Quoting his words, one article states, " 'it is a pity there is no longer a death penalty because I would not hesitate, not even for a moment, to let you hang.' He

<sup>134</sup> Mbembe. (2001) p. 3-4.

<sup>135</sup> Helen Moffett. *Speaking the Unspeakable: Narratives Surrounding the Rape of Children*. p 10.

described the crime as the most gruesome human rights violation he had encountered in his 32-year career”.<sup>136</sup> A headline in the *Sunday Independent* stated, “The judge said Potse deserved the death sentence.”<sup>137</sup> Judges hold cultural power as they signify law and justice. Hennie Lacoock’s judgment has the power to strongly influence readers due to the respectability, authority and status he owns as a judge in the court of law.

Castration was another common response to the baby Tshepang rape case. One of the most disturbing headlines read, “Cut it off and make them women”.<sup>138</sup> A letter to the editor of *The Cape Times*, echoed this sentiment stating, “Castration – How to punish rapists”.<sup>139</sup> Demands for death or castration depend, in a large degree, on the guilty party being Other. Moffett states, “those who call for measures such as the death penalty or castration would be unable to do so if they stopped to consider the extremely high likelihood that a father, husband, son, boyfriend, neighbor, colleague, priest, doctor, teacher, nephew, friend or brother might be affected. This reality is not only often simply too painful to contemplate; it baulks communities in which there is a considerable investment in and approval of such rhetorical strategies.”<sup>140</sup> Could we still call for the death penalty if the rapist was someone we loved? As Moffett points out, within the current discourse on rape, this question cannot be asked. Too much is at stake if we were to deconstruct the human/savage binary. As long as infant rapists are the non-human outside of our community they cannot be the victims of violence.

There are two interlocking notions at play here. One, rapists are Other and not Us and two, we are not participating in violence by demanding death, as violence cannot be done onto what we do not recognize. Any harm in the form of punishment is justified as not against humanity or a human but against evil. It is the understanding that rapists are savages that simultaneously legitimizes any violence done onto him while making violence onto him impossible. Nothingness, in this case, cannot be a victim of violence. If we are to engage with violence and begin to ‘speak the unspeakable’, rapists need to be seen for what they are

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<sup>136</sup> “Unrepentant Rapist of ‘Baby Tshepang gets Life,” *IOL South Africa Online News*, (26 July, 2002).

<sup>137</sup> “I Keep Thinking it was my Fault,” *Sunday Independent*, (27<sup>th</sup> October, 2004).

<sup>138</sup> “*Sunday Times*, (24 March, 2002).

<sup>139</sup> *Cape Times*, (November 7, 2001).

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.* p. 7.

– human.

In exploring what underlies such rhetoric I would like to consider Mbembe's question: "what does it mean to do violence to what is nothing?"<sup>141</sup> This question allows for a shift to occur within this tightly confined debate. It opens up the possibility to discuss positionality and to consider who is making the demands for death. A different methodology would need to be explored when examining how the Louisvale community reacted. Their public outcry for the death of David Potse is engulfed with their own set of fears, trauma and anger. I do not attempt an analysis of this nor do I wish to exepthualize their response or argue that it is free from violence. My argument is that although the trauma felt after the event does not belong to Louisvale alone, proximity and location does matter. My analysis applies to the media representation of baby Tshepang; I am aware that a different theoretical approach would be needed to address the response within the community. My concern has been with how this case has been brought into the dominant discourse and the narratives it permits. In saying this, displaying public support for death or castration needs to be read within its specific context. Public rhetoric proclaiming a push towards 'regenerating morality' set the tone regarding the demands for castration and death and it is within this paradigm that I offer my criticism.

## Shame Sticks: Gender Performativity and Wanda's Denied Subject Position

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I wish to return to the representation of Wanda, however from a different theoretical angle. Wanda was not present when Tshepang was raped. It was reported that she was shopping or drinking at a nearby shebeen. We do not know, all we know is of her absence. This absence and possible drinking, a central theme within the media reporting, are the facts that fed into the image presented of Wanda. They also subjected her to a litany of shame. Wanda is vilified within the media reports, which present her as a young, irresponsible, unemployed, single mother who prefers to drink over attending to the needs of her child. I wish to interrogate the media's representation of Wanda by looking critically at the instruments used

<sup>141</sup> Mbembe. (2001) p. 174.

to condemn her. Texts do not only promote particular judgments, they perform them as well. When analyzing texts, I wish to return to Ahmed's point I addressed earlier. In asking what do these texts do, I have considered what judgments are being passed by naming and repeating certain 'facts'. How do particular labels and emotions get stuck to bodies and places; what histories are being mobilized in this process?

The language used to discuss Wanda places an emphasis on her failure as a dutiful mother as the following example demonstrates:

Raped baby's mom held for assault, neglect. Echoes of Baby Tshepang from Uppington haunted the Action Cinema, where a five-month-old baby was raped. In Uppington and in the run-down Joubert Park movie complex, both mothers had left their babies in the care of others. In both cases, no one tried to stop the rape. Both mothers are young, unmarried and unemployed, and both were drinking on the day their children were brutally raped.<sup>142</sup>

In the research conducted by the MMP similar conclusions were drawn. The MMP states:

Baby Tshepang's mother was mostly represented in fairly unsympathetic terms. She was represented as an irresponsible mother who got drunk and neglected her child's welfare, leaving her unsupervised in the company of disreputable men. Almost invariably, the press referred to her as a 'teenage mother', making the assumption that her age somehow contributes to the sequence of events surrounding the rape.<sup>143</sup>

The potentiality for violence is measured upon Wanda's inability to perform 'dutiful mother'. The hypothetical – had she been there this would have not happened- sets the tone in the media reports. The social expectations, in their binary form, which determine what a woman

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<sup>142</sup> "Raped Baby's Mom Held for Assault and Neglect," *The Sowetan*, (3<sup>rd</sup> December, 2001).

<sup>143</sup> William Bird & Nicola Spurr. (2004) p.46.

and/or mother ought to be and do are based on preconceived notions of gender. Such notions privilege a woman's duty as mother over human. Shame sticks to Wanda through a trajectory of constructed ideals that she has not conformed too. Her status as unmarried and her age, as she was only sixteen, were also used to penalize her. An article in *The Citizen* states, "Tshepang's unmarried mother, aged 16, whom the community initially hit out at because of her alleged late-night drinking and partying sessions, will also not be returning".<sup>144</sup> The emphasis on her status and age further represent Wanda as irresponsible. In a similar tone an article in *The Independent* states, "Neighbours say the baby's mother, who is aged 16, spent the evening drinking at a local shebeen".<sup>145</sup> The ways in which irresponsibility is attached to young and unwed mothers does not need to be explicitly stated to be heard. Ann Laura Stoler points out that within the construction of 'common sense' certain ideas can go unwritten because everyone already knows it.<sup>146</sup> It is the facticity that speaks; unwed, teenage mothers are irresponsible because they are.; "the thing *is*; and it *is* merely because it *is*".<sup>147</sup>

The media representation of Wanda operates as a punishment, condemning her choice to leave her child unattended as well as stepping outside the prescribed role of dutiful mother. Wanda denied her given responsibilities, however it is the preconceived notions of mother that made her an object of shame. The expectations placed on women such as Wanda to provide for and protect their children in situations where they are not safe themselves needs to be seriously reconsidered<sup>148</sup>.

The newspapers I analyzed perform as a moral watchdog onto their subjects. The rhetoric being perpetuated in these articles depends 'on longer histories of articulation'<sup>149</sup> of women and what it means to be a mother. Within the discursive framework that shapes how we hear

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<sup>144</sup> "Baby Tshepang Goes to a Safe Loving Home," *The Citizen*, (20<sup>th</sup> January, 2002).

<sup>145</sup> "South Africa Shocked as Six Charged with Raping Baby Girl," *The Independent*, (13th November, 2001).

<sup>146</sup> Ann Laura Stoler makes this claim within a different context, however her insight on the ways in which certain things are go unwritten but are still understood as they operate within the dominant discourse is useful in understanding the representation of Wanda. See Ann Laura Stoler. *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*, (2009).

<sup>147</sup> Mbembe, (2001) p.3.

<sup>148</sup> See Jeanne Flavin. "Punishing Pregnant Drug-using Women: Defying Law, Medicine and Common-sense." *Journal of Addictive Disease* vol. 29. (2010).

<sup>149</sup> Ahmed. (2004) p.1.

rape narratives, fault and blame is placed in the lap of the rape survivor. In this case, fault cannot be directed towards a nine-month old for what is done onto its body, so the blame shifts. The town of Louisvale is portrayed as one guilty culprit and within this town of shame is Tshepang's mother. In this case, discourses on motherhood and rape operate as a double-edged sword; women are deemed responsible for rape and mothers are to protect their children from harm. Under this lens Wanda's actions become part of the unspeakable and unbelievable, she is consumed within the trope that frames this event. Wanda's public response to the event was situated within her presumed shame. Does her failure to satisfy her duties as mother justify the limitations placed on her disposition? How was she to communicate other emotions, her anger, fear and sadness when she was always to answer to her shame? In an article printed in the *The Star*, the father of Tshepang is given space to display his hurt and anger.

An angry, jobless 21-year-old man paces through an orchard. He is the father of baby Tshepang... and he knows all six of her alleged attackers. Outside, Tshepang's father says: "I am so deeply hurt and I am so angry with what has happened to my baby. "I am going to leave it in the hands of the court, but I have told the community that if justice is not done, they can mete out any sentence that they wish on the real culprit." The father said that when he was told of the rape, he just stayed at home. "I was in shock. I knew that if I went there and one of those men stood in front of me, I would have done something really bad to him."<sup>150</sup>

Tshepang's father was not present when the event occurred. It seems that he had not been present for most of Tshepang's life. His choice to have been somewhere else when the rape occurred does not factor into the reporting nor do the activities he was participating in during the time of the rape. He could have been at a nearby shebeen but this we do not know. What the media does tell us is that he is angry. His life choices have not denied him this. Wanda being the subject of shame acts to exonerate others from their obligations. In this case, the facticity of gender roles, the taken for granted truth that mothers are innately care givers penalized Wanda while simultaneously relieved baby Tshepang's father of

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<sup>150</sup> "Baby Tshepang's Father Talks of his Anger," *The Star*, (8<sup>th</sup> November 2001).

responsibility.

The public was given a platform to voice their anger. Newspapers reported that the rape had created a ‘crisis’ of ‘moral panic’ throughout the nation.<sup>151</sup> Trust funds were created and *The Cape Times* reported that they were being ‘flooded with calls from people wanting to do something to help baby Tshepang’<sup>152</sup> One woman took a particular interest in the case, sending out mass emails to gather support for Tshepang. Her state was described as ‘angry’, ‘heartbroken’, ‘sickened’ and ‘disgusted’.<sup>153</sup> Another article stresses the public’s interest that Tshepang, ‘goes to a safe and loving home far from Louisvale’<sup>154</sup>. The reason I mention these examples is to stress the relationship between representation, recognition and *speaking beings*.<sup>155</sup> Higgins and Silver note that when listening to the stories of sexual abuse it is necessary to be, “listening not only to who speaks and in what circumstances, but who does not speak and why”<sup>156</sup> What conditions exist when we hear the anger of some while shame silences others? How are we to even begin to engage when we not only silence the very voices we need to hear but we deny the possibility that these are voices of knowledge? In the case of infant rape the story that may ease our anxiety is not the only story that should be told. There seems to be a real need to resist the desire to shame even if it places us in precarious places of discomfort.

## Politicizing Shame: Lara Foot Newton’s *Tshepang: The Third Testament* as an Alternative Response

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The reportability of the rape of baby Tshepang depended on offering a story we could ‘hear’. One that made sense and in spite of the disbelief of the event, the media offered a version that evades the complexities and complications. Bad mother and a diabolic town are presented to us in juxtaposition to the concerned, situated outside of the shamed. Hilory Nicholason, commenting on gender and the media more broadly states, “The media tends to

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<sup>151</sup> Posel. (2005).

<sup>152</sup> “Cape Times Offers Stream in to Help Raped Baby,” *Cape Times*, (6<sup>th</sup> November, 2001).

<sup>153</sup> “Angry Mother Strikes Cord with Email Campaign,” *IOL.co.za*, (7<sup>th</sup> November, 2001).

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Anthony Bogues. “Imagination Politics and Utopia: Confronting the Present,” (2006) p. 159.

<sup>156</sup> Lynn Higgins and Brenda Silver. (1991) p 10.

rely on stereotypes as short-cuts in order to elicit quick responses from us. These stereotypes limit our understanding of others and limit our perceptions of what is possible”<sup>157</sup>. What understanding of Wanda or Louisvale are possible within these confines? What do we know when well-worn stereotypes not only inform us but shape whose voice is allowed credibility and consideration.

The ways in which Louisvale was conceived as a town of shame rested upon a presupposition that the conditions within the town already had the potentiality to be shameful and just needed to be discovered or found out. Shame is written onto the landscape of this space as if it was part of its essence; as if it was always there. Louisvale is a town that does struggle with serious social, economical and political issues, which cannot be considered outside of the historical and contemporary context. The people of Louisvale were blanketed with an image of shame in a manner there shame become the norm. The interface between the shameful town and the empathetic self operated through an uneven relationship of power that was rarely addressed.

An alternative to the newspaper reports within the archives of the baby Tshelang case is Lara Foot Newton’s play *Tshelang: The Third Testament*.<sup>158</sup> It is through this play that I offer a close reading of how shame operates as a contemporary form of the colonial constructions I have addressed previously. Foot Newton demonstrates how the act of shaming creates existential distance between the self and the Other. I argue such an attempt perpetuates a quiet form of violence onto Others. Carolyn Dean states, “the institutionalized forms of everyday violence that normalizes the dehumanization of specific groups of people in ways mostly invisible to others, invisible to those who are not its target.”<sup>159</sup> Foot Newton’s play sheds light onto the ways in which the people of Louisvale were violated within the media reporting. The media image of Louisvale is challenged through acknowledging shame but

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<sup>157</sup> Hilory Nicholuson. “Gender as a Dynamic Concept in the Media”, In *Gendered Realities*, Edited by Patricia Mohammed. p. 361.

<sup>158</sup> I must state what seems obvious but is important to such a criticism, which is that *Tshelang* is a play and the audience is watching a performance not the real events. The audience is engaging with the actors who represent real people and their lived experiences but it is a particular representation. The play takes place in a controlled environment. In saying this theatre is an interesting space to interrogate public culture and offers possibilities to analyze how events are interpreted and how we can understand how meaning is made in cultures.

<sup>159</sup> Carolyn Dean. *The Fragility of Empathy: After the Holocaust*, (2004) p. 95.

viewed as a projection rather than a fact. The viewer can no longer feel good as they are now entangled into the event. Deep and difficult questions of social response replace feelings of a shameful Other.

In Foot Newton's play the character Simon narrates the entire story; he talks of the town, describing it as a desolate place where 'nothing ever happens'. Simon offers an image of the town where alcoholism is commonplace, sex is treated with crass vulgarity, women are objectified, employment is an everyday struggle and violence raises little concern. This description does not seem to offer anything that the media portrayal does not, however, this image, I argue, is offered with difference. Although Foot Newton fails to fully challenge the impression that poverty and alcoholism can explain rape, why I argue this play is important is because of Foot Newton's efforts to highlight the violence of concealing discomfort and near apathy through the act of shaming. Foot Newton also reattaches history to the contemporary condition of Louisvale, something the newspapers articles fail to do.

*Tshepang: The Third Testament* offers a complicated version of the baby Tshepang story through a seemingly simple tactic; by humanizing it. We are confronted not with savages or monsters but people who call this demonized place home. Foot Newton peoples the 'town of shame'. Simon knows the insides of the town, he is familiar with the attitudes and history of the people who occupy it. Simon, providing a face to Louisvale, represents its dwellers. Simon narrates the story with much animation and emotion. He describes many of the town residents, giving an account of their often painful histories. Simon displays gratitude for aspects of his life, such as his daughter. His story, as the story of many of Louisvale, is a complex one. There is no simple bifurcation of good and evil. Even the rapist himself is given a history fraught with abuse.

Simon is well aware of the imagery created by the outside world. He is aware of the shame cast onto him. His animated narration speaks directly to this shame. As stated, shame is always a relational experience and requires a witness. We can only feel shame before another, Ahmed states, "Shame is about some quality of the self. Guilt implies action, while shame implies that some quality of the self has been brought into question...the badness of an action is transferred to me, such that I feel myself to be bad and to have been 'found' or

‘found out’ as bad by others”<sup>160</sup>. Simon speaks of the ‘shit’ his town is made out to be; a place where nothing happens. The journalists come from around the world to gaze upon the derelict town and its morally corrupt population. The town has been ‘exposed’ or ‘found out’ however, Simon is not subdued under the weight of shame. Rather he talks back. Ahmed continues, “(t)he very physicality of shame – how it works on and through bodies- means that shame also involves the de-forming and re-forming of bodily and social spaces, as bodies “turn away” from the other who witness the shame.”<sup>161</sup> Simon directly confronts the act of shaming through his body and resists the silencing effects shame carries.

We see the dominant image of shame being strongly opposed as the journalists enter the narrative. Simon describes the media attention that followed the rape of baby Tshelang stating, “now you want to see something happen? You want see something happen? They all arrived. The press, the newspapers, television, film, cameras, USA, Britain, Johannesburg, Amsterdam. They all came here. What a story – six men raped a nine-month-old baby. You see! You see how shit you are? You see how shit we all are?”<sup>162</sup> The media arrived and now this place, where people continue to live, not only have to cope with the rape of a child but are to carry the metaphor of ‘shame’. This town becomes a place of disgust while the outside world remains innocent. Simon continues to address the world through shouting at a journalist,

Shame that you so ugly, lady. Shame on you! Shame on all of you! Who do you think you are? Coming here with your cameras and your accusations. Pointing your painted ugly finger at us. Where were you, where were you? What are you doing here? Get out of here! Take your cameras and get out! This town was raped long ago. This town was fucking gang-raped a long, long, long, long time ago. Shame on us? Shame on you, shame on all of us!”<sup>163</sup>

Louisvale and the rape of baby Tshelang no longer exist in a void of social and historical context. The violence of colonialism, apartheid and current post-Apartheid inequalities, which remain invisible through the shaming of this town are now illuminated. The guilty/innocent, disgraced/honourable, barbaric/civilized binaries are no longer intact and

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<sup>160</sup> Ahmed. p.103.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid. 103

<sup>162</sup> Lara Foot Newton. *Tshelang: The Third Testament*, (2005) p. 38.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid. p. 40.

even journalists, who are often portrayed with an absurd amount of dignity in popular culture, are implicated into the violent acts. Loiusvale can no longer be seen as the uncivilized Other, thus complicating questions of responsibility.

A close reading of *Tshepang* given by Tony Hamburger looks at the politics of responsibility and response. Hamburger interrogates the ironic statement, “nothing ever happens here” which Simon states numerous times throughout the play. Nothingness reemerges in the storyline with the incident where Sarah, a prostitute in the town, witnesses the rape and ‘does nothing’. Hamburger states, “she (Foot Newton) can only present us with a play. That is her response to a horror. She invites us to challenge the statement ‘nothing ever happens here.’ Paradoxically, terrible things have already happened and continue to happen here. The ‘nothing’ happens in our consciousness”.<sup>164</sup> Hamburger is suggesting a more critical viewing of *Tshepang*, one which would lead to a reflection on one’s own response and the ways in which society lacks meaningful reaction to terrible events that take place ‘elsewhere’.

Ruth, the mother of Tshepang does not have any spoken lines throughout the play until the very end however she is heard through the constant rubbing of salt. Looking at Ruth’s performance I will be exploring, firstly, the politics of unspeakability. Secondly, I will look at how trauma and pain are inscribed onto the body of the character Ruth in a manner that does not allow an assimilation of Ruth’s pain but instead calls for a more critical form of empathy. Using theories of empathy presented by Jill Bennett I will argue that Ruth’s character challenges popular images of the real mother of Tshepang as a demonized Other.<sup>165</sup>

A cursory glance at the portrayal of Ruth one might find fault in her lack of verbal contribution to the narrative. Ruth speaks only once at the end of the play as she looks into the distance, into nothingness, and says one word, ‘Tshepang’. A conventional gender analysis might point to the loss of voice, epistemic violence and the denial of Ruth’s lived experience. However, another reading of Ruth’s role, suggests that her verbal silence acts as a strategy to control what kind of relationship the audience can have with Ruth while

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<sup>164</sup> Tony Hamburger. “Introduction to *Tshepang: The Third Testament*”, (2005) p.12.

<sup>165</sup> William Bird & Nicola Spurr. (2004).

drawing attention to the implications of speaking rape. Also, Ruth is not silent throughout, she makes much noise by constantly rubbing salt into a piece of animal skin that lies on the ground. The speed and strength of her movements vary according to her reaction to Simon's words. When Simon begins to talk about the rape, Ruth reacts and displays her anger by throwing salt in Simon's direction. Bennett states, "...trauma itself is classically defined as beyond the scope of language and representation; hence, an imagery of trauma might not readily conform to the logic of representation."<sup>166</sup> The media depends on a particular logic of representation that I have argued is harmful. Foot Newton allowing space for verbal silence brings Ruth's body to the forefront. We are not handed words that describe Ruth's state, but are confronted with the unspeakability of what Ruth has experienced. This confrontation is an uncomfortable one as we are given no answers. Through her verbal silence Ruth resists the expectation to reply to her shame. Our orientation towards Ruth differs from the one presented to us in the media. We are confronted with Ruth's body and display of emotions rather than statements made about her regarding her age, her lifestyle and life choices. In other words, we are confronted with a human.

Ruth's 'voice' is heard through her movements as she cures cowhide with determined repetition. If words fail to capture trauma, then we hear her pain through her bodily actions. Returning to Heggins and Silver's point that within rape stories we must be "listening not only to who speaks and in what circumstances, but who does not speak and why". Foot Newton seems to be interested in portraying Ruth's pain, which does not receive acknowledgement in the reporting carried out by the media. Within the media, Ruth's words are used to silence her; supplying information for her own condemnation and providing evidence of dire unending poverty. Her words are therefore turned against her. Within the play, Ruth's silence seems to belong to her, as does her pain. Referring to Veena Das, Bennett argues that "the task of historiography is not simply to break silences and to uncover hidden truths; sometimes, it is to recognize that pain *seeks acknowledgment* in different ways"<sup>167</sup>. Foot Newton has taken up this task through performance. We acknowledge Ruth's sadness through its intensity. The unspeakability of this pain is still communicated in a manner that does not try to capture or classify it.

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<sup>166</sup> Jill Bennett. (2005) p.3.

<sup>167</sup> Bennett. (2005) p.102.

Ruth's verbal silence creates space for empathic engagement, however, one that acknowledges the politics of positionality. There lies a difference between empathy that encourages the audience to colonize the position of the subject and put aside the historical and embodied specificities and empathy that assists in critical thought. The former does not properly acknowledge that memory and experience of trauma and pain belong to an individual and the 'experience of the other is not one's own'.<sup>168</sup> Bennett argues that this form of 'crude empathy' leads to feelings of guilt, which often foreclose meaningful ways of thinking and engaging with traumatic events.<sup>169</sup> Ruth's verbal silence holds the audience at a certain distance; we are aware of her trauma but not of her interpretation of events. She embodies pain that so obviously belongs to her. My interpretation of the ambiguous relationship between Ruth and the audience provokes a reaction to question feelings of uncertainty rather than to slip into a state of guilt. Ruth's unwillingness to speak verbally is a demonstration of her agency to resist the colonizing of her experiences. Ruth's movements shape the atmosphere of the theatre as she guides our emotional response. We cannot assimilate Ruth's experience or remove ourselves from the violence, we are not left with feelings of guilt nor can we rest on a moral stance.

My analysis of the media representation has run the risk of falling into an unfortunate trend of some post-colonial studies, which is to "elevate the figure of the victim to a position of moral superiority."<sup>170</sup> To do this is to equate victim with 'good', and as Bennett explains "in the era of postcolonialism, trauma has acquired a certain cachet, and, with it, a moral authority. Increasingly, it is discomfiting to find oneself aligned with cultural oppressors; hence, it has become politically desirable to identify with victims of oppression."<sup>171</sup> Through the character Ruth, Foot Newton complicates our understanding by challenging the conflation of victim and morality. Ruth is not presented as an innocent victim although she does represent a subject whose lived experience is shaped by oppression. The audience is aware of the difficult social conditions represented in the town and the effects this has on Ruth's life. However, Foot Newton does not rely on a standard narrative by constructing

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid. p. 9.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid. p. 5.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid. p. 26.

the image of a moral individual. The audience is not called on to engender pure sympathy for Ruth as this would perpetuate notions of ‘morality as compassion’.<sup>172</sup> I am not arguing that *Tshepang* is free from moral judgment or that an audience member would not create a moral judgment based on their own interpretation but rather I am offering one reading of this performance as possibly going against the grain of how traumatic events are often perceived in the mainstream media.

Foot Newton’s portrayal of Ruth does not place her on the side of good or evil. She represents a more in-betweeness, which deters the audience from identifying with Ruth as victim. As Hamburger points out, Foot Newton does not place anyone clearly on either side of the good evil divide other than perhaps the journalists<sup>173</sup>. Even Alfred, the man who raped baby Tshepang, is given a specific history where he is the victim of abuse. Simon also complicates the oppressor/oppressed dialectic. Foot Newton offers no clear answers and defiantly no body or place to assume the blame. The audience cannot begin to identify with Ruth or any of the characters without grappling with issues of responsibility. Politicizing empathy, as Foot Newton has done, reveals the ways in which the act of shaming Louisvale has less to do with the town itself as it does with those located outside its parameters.

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<sup>172</sup> Jill Bennett. (2005) p. 15.

<sup>173</sup> Tony Hamburger. (2005).

## Chapter III: Moving Away From Shame and Towards Critical Enquiry

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The 'Town of Shame' operates as a spectacle; it shocks us while simultaneously relieves us of any social responsibility. An image of Louisvale is mediated by discourse of gender and colonialism and it is through these processes that it can be, without controversy, a place of shame. The repetitive use of colonial and gendered language shapes our relationship with Louisvale; it sets the tone for our encounter. One cannot act with compassion towards the savage, therefore it is our distant Other and comfortably so. Louisvale has been 'exposed' however still remains hidden; civilization's Other yet it does not exist. The rape of a small and vulnerable body should shock us, leave us without words and raise difficult questions concerning humanity. We should have been catapulted into disbelief and with no possibility of understanding the event or the alterity of another. However, the newspaper reporting failed to challenge us and instead relied on the facticity of stereotypes to make sense of the event.

Additionally, the spectacular image created *speaking beings* and a silent Other. As long as Louisvale is represented as a place of death rather than life, it cannot be heard. It is not infant rape that is being normalized but rather that infant rape is the outcome of barbarism, which in this case is described through impoverished conditions, lack of sexual control, idleness and alcohol abuse. A town of shame drove South Africa into a 'state of emergency' and led international media bodies to condemn South Africa as reaching an unprecedented low.<sup>174</sup> In response the South African media highlighted the need to restore morality. The media participated in a shift of thinking, instead of stilling with disbelief or pondering it, we were now to understand this event in a paradigm shaped by talk of morality and immorality. Spectacular images and explanations quickly offered, in the place of hard questions and contemplation a desperate attempt to console.

<sup>174</sup> "SA Facing Child Rape Crisis," *CNN.com*, (26 November 2001).

## Betraying Futures: What Fiction Can Teach Us About Rape

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If spectacularization encourages detachment<sup>175</sup>, humanization offers possibilities for meaningful engagement. An idea developed by Gilles Deleuze argues for a prioritization of feelings within knowledge production. He argues that feelings entice deep and meaningful thought. Deleuze's term 'encountered sign' argues for an alternative form of the sign, one that is not 'recognized or perceived through cognition'<sup>176</sup>but felt. According to Bennett's analysis of the encountered sign she states, "Deleuze's is not simply saying, however, that sensation is an end in itself, but that feeling is a catalyst for critical enquiry and deep thought... For Deleuze affect and emotion is a more effective trigger for profound thought because of the way it grasps us, forces us to engage involuntary"<sup>177</sup>. I argue that particular South African fiction that has taken up the difficult task of writing rape holds the possibilities of grasping us. Foot Newton's work illuminates the violence of shaming and promotes a more reflective form of empathy. She answers back to the media in ways I argue are needed and this is her strength. It would be unfair to criticize her for not delving deeper into issues of rape as that was does not seem to be her aim. However, for the purposes of my research, her play does not address the kind of issues I have accused the media of negating. The fictional writing of Jane Bennett's *Disarmament*, Ashraf Jamal's *Empty* and Njabulo Ndebele's *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, does investigate such issues. Fiction holds the possibilities of thinking anew as it is not confined to 'facts' or rigid frameworks the way media and academic writing often is. My interest lies in thinking about what these three excerpts offer in terms of new ways of interpreting baby rape. I will structure my argument around the following three excerpts.

In a short story set in an unknown city of South Africa, a prostitute is left for dead after being violently raped with a broken bottle, the words of Ashraf Jamal follow:

She is empty. A place for *empties*. The twisted link surprises her. She realizes she can think. Not a good thing. Never a good thing - to think. Still she

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<sup>175</sup> Guy Dubord. *The Society of the Spectacle*, (1983).

<sup>176</sup> Bennett, Jill. *Empathetic Vision: Affect and Contemporary Art*. (2005).p.7.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

thinks. She thinks of the *empty* that's still inside her. Useless. Broken. She couldn't take it to the bottle store and get her money back. The quart – she knows the size, they showed it to her – is good for nothing now. Good for her, she thinks. She who is nothing now... Blood everywhere. In her eye, the mouth, in the emptiness between her legs. *Empty*, she thinks again. Don't fill a woman but empty her. Tear the flesh, rape the voice. Leave Nothing. Make nothing of nothing... It is the word they spoke repeatedly. Nothing. Indefinite. Without substance. A hole.

The vagina - a void penis shaped grotto where there is nothing - is the message we are delivered through Jamal's depiction of a rape scene. Jamal's haunting description inquires into the politics of the woman's body as flesh in the form of nothing; rapeable and without value. The useless and broken empty inside of her is also her raped vagina. The differentiation between the two is blurred and we get the message, rape empties a woman because the vagina is treated as nothingness, 'Without substance. A hole'.<sup>178</sup> Jamal's *Empty* does not shy away from the crudeness of the act, instead he carefully writes with the vulgarity and brutality of rape.

Rape has become a common crime in South Africa, intertwined with this is the notion that a woman's body is disposable. Within the patriarchal process of diminishing the value of women's bodies, the vagina becomes the epitome of worthlessness, a space that lacks.<sup>179</sup> Corrective rape, where a man or men rape a woman to 'put her back in her place' or to 'teach her a lesson' about being a woman seems to be a growing trend in South Africa.<sup>180</sup> Such rape operates to violently 'remind' women that they are the 'weaker' sex. Its effect is to correct woman who 'perform like men'. This may be due to a woman's gait, that she sleeps with women or her economic upward mobility.<sup>181</sup> Corrective rape maintains patriarchy through violating a woman's body and reducing power to physical dominance. "Don't fill a

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<sup>178</sup> Ashraf Jamal. *The Shades*. (2002) p. 9-10.

<sup>179</sup> See Moffett, Helen. *Stemming the Tide: Countering public narratives of Sexual Violence. Womankind Worldwide* (2003). Moffett expresses her concern for the ways in which the vagina is conceived in everyday life. She notes that the images we see of female genitalia in our doctor's office portray the vagina inaccurately furthering the misconception that the vagina is an empty penis shaped hole in the woman's body.

<sup>180</sup> Helen Moffett. "These Women They Force us to Rape Them: Rape as Narrative of Social Control in Post-apartheid South Africa,"(2006).

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

woman but empty her, leave nothing”. It is not surprising that women who are raped are stigmatized as ruined, used and dirty. The act of rape is a direct attack on the body causing pain and leaving a mark of damage and impurity. “She thinks of the *empty* that’s still inside her. Useless. Broken. She couldn’t take it to the bottle store and get her money back. The quart – she knows the size, they showed it to her – is good for nothing now”.

The second piece I wish to draw attention to is an exert form *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*.

Ndebele offers a fictional narrative from a rape survivor stating:

Now I have a better understanding of rape, and fucking, and thrusting and pumping. Rape is the invasion of the primal country. It is the first form of violence and brutality. All other forms of violence are derived from it, for rape is an onslaught on the territory of one’s origins. It is the ultimate betrayal, the ultimate, most horrible expression of despair and misery, arising out of a desire for annihilation. A man rapes again and again in quest of the end of his world.<sup>182</sup>

Ndebele offers a correlation between self-effacement and internalized hatred with the act of rape. A man does not rape in a quest to end his life but his world. Rape as the ultimate betrayal highlights the violence done onto the self and the diminished level of worth a man has for his world.

The female body is often used as a metaphor for territory; the land where we originate from. Africa is often described as the motherland, which has been repeatedly raped through colonial invasions. Colonialism was explained as non-violent on the pretence that the land was empty and nothing was there. This was the first in a long list of violent language used to relieve colonial countries of their responsibilities and the people of their guilt. Colonialism could then be remembered as white men obtaining empty land and putting it to good use. Their ownership of this land was ‘earned’ through their commitment to hard work. Such discourse also provided meaning to what it meant to be a man. To hold the authority to invade, own and control are historically one way patriarchal power has been conceptualized. During apartheid, white men referred to their black counterparts as boys. The outcome was

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<sup>182</sup> Njabulo S. Ndebele. *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, (2003). p. 50.

a difference in masculine status in the form of a clear hierarchal power structure.<sup>183</sup> Man meant white man, owning land and people. Although it has been pointed out that apartheid inequalities cannot be used to fully explain the phenomenon of baby rape<sup>184</sup>, I argue that apartheid did inform current understandings of masculine power, most notably a correlation between manhood and ownership.<sup>185</sup>

The third excerpt is from Jane Bennett's collection of short stories entitled *Porcupine*, which tells the story of a raped baby. *Disarmament* begins in a South African train, a woman sits reading a news story about the rape. Bennett writes, "The opening gambit involved duty. It was her duty to read about the baby's rape. The baby would be less raped if she knew a story about her, a story with some details – age (not weight), where, how did they know, where was mom. Counter-argument said that, no, if she became a reader, a reader in the aftermath of the baby's rape, she would be part of the attack, her eyes boring into the tiny squalling body."<sup>186</sup> My interest in this piece is not so much to do with the character's debate whether or not reading rape in some way perpetuates the violence but in a more minor aspect of this story. The character comments on the details available to her, noticing it is the age of the baby and not its weight that inform the reader of the baby's body. The baby is presented as young rather than small. One reading suggests that Bennett is attempting to subtly subvert the discourse around baby rape through drawing attention to the size of the baby's body and therefore the body more generally.<sup>187</sup> Bennett's observation has forced a question I made reference to earlier; what does the rape of a small and vulnerable body say about the intersection of masculinity, gender violence and conceptions of empowerment/disempowerment.

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<sup>183</sup> Graeme Reid & Liz Walker, "Masculinities in Question" In *Men Behaving Differently: South African Men Since 1994*, (2005).

<sup>184</sup> Helen Moffett. "These Women They Force us to Rape Them: rape as narrative of social control in post-apartheid South Africa,"(2006).

<sup>185</sup> Ibid

<sup>186</sup> Jane Bennett. *Porcupine*, (2008). p.63.

<sup>187</sup> After the rape of baby T'shepang, reports of baby rape become much more prevalent. The shock factor seemed to centre on the age of the baby as newspapers told stories of infant rape where the infant is as young as five months. See "Baby Rapes Shock South Africa" *BBC News*. (11<sup>th</sup> December, 2001).

Louisvale is strongly characterized as a town of unemployment, where men sit around drinking and doing 'nothing'. If the conditions of poverty and oppression create barriers where men have little access to work, income and material property (including a home), what ways of displaying ownership are available? The female body, again, becomes a sign of conquest and property. To rape a woman is to display power, it connotes the ability to take, own and destroy. Poverty alone cannot explain rape. However, poverty as a technique of emasculation, speaks to the available avenues some men have to obtain power.<sup>188</sup>

In spaces where masculinity is already fraught with insecurities and livelihood is uncertain, violence is likely to manifest. I have been suggesting that a relationship between rape and performativity of masculinity is often evaded in public discourse around rape. The frustration of perpetual despair and anger towards one's world can make one despise the idea of their own future. Nonetheless, life continues and futures are inevitable. Perhaps infant female bodies represent that future. If, "rape is an onslaught on the territory of one's origins," is infant rape also an onslaught on the country's future? Have the bodies of infants become objects for one to violently project their emotions of anger and despair upon? To destroy an infant body, small and vulnerable, speaks of the desperation involved in attempting power while simultaneously annihilate one's world. Rape in war has been described as using the penis as a weapon; to rape the enemy's women is to violently affront the enemy. Infant rape is a war against oneself and one's origin. It destroys what we are to protect and betrays our futures.

The fictional writings I have analyzed above have moved me to think about infant rape in a more critical way than newspaper articles allowed for. The notion that men rape infants because they are barbarians leads us nowhere. Poverty, alcoholism, unemployment and the belief that sex with a virgin can cure HIV/AIDS are factors, but they leave too much unsaid. If the numbers of infant and child rape are as high as the statistics report then South Africa has an enormous amount of children whose lived experience includes rape. Possibly we owe it to them to think more critically and in more complex ways about the rape of small bodies.

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<sup>188</sup> See Deevia Bhana's, "Violence and the Gendered Negotiation of Masculinity Among Young Black School Boys in South Africa" In *African masculinities* (2005) for an ethnographic study on the correlation between poverty and gender based violence in South Africa.

We need an explanation that is not premised on barbarism and one that moves us to think about the ways in which history, power (and its inaccessibility), violence, racism and gender intersect. Foot Newton, Jamal, Ndebele and Bennett, I argue have provided us with an alternative response, one that is complicated and compelling.

## Conclusion

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Presenting Louisvale as a spectacular and barbaric Other severs the ties between South Africa's violent past, current forms of oppression and the phenomenon of infant rape. The spectacle generalizes and promotes complacency through the creation of an innocent/guilty binary. It further 'makes sense' of a shameful town where poverty is conflated with barbarism. The blame and shame directed toward the mother of baby Tshepang demonstrates how gender constructions are used to penalize women in the event of rape. Ironically, the ways in which the representation of Louisvale relied partly on the trope of Africa as a place of lack and no future failed to address the complex ways infant rape and futures intersect. The facticity of colonial and gendered discourse provided a short cut when explaining infant rape through dodging difficult questions and feelings of discomfort.

Lara Foot Newton draws attention to the harms of shame through her play, *Tshepang: The Third Testament*. Her main character, Simon, speaks back to shame and leaves no clear division between the guilty and innocent. Ruth, the mother of baby Tshepang, demonstrates the unspeakability of trauma and denies the audience the opportunity to easily identify with her pain. Foot Newton illuminates the ways in which the shame acts as a form of violence perpetuating colonial discourse. Although *Tshepang* demonstrates how shame operates as a contemporary form of projecting colonial imagery, she does not challenge the idea that infant rape is a product of alcoholism and poverty.

Perhaps it is not the duty of the mass media to evoke critical thought however the dangers of perpetuating stereotypes is that it moves us further away from understanding the specificities of the context and the subjectivity of the people involved. A compassionate consideration of how proximity to trauma matters was for the most part overlooked by those who named Louisvale a town of shame. Instead of exploring how location and positionality are sites of knowledge, journalists took advantage of their 'outsider' status to further cast Louisvale into a zone of non-being. Proximity became a tool to Other and a way to cast shame onto what we did not want to be a part of. Through the media representation a chain of Othering began. The international news constructed South Africa as Other. In reactionary style, South Africa

Othered Louisvale, projecting the shame onto the small community. Louisvale absorbed this shame but also blamed individuals such as the Wanda. Forcing her to leave the community was a possible attempt to rid the town of its shameful image.

The methods of Othering used to inform readers of the baby Tshelang case had the potential of leaving the reader feeling morally righteous. I argue that it is the hardness and/or deepness of the writing of Jamal, Ndebele and Bennett that move the reader towards possibilities of *empathetic unsettlement* and critical enquiry when thinking about rape. Often ignored, fiction has a unique ability to address societal matters that other forms of writing cannot. When freed from the burden of providing 'facts' and presenting the really real one can open up spaces to explore complexities in new and challenging ways. Without the expectations to explain or appear to be objective, writers of fiction can ask questions without providing answers. This creates room for ambiguity and allows for the possibility that we can learn from what we do not understand. Perhaps triggering feelings can lead to new ways of 'hearing' the voice of others and understanding that rape is a complicated form of violence.

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