Shining light into the darkest part of your cupboard

On making the writers acquaintance

Phew, I arrive back home after a 3-hour men's meeting.

The discussion and emotions linger and race around my mind and prickle my heart. At the end we came to the conclusion that we should talk of Cape Town as #thecitythatstillenslavesyou. A city stuck in nasty emotions of master and servant and the silenced pain of generations.

With this energy I open my laptop, download my e-mails. The first one is from David at Arrupe, a spark of hope germinates in my heart. Zimbabwe. Memories flood back of the last few visits. A place of friendship, emotional resilience and hunger for change.

I'm hooked by the brief: [encouraging]… writers to identify what Zimbabweans can learn from the insights of those who have observed the country from a number of internal and external vantage points.

And yet hesitancy creeps into my psyche. I am of settler origin – do I have the right of comment? As a Jew, I am from a revenge-based ethics of dessert people, can I comment on ubuntu? What space do my African sisters and brothers give me to comment? How do I accept and respect this space?

I`m stuck for a few days in wrestling with an ethical question. I talk to a few Zimbabweans and experience African ethics as a salve for my conscience. The idea of me commenting is

received with open heart and curiosity about what I might say. I decide that as Zimbabweans extended solidarity to us in our struggle and to me personally, to write something would be to return the gift.

So, sisters and brothers a view from my inside of your outside…

Thank you for asking and reading.

What I share are the experiences which shape my consciousness.

What I share is the light from my heart.

May it warm yours as you reshape a new Zimbabwe.

Starting in the darkest corner of the heart

Where do our stories of pain and hope connect Zimbabwe and South Africa? Great Zimbabwe and the VhaVenda? Zulu kingdoms and the dispersal? Jameson and Rhodes? Solidarity, resistance and refugees, our struggles and experiences are interwoven. A common story of great empires and long struggles for freedom. The darker side of our collective stories drenched in violence, dislocation and the growth of war torn identities, both colonized and colonizer. Forming and reshaping who we are as human beings and doings. As individuals, families and societies.

Witness this statement:

> I have travelled across the length and breadth of Africa and I have not seen one person who is a beggar who is a thief such wealth such high moral values, people of such calibre that I do not think we would ever conquer this country unless we break the very backbone of this nation which is her spiritual and cultural heritage and therefore I propose that we replace her old and ancient education system, her culture for if the Africans think that all that is foreign and English is good and greater than their own

they will lose their self-esteem, their native culture and they will become what we want them a truly dominated nation[i]

The violence of colonization - of 'breaking the backbone'- wounding and scarring us all with the rage of the powerful and powerless. The physical and psychological violence of oppression is deliberate, systemic and structural creating historical wounding and social trauma making it difficult to overcome and resist. People and communities saturated with brutality to maintain existing forms of power while carrying the "baggage" of the past.

My memory flicks back to a discussion with Zimbabwean men in 2017. A time of coming together as men and speaking of our pain.

In the group were men from 20 to those over 60, all involved in community development. A group of people drawing on different cultural and spiritual traditions. As we spoke, and shared, deep stories began to emerge. Stories of the present and those of recent and distant past. Stories about wounds from colonisation, Chimurenga, massacres and oppression, of social injustice scaring the psyche and driving identity. Stories which recounted how the psychological skin of community was ripped apart by brutal violence of conquest, resistance and forced labour. Stories that told how families were forced to create new and wounded identities on top of the old. Colonial identities of master and servant grafted on top of African ones. The imposition of individualistic, racial, capitalistic culture on an African ethic of *I am because you are*.

That day we spoke of the deep pain burning in the hearts of the men present.

Perhaps the most painful part of the discussion was hearing how this unprocessed pain, this emotional suffering and rage of powerlessness filtered down generations, into everyday life, and in the organisations that the men worked, shaping relationships with self and others. Stories of fear and distrust, sexual harassment and patriarchy invading the spaces created to grow organisations of social justice.

On returning to South Africa, I did further reflection and investigation to understand if the experience of the men I spoke with was a more generalised one revealed two distinct phenomena. Internalised violence and silence.

Firstly, the expression of forms of internalised violence through domestic violence in Zimbabwe. I learnt that rates of domestic violence may be as high as 47% of women having experienced this.

Almost 1 in 2 women! A tsunami of gender-based violence, the same as in South Africa.

Secondly, the unusual silence…As I think through my own experience and try to integrate it with my knowledge of Zimbabwe, it seems to me that the years of Chimurenga and Gukurahundi, of dreams and struggles, of freedom being overcome by oppression, must leave a deep hurt in the souls of individuals and communities. As apartheid and colonialism did in South Africa. In my visits and conversations with Zimbabweans I am struck by the deep capacity for emotional resilience and longing for change. I don't feel the repressed anger and volatility of South Africa. The recent coup and the responses of civil society to this event through massive peaceful demonstrations, as well as the emotional ability to consistently promote non-violence and peaceful opposition is a lesson for us here.

And yet the emotional resilience also feels like emotional freeze. Emotions buried deeply as Zimbabweans engage in daily survival. Emotions on a tight leash forced there by brutal repression and the resulting powerlessness and fear? Managed and controlled. I feel and sense an emptiness and silence in the places I have visited. I struggle to hear the music and songs, the poetry and dances of freedom. Having danced to the music of Zimbabwe, I am struck by the repressed silence of central Harare I experienced in 2017. Symptoms of something deeper?

In South Africa, we are on the boil with emotions spilling out everywhere. Unlike Zimbabwe, I experience too much noise in South Africa. The noise of angry shouting against "the other". And yet we have gone silent on one aspect. The hurt pain and rage of the past experienced individually and the structural violence it has left us with[ii].

Do wounded nations go silent, pushing the pain and loss of the past deep down? And yet continue to experience the symptoms of this wounding? How do we relate the capacity for peaceful protest with the high levels of domestic violence? Are the high levels of domestic violence the pressure cooker release for the pent unprocessed trauma of the past?

I am troubled by the mainstream explanation for why people perpetrate domestic violence - victims of violence have a high likelihood of becoming perpetrators. Is the high rate of domestic violence in Zimbabwe a scream from inside the 'private' silenced zone of the family? Men crying bullets against the self and those they love and care for?

What is driving this violent and silent behaviour in a society where *a person is a person because of other people*. How is it possible that after our liberation struggles in both our countries, half of the women live in fear of half of the men?

One common explanation in both our countries is the high levels of unemployment. If men are unemployed and can't provide for their families, their identity collapses resulting in a propensity to violence to release the internalised rage of failure. Men are violent because of suffering the structural violence of unemployment. I have heard this explanation so often from wounded men it has to be true. However, if economies developed quickly would gender based violence disappear? I think not. The cause and effect here is too simplistic. The social traumas of the past are transferred trans- and inter- generationally, genetically[iii] and socially. If our gender identities are socially constructed, then we have constructed these wounded identities out of our pasts, over generations. The wounded cycles of powerful and powerless repeated endlessly. Shaping and reshaping who we are. Unlearning and reshaping is a complex issue.

It seems to me that the violence we experience in both our countries, post colonialism, has a much deeper root and is more difficult to unlearn.

At the start of the South African transition to democracy we were a nation of deeply wounded people who were undereducated formally and experienced high levels of unemployment and poverty. That was the legacy of 400 years of brutality and resistance.

Our transition from a society characterized by systemic oppression, dominance and violence to one based on respect, equity and peaceful co-existence has been complex and fraught with

difficulty. We have focused on restructuring and tinkering with the system, changing policies, structures, agreements, laws and protocols. Our focus has been on the logical, on the see-able and do-able. But systems are populated by people, and values and institutions are rooted in our hearts not our heads! In our hearts something else was living – the pain and rage of powerlessness, historical wounding and social trauma.

In our transition we never spoke of the extent and depth of the rage and pain a crime against humanity causes. Nor did we speak about how violence had become institutionalised and the impact of consistent intergenerational experiences of powerlessness and dispossession. An example of this was the transformation of the South African Police (SAP) to the South African Police Services (SAPS). Systems, procedures and protocols were changed without healing the people in the service or the scarred relationship between the people and police.[iv] Today, community-police relationships are at an all-time low with SAPS accused of provoking and evoking high levels of violence in many communities through public order policing, support for gangs and responses to inter-personal and gender violence.

This silence was in our movement as well.

In the moment of transition, as activists and leaders, we were challenged to change our personal relationship to power while ensuring this change in our national values, ethics and institutions. Our challenge was also to ensure that in our social and political movements we modelled the society of justice and equity we wanted to build. But, in our movements, amongst our leadership and in our communities, we never took the time to stop and reflect on how oppression had wounded us as individuals. How were our organisations of liberation affected by social trauma? How could we change the way we construct our power

individually and collectively as we moved from operating underground and in war conditions to being effective as the voice of people in a transparent and open democracy?

Like the SAPS, this failure is directly reflected in the way our organisations of civil society operate today, as many of our social movements are a mirror of what is happening in our society. The recent revelations of gender-based violence in some large NGOs[1] are an example of this. The general secretary of one of our national trade union federations has two documented charges of sexual harassment against him from young, less powerful women. This while he continues to be a voice against oppression and gender-based violence. Wounded comrades in a wounded system? Surely the movements we build to carry us through the struggle for social justice should reflect the human dynamics of the society we want to build, not the society we live in?

At the beginning of our transition, like the nation as a whole, the need for activists to heal was obscured by the need of our grand mission of transformation. As activists and leaders, we allowed ourselves to focus on the grand mission and could not, or would not, simultaneously go to the darkest parts of our cupboard to shine light there and transform. We forgot that deep wisdom: "the personal is political". We got caught up in our heads and allowed the narrative of the time to dominate. The "rainbow nation", the magic of our "miracle" and symbolic acts of "reconciliation" obscured the real need to talk about historical wounding and understand how it is institutionalised.

It is true that at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission we began to tell the story of what happened under apartheid, but this was limited in time and space and only covered the brutality of the State. A report was written, and our leaders thought we could leave it there.

Not speaking about our trauma[v], not analysing how it is being transferred trans- and inter-generationally, not accepting and embracing peace and social justice has derailed our transition. A wounded nation whose psychological skin is ripped apart by brutal racial capitalism needs to grieve, restore, rediscover and rebuild the emotional life of individual and collective being.

Today, the system of structural violence remains intact adding to our social and individual trauma to the extent that the social infrastructure in our nation is becoming dysfunctional. In 2017/18 20,000 South Africans were murdered, there were over 360,000 rapes, 12,000 killed in road accidents, Cape Town became one of the most violent cities in the world, corruption and greed everywhere, child murders and kidnappings frequent, as are school shootings and gang violence…the list goes on. Quite a "rainbow miracle" based on denial and desire for accommodation and silence of the nature of the past.

The link between oppression, social trauma and social violence is becoming clearer in South Africa.

As I researched for this article, I struggled to find analyses that grappled with the history of trauma in Zimbabwe. It seems as if not much light has been shed on this issue. What has been written deals more with the last 30 years and the impact of becoming a refugee. But the roots into the past seem to remain unexplored?

M. Ndlovu recently commented in Daily Maverick:

> Unaddressed issues – ranging from a lack of access to basic human rights such as housing, education, fresh running water and healthcare, to the systemic violence and pillaging of resources that has left the country's economy in tatters, forcing many to seek opportunities elsewhere and often tearing families apart – continue to shape the realities of Zimbabweans. For almost four decades, these triggers, encased in fear and despondence, have rendered Zimbabwe a traumatised nation.
>
> For Zimbabwe, the fear of historical trauma renders itself not a distant event, but a part of everyday lived experiences. Historical trauma has thus become naturalised into society and remains omnipresent. The election was a time to mend this. Riding on the re-energising of ousting former President Mugabe, Zimbabweans took to the polls on 30 July in order to vote for change and begin the process of undoing the historical trauma they continue to face[vi]

A Zimbabwean NGO, Tree of Life, argues: If *trauma is dealt with through a group-based community-rooted process, including both victims and key people,* then *social-cohesion will increase, enabling reconciliation, justice, peace and development to happen.[vii]*

What has happened to the social traumas of the past? Is there a link between the high rates of domestic violence and the brutality of pre- and post-colonial oppression? Is the brutality of Zimbabwe of the last 30 years rooted in the unresolved historical wounding and unprocessed social trauma of colonization and the fight for freedom?

How do we hold the tension of transition rebuilding and processing our traumas simultaneously? The tension of going to our accumulated pain and suffering at the moment of peace and change? Is it possible? How can we mobilise the energy and release of celebration of the moments of liberation and transformation to heal the accumulated pain of suffering?

As Mahmoud Mamdani challenges us to think – *[How] do victims become killers? And can we prevent this by ensuring that physco-social healing of individuals, institutions and societies becomes central to our struggle for social justice?* [viii]

I believe the answer to these critical questions for all processes of transition and transformation lies in 3 words: "politics of trauma". This remains the hidden side of our organisations, our social fabric and the shape of the new as it emerges. The ability of our societies and organisations to break the cycle of violence is determined by our ability to deal with the politics of trauma, individually and collectively.

Martha Cabrera, writing about the experience of Nicaraguans, brings to our attention how the multiple wounds of the past become fetters on the ability of our organisations to hold the tensions of transition:

> In Nicaragua, a great many organizations want… "change the world," but do nothing to change an old-fashioned model within the organization itself and thus reproduce a leadership style that blocks any real change. …That political boss syndrome is reproduced in social organizations, in NGOs, in all sectors of our society. The question is not whether we have democratic organizations, but whether we can have them. We've discovered that it's very difficult to build democracy when a country's personal history still hurts… Most of those promoting development processes all over the country today are themselves affected by traumatic situations. … Personal change is key to organizational processes. There can be no social change without personal change, because one is forced to fight every day to achieve that change[ix].

The failure to engage our pain and the destruction of the psychological skin of our societies pushes us toward the dark side of leadership.

Aurora Morales adds to this by challenging us to think:

> How do we reframe our experiences of oppression so that we don't act from a sense of victimhood, and end up recreating what we abhor? Why do oppressors oppress, and how can we win them away from doing it? How do we interrupt the cycles of reenacted pain at the level of nations? How do we stop the self-defeating expressions

of traumatic rage between oppressed constituencies that shatter our coalitions? ... Or that trauma leaves people with a pull toward repeating what was done to them. Or that oppression leaves masses of traumatized people in its wake. But these understandings have not made their way into the heart of social policy or of political action.[x]

Steve Wineman adds:

There is a strong tendency for traumatized people to internalize the experience of powerlessness, and then at critical moments to engage in desperate efforts at self-protection that are driven from that place of subjective powerlessness. This is a psychological and political place from which we are incisively aware of the ways in which we have been acted upon, victimized and harmed, but from which it can be difficult or impossible to gauge the impact of our enraged behaviour upon others, or even to maintain our awareness of the core humanity of those defined as Other."

Internal conflicts blow up and become unresolvable in part because we lack a common language and framework for recognizing the effects of trauma, and lack practical tools for managing the traumatic rage that we all too readily direct at each other.

When trauma is unnamed and unrecognized, its presence – at once palpable and invisible – can cause an enormous amount of damage. We need to develop shared understandings of the politics of trauma that bring awareness of trauma into the room[xi]

Understanding trauma can help us to overcome divisions that chronically plague progressive social change movements. The Left in South Africa has been repeatedly weakened by internal divisions and fragmentation, both in the form of in-fighting within social change organizations and through the inability of different oppressed constituencies to form robust and sustainable coalitions.

And yet in our organisations we don't often talk of ourselves as sites of oppression, how and why we construct our personal and organisational power, why we reproduce it, how we overcome power under and move to power with.

The silencing of the politics of trauma is rooted in the failure in our movements for transformation to embrace the slogan "the personal is political". In our daily struggles for change and in the psychological tensions of transition we struggle to hold an essential truth of feminist and socialist discourses that the personal political.

Capitalism and imperialism are, by their very nature, exploitative and oppressive and based on class and patriarchal hierarchies. The acquiescence of people to these systems is obtained through coercion and socially constructed violence, which we experience individually and collectively. This is outlined in Figure 1 below.
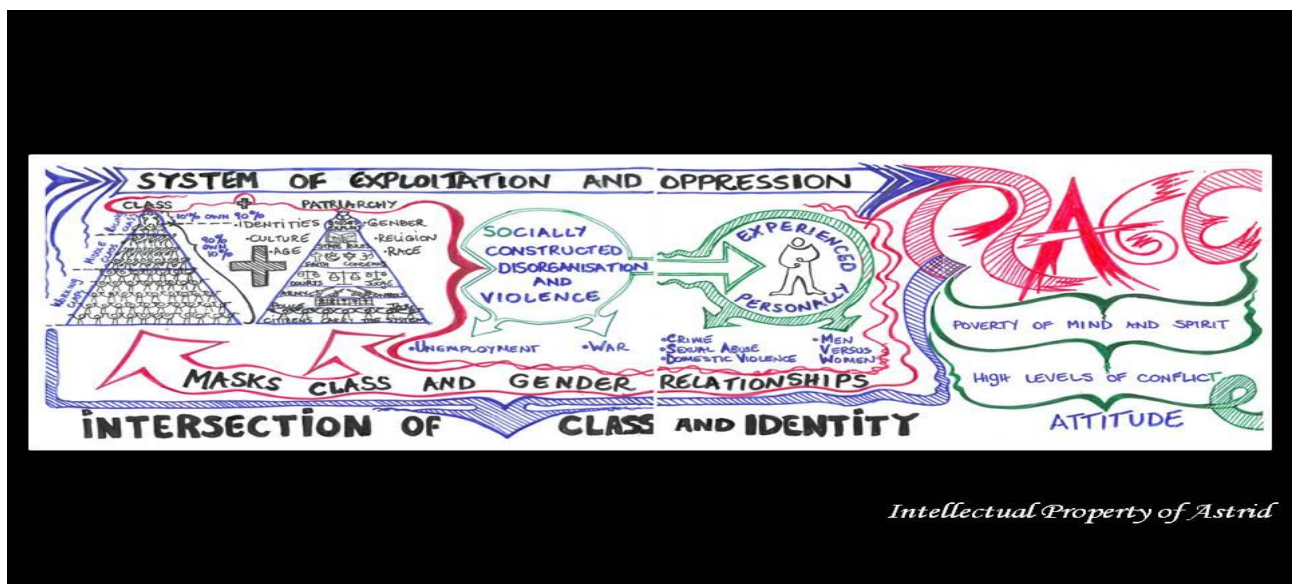
The function of socially constructed violence is to overwhelm individual and collective psychological resources resulting a rage of powerlessness which, if internalised, creates isolation, apathy, frustration, self-hatred, interpersonal conflict and low self-esteem, to name a few. This historical woundedness and social trauma takes many forms:

1. Historical and collective emotional and psychological wounding coming from group [community, culture, race] experience of oppression.

2. Class experience of exploitation creating ever deepening conditions of poverty

and barbarism forcing people into a war of survival over resources

3. Disfiguring of cultural beliefs, practices, memory and identities

4. Internalized oppression: despair, confusion, anger, self-hatred woven in the fibre of family leading to self and familial abuse

5. Relational: personal pain from relationships that remain unresolved e.g. father hunger father son; brother-brother

6. Inter- and trans- generational passing on the trauma's and their outcomes to multi generations

The personal is political precisely because oppression operates through the individual and in the personal-family-community space. The experience of it is individualised. The struggle over class and patriarchal power happens to us. All the time. The outcomes are written on our skin, into our hearts and between people and communities and nations, re-traumatising causing deep and lasting pain.

As societies transition from violence to peace we need to be able to identify how cycles of unprocessed trauma and violence feed off and strengthen each other. Did the emotional dislocation and wounding of colonialism create the conditions for post-colonial oppression in Zimbabwe and interpersonal and institutionalized violence in South Africa?

Simultaneously, we need processes that heal the wounds and legacies of oppression in the personal as well as social spaces. These processes need to be extensive in scope and include individuals and collectives. We need to create practices that move us from the identity and trauma of being a victim into transitional and new identities that reflect what we are trying to build. We need to be able to grow out of the powerlessness of victims into the power of

compassion, peace and acceptance ensuring that survivors don't become perpetrators. This needs to be a collective journey, through which we externalise the trauma experienced in our personal spaces. It needs to be a creative journey as we create new sources of personal and collective power.

If we acknowledge the 'politics of trauma' and the importance of the personal nature of the political we can begin to break the victim to perpetrator cycle that characterises so many of our revolutionary movements in the aftermath of the seizure of state power. Transformation requires new energy, the energy of inclusivity, innovation and entrepreneurship.

<u>On not becoming another South Africa</u>
Is there a learning I can share from ideas of social trauma? If so, then it is this….

I so often hear in the South African discourse the danger of becoming 'another Zimbabwe' as a warning of doomsday hanging around us. So, I would humbly appeal to you sisters and brothers, comrades and friends in Zimbabwe, at this moment of crossroads in your struggle for Liberation do not become another South Africa! A place driven by socially constructed and institutionalised violence of the past, refuelled by the inequities of capitalism with the smiley face of global citizenship and internalised and expressed through tsunamis of domestic violence. Perhaps at this crossroads moment in your history, you have a choice to let the caged bird sing. Sing new and different songs of peace inside people, reflected in your organisations of civil society, and facilitated by the government. Songs not weighed down by the scars of the past.

But this will depend on how each one shows up and engages with change. I would argue that how we hold the tension of engaging with "the other" is the foundation of peaceful transformation. 'The other' inside of ourselves, in the darkest parts of our hearts, where we dehumanise ourselves and others. The way we change and shift our relationship to power as we grow and deepen democracy personally and collectively determines the outcomes of our transitions.

My learning from our transition – don't fear to let the light into these dark corners by holding the tension of contradictory stories and behaviours in a way which does not trigger conflict but allows emotional capacity to broaden and deepen. This is the key.

Personal transformation needs to be interwoven with the growth of democracy and the peaceful exercise of civil rights. The challenge for leaders and activists is to facilitate the growth of a positive emotional environment in which new and rediscovered values and ethics can grow at the grassroots, in institutions and society. This will allow the space for new forms of being, individually and collectively, to emerge.

In Zimbabwe, like in South Africa, we need to grow a force, a peaceful spiritual force, a collective force, which creates the space and time to grow an emotional climate which fosters the new ways of being with each other and in our relationships to power. A movement which can mobilise and transform hidden energies of powerlessness and rage of past and present oppressions into social justice and peace. As the new democracy begins to grow, alongside it needs to grow this movement of healing, personal, organisational reconnection and renewal. It seems to me you have already begun to build this force, this movement of soft power,

evidenced by the peaceful, gentle way the majority of Zimbabweans managed the transference of power within ZANU.

This needs nurturing, growing and expanding.

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Notes

[i] T. B. Macaulay address to British Parliament in February 1835 2-2-1835.

https://fee.org/articles/thomas-babington-macaulay-extraordinary-eloquence-for-liberty/

ii Sarah Henkeman [ed*] Disrupting Denial* [Cape Town. New Adventure ublishing.2018] 27

iii David Anderson Hooker and Amy Potter Czajkowski. Transforming Historical Harms

http://www.comingtothetable.org/resources/cttt-resources/guides/.

Maria Yellow Horse Brave   Wakiksuyapi: Carrying the historical trauma of the Lakota.

 Heart.

iv Johnny Steinberg. Thin Blue Line [Cape Town Jonathan Ball. 2008]

Anthony. Altbeker. A country at war with itself [Cape Town Jonathan Ball publishers. 2007]

v For example, the greed of the mine owners created the need for cheap labour which lead to

the migrant labour and pass system which normalised the absence of African men in families.

It became part of life under apartheid. As a nation we did little to intentionally repair this.

Today we have almost 2/3 of families without male parent.

vi Daily Maverick 6 August 2018

vii http://treeoflifezimbabwe.org/node/59

viii Mahmood Mamdani. When Victims Become Killers Colonialism, Nativism, and the

Genocide in Rwanda. Princeton University Press Princeton 2002

ix Martha Cabrera Living and surviving in a Multiply wounded country [2002 publisher

unknown] http://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/1629

x Aurora Morales. Introduction to Power Under [private publisher.2003]

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xi Steve Wineman Power Under [private publisher.2003] 23

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