A Case study of "Necklacing": When the case has a face

Abstract

This article reports on, and develops, existing studies by Mbuqe (2010), and Mbuqe & Laubscher (2019). Political violence is the general phenomenon of interest, research and theoretical access to which is granted by a close examination of the "necklacing" murder of Ms. Nombulelo Julia Nokwakwha Dilato in Colesberg, South Africa, on the 2nd of October, 1985. The authors illustrate how their research was upset and troubled by a particular incident – the perpetrators throwing sand on the face of the victim in order for it not to burn – and how revisiting that incident dramatically changed the course and understanding of their research. The authors conclude by suggesting an ethical scholarship, influenced by the work of the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, as well as the imperatives of Unobuntu.

> *"We are bound up in a delicate network of interdependence because, as we say in our African idiom, a person is a person through other persons"* *[Ubuntu]* (Archbishop Desmond Tutu, 1999: 35)

It makes good sense to alert the reader to this article's close connection to two other studies, Mbuqe (2010), and Mbuqe and Laubscher (2019). Even as each can stand on its own, so to speak, it is our desire and recommendation that they be read alongside each other. We start by briefly revisiting those earlier studies, as contextual mise en scène of sorts within which this paper can take both meaningful and sur-prising[1] center stage.

**Leswin Laubscher[1] and Sipho Mbuqe[2]

[1]Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA, USA
[2]Upstate Medical University, State University of New York, Syracuse, NY, USA

*Correspondence:
Leswin Laubscher
McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts Psychology,
215 Rockwell Hall, Pittsburgh, PA, USA
laubscher@duq.edu

Keywords

---

[1]   We continue to take the etymological origin of surprise (from Latin *superprehendere*, to "seize") very seriously. As "seizure", it is something that comes from elsewhere, unexpectedly; it is outside of our agency or will, and literally grabs us and demands our attention.

The earlier studies: Recapitulation

In a summative nutshell, we were interested in political violence, and as psychologists, specifically how that discipline theorized and studied it. As a phenomenon of scholarly and intellectual interest, violence has been an object of formal study and reflection since the very birth of Western philosophy – the surviving fragment of Heraclitus, characterizing war as the "father of all things", readily spring to evidentiary mind, as does the oldest extant works of Western literature, Homer's Illiad and Odyssey. This interest has continued since across all subsequent learned disciplines, and well by the constitutive means, interests, and organizing principles of both distinctive and overlapping fields of study. Clearly a comprehensive rendering of such an expansive and interdisciplinary scholarship fall well outside the constraints of space (if not ability) for this article. Instead, we focus specifically on psychology, and even more narrowly, on political violence as modifying qualifier for violence in general. This, however, is not only a choice born from the exigencies of space and scope, but also because we would like to trouble dominant notions of political violence in psychology, specifically, no less because it is the discipline within which we are professionally vested, and derive a fair measure of our senses of self from.

Research access to the phenomenon of political violence came from close examination of a particular incident, the "necklacing" murder of Ms. Nombulelo Dilato in Colesberg, South Africa, in October of 1985. Most readers of this journal, we suspect, are well aware of the horrific manner of necklacing, which is to place a car tire, filled with gasoline, around a victim's neck and shoulders, and then setting it alight. A particular feature of the South African socio-political landscape during the turbulent 1980's, necklacing usually occurred as retributive action by an incensed group, the victim having been accused as an apartheid collaborator (*impimpi*) and/or traitor to the anti-apartheid cause[2].

This was also the case here; Ms. Dilato was branded a traitor to the political cause, her having broken a boycott of white owned businesses, and supposedly not heeding "warnings" from community marshalls to refrain from seeming sympathy with "agents" of the Apartheid state. After a decision was taken by the "comrades" (young political activists and leaders in the community) to "burn" her, a group of young men lay in wait for Ms. Dilato as she walked to work that fateful October morning. They accosted her, punched and beat her, and as a larger crowd gathered, screamed recriminations and accusations at her, including that she was responsible by her actions for what was happening to her. Then they doused her in gasoline and set her alight. A car tire was

---

2   It bears mention that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) also uncovered several incidents of "necklacing", engineered and perpetrated by the Apartheid police, as an attempt at "dirty tricks" subterfuge, to cover their assassination actions and redirect blame elsewhere (TRC Report, 1999, vol. 2).

on hand to complete the necklacing modus, but could not be placed completely over her shoulders, the intent notwithstanding, as the police arrived on the scene just about then. The crowd scattered and fled, but several arrests were made later, including the three men whom we interviewed for our study. Eventually five individuals were tried in court and sentenced in 1986. With the exception of one, who received clemency for turning state witness, the others all received lengthy sentences, including a death sentence which was later appealed to life in prison. A few years later (in 1991 and 1992), however, all were granted amnesty on the grounds of their actions being deemed "political" and as a condition for a negotiated end to violence and a peaceful transition to a post apartheid society[3]. Upon their release, the perpetrators returned to the Colesberg region to live and work, which is also where we interviewed three of them for our study in 2009.

Where the psychological literature is concerned, a broad review synopsis will suffice (see Mbuqe [2010] and Mbuqe and Laubscher [2019] for a fuller literature review). Firstly, the overwhelming bulk of psychology's response to violence and political violence comprises quantitative and naturalistic empirical research, mostly across the terrains of general- and social psychology. Within general psychology, it is noteworthy that the term aggression seems preferred over violence, the latter being understood as the behavioral expression of an intrapsychic or initiating aggressive "fuel" or "motivation". As such, violence is primarily an individual affair, even as or when it finds expression in groups; indeed, group expressions of violence are but individual processes writ large, or individual motivations harnessed to group aims or concerns.

Social Psychology's attention to the importance of the situation or context, notably in the wake of World War 2 and the Holocaust, appear to pose a challenge to the dispositional standpoint of general psychology. Against the one pole, where the social (and violence) is understood as individual expression on a larger, group canvas, and the seeming other end, of the situation structuring, if not determining, individual behavior, we find a low level, intradisciplinary tug-of-war that has not quite allowed for a satisfactory compromising middle, but neither has it produced an exploding war of irreconcilable opposites either. Perhaps such détente and glasnost, both, are possible by the fact that these poles, their seeming differences notwithstanding, share an essentialized, natural scientific quest for a lawful, universal truth; whether

---

3   It is important to stress that whereas amnesty was granted by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to all manner of people who committed politically motivated atrocities (Apartheid and anti-Apartheid forces alike), provided they "came clean" and told all, the perpetrators in this case were not granted amnesty under these conditions. They were part of an earlier group, before the TRC even existed, granted indemnity as a result of good faith negotiations between a still sitting Apartheid government, and liberation organizations readying to take over the reins of government.

an intrapsychic truth to explain violence for everyone, or a universal truth about the nature and process of the situation and groups[4].

Even grand motivational theories, such as psychoanalysis for example, falter in the distance between, on the one hand, a generalized proposition of violence and aggression as instinctual human nature that is so broad as to be methodologically impossible to research as such, or on the other hand, so specific in the post hoc psychodynamic analysis of a singular case that the phenomenon of interest is lost. Put differently, to analyse violence in terms of a poorly functioning ego, the failure of sublimated societal structures, the deployment of defenses like splitting or rationalization, or the bestial pull from the crowd in identification and projective identification, positions psychoanalysis in the same neighborhood as the essentializing, ahistorical, Platonic interior of general psychology.

Yet, having mentioned earlier that scholarly interest in violence is both old and widespread, the fact of the matter is that general psychological research on violence is scarce, and for political violence as such, practically nonexistent[5]. One would expect a more robust research concern in social psychology, a presumption that holds true for violence in general, but not so for "political violence". To illustrate, an electronic search of the **Journal of Social Issues** (over a 75 year archive), the flagship journal of the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, as of April 2019, produced 1118 "hits" for the search term "violence" (which included all kinds of violence – domestic, criminal, institutional or terroristic, for example), but only 35 hits for "political violence"[6]. Even in the wake of the September 11 attacks in the United States, and several others in Europe and across the world since, leading to a new, energized impetus to study terrorism, such studies are rarely framed within group violence or political contexts as such. Much rather, psychological emphases seem to be on divining terroristic profiles or traits, elucidating dynamics of "radicalization", or extending well

---

[4] In recent years, several authors have characterized their work as "political psychology" or a "psychology of politics/the political". We have considered this grouping of authors and scholarship under the broader social psychological rubric, both because a formal division or widespread recognition for political psychology does not yet exist, as well as because it is not altogether clear yet by which measures such a grouping would be distinctive as a subdiscipline, warranting of its own, or distinctive, organizing scholarship. In any event, for most such studies, the essence of an organizing center remains, the "situation" of social psychology having simply been replaced by a desire to map the lawfulness of "politics" or "the political".

[5] An electronic search of articles (in April 2019) published in the **American Psychologist**, the flagship generalist journal for psychology, recorded 214 hits for the search term violence, and only 2 for the search term "political violence".

[6] Whereas a similar dearth is noted in South African journals of Psychology, it is also true that several South African academics have reported on violence and "necklacing" in particular, especially in the aftermath of the TRC hearings. The work of Pumla Goboda-Madikizela (e.g. 2002, 2003) and Don Foster (e.g. 2005, 2009) are notable examples. However, even as much of this research involve perpetrators and victims, or a violent South African context or incident, the bulk of such work is not quite about political violence as such, but forgiveness, empathy, or trauma, for example. And, in the few cases where there are attempts to research and/or theorize political- or crowd violence specifically, the hammer of such application is rather traditional, easily subsumed under our characterization of the field in general.

travelled social psychological concepts such as dehumanization or conformity, for example, into the phenomenon of terrorism.

It was, then, from all kinds of frustrations with the existing literature – from paucity of research and theory to a palpable unease with the ontological, epistemological, and methodological positions the field seemed to privilege – that we entered the conversation. Proceeding from a broadly human science psychology, we proposed a hermeneutic semiological (Silverman, 1994) study of political violence. As such, we saw violence as a contextual, human, and relational concern – the violation of (a) person/s by (an) other across a relation of difference and alterity, and in space and time. We sought not to de-humanize violence in the reductionism of singular concepts and/or universalizing laws, but to maintain the complexity of human experience to the ends of a human scientific truth within and between the tension of the particular, even subjective, individual case as well as the general of violence as theme and dynamic.

A brief summary of our findings (see Mbuqe [2010] and Mbuqe and Laubscher [2019], for a fuller description) involves, firstly and unequivocally, that psychology has to take the sociopolitical context into much more serious account than it has. It seems intuitively apparent, but political violence cannot be understood without wrestling with politics and the political; violence itself is thoroughly inflected, and given meaning, by the political and historical context ("we did what we did because of politics … there was a cause for us to do all those things" [Participant 1, Mbuqe, 2010: 103]). A stereotypical, mainstream psychology fails when it ignores the motivational particularity of the historical context and times or hangs an explanation solely or primarily on aggression or some other learned behavior, intrapsychic predisposition, or trait. Relatedly, there was no subjective satisfaction derived from the act as perhaps in psychopathy or "revenge" (" I never hurt anyone in the past … here is the person, she is burning, screaming … I sometimes, you know, I felt I could have gone again try to help her …" [Participant 2, Mbuqe, 2010: 119]), nor was there any motivating expectation for material or tangible gain from the act, as is often the case in many forms of criminal violence, such as robbery, for example. The "political" qualifies violence differently than the "criminal", "sexual", etc., even as there are clear similarities. The point is that psychology's essentialised desire for universal and timeless laws runs the risk of neglecting the different, local, and specific; not unlike an abstruse and removed truth where we are all human, to the neglectful oversight that some of us live in a penthouse and others in a slum, or that some of us live in the world by the experience of our skins, or our religions, very differently than others. These experiences, for those of us who live it, are anything but "contaminating" or "modifying" factors secondary to the lawful primacy of our "humanness". Indeed, and by analogy, meaningful understanding of political violence is less available by the generalized truth of violence, as such, than in violence's difference from itself. A natural science accounting of

the "dynamics" of violence, as for example an exercise in power of one over another, may well be true for rape and robbery alike, but the experience of rape and robbery cannot be alike at both levels of the personal as well as the phenomenonality of the event. Rather straightforwardly, if psychology is interested in studying political violence, political violence is what it should be studying.

An aphoristic way of restating our findings in relation to the literature would be that general psychology fails when it discounts the power of the situation and the times, to the extent that social psychology fails when it ignores or subordinates the individual, and identitary investment in the situation, role, or group. Some recent authors (such as Kraft, 2014; Litman & Paluck, 2015) have made and leveled similar arguments and criticisms (it is perhaps telling that those authors, not unlike us, have all come to this recognition from research with "actual" perpetrators). Rauschenbauch, Staerklé, & Scalia (2016) pointedly noted that the violent acts of their respondents "… cannot be understood as simple obedience to wrongful orders and conformity with group pressure (following Milgram …) but rather as indicative of deeper processes of social influence, such as identification with the source of influence and internalization of group discourse" (228). Indeed, the oft reported findings of moral disengagement, depersonalization, distancing of the perpetrator from the event and his or her action, diffusion of responsibility, subordination of individual agency to the group, loss of intellectual and emotional bearings, agentic powerlessness and feelings of automaticity and choicelessness (all of which we also found in our study), *serve an identitary function*; they arise as possibility precisely from identitary investments, and well in two ways. On the one hand, the investment in the group involves the self giving itself (up), but on the other hand, in the aftermath of the event, the very manner of memory and the event's retelling and reconstructed meaning also arises from the self's protective gathering of itself in a subjective discursive reconstruction of what happened.

An identitary component to the politically violent act, however, does not necessarily translate to an individually agentic one. Ricoeur (1992) distinguishes between two fundamental aspects of the self: *ipse* being selfhood, an inexpressible inner core marking who we "really" are, whereas *idem* is an identity forged from sameness and constancy, a conscious access to, and articulation of, the self's contents or attributes. Every single participant reported a loss of ipse, or a sense of who they were "fundamentally" and at some ineffable or inexpressible non-location. This, however, was not a loss to some vacant, unthinking and zombie-like end; inasmuch as there *was* a sense of agency, it was derived from, constructed by, or given content by a group, such that volition/idem both served and became a function of membership in that group[7].

---

[7]   The astute reader may think of Erich Fromm's escapes from freedom here (Fromm, 1976/1941). We would not challenge such connections at all.

The Study: Capitulation

We believe our companion studies (Mbuqe [2010], Mbuqe & Laubscher [2019]) to be rigorous and important, especially so for its qualitative and interpretative location within a human science tradition. It is, though, fundamentally a truth derived from presence, from what presented itself, and from our attentiveness to the spoor of the "readable" and the given. The "data" for the studies – the interviews of the perpetrators, the court transcripts of the hearings, the transcripts of the TRC, and its literary recounting thereof in Antjie Krog's (2000) text – were all within sight (even when the interrogative of our methodology opened up new lines of sight), and within our intellectual grasp for an understanding organization into themes and patterns, and even as we decried a natural scientific explanatory law[8]. It is important to assert that we are not setting our methodology – hermeneutic semiology – up as as a caricature or straw person, focused simply and simplistically on presence (it is precisely not about essential or underlying meanings to the phenomenon revealed by its presencing); the point is much rather the seduction for the researcher to stay within the safety of what presents itself, and that the scholar's occupational herald to truth must be located in the evidentiary veridical of the phenomenon as presence, given to the taming grasp of reason.

Yet, for all our confidence in the scholarly *dayenu* of our project, we nonetheless felt that "something" was "missing" (or, as it turns out later, "someone"). Perhaps, to give due credence again to a robust epistemological and methodological frame, the spark for this discomfort might also have been abetted by the deconstructive interrogative of our method, reminding us as it did that whereas we've brought into a system of signs what was, the truth of the event as event was gone; there could never be a "lining up" of the event "as it was" with its representation in the present. Even more so, not only does the thing not exist as told or remembered, it *never* existed as a thing-in-itself – it was always an overflowing and an excessive absence in the midst of its presence(ing)[9].

Thus, we re-turned to the data for precisely that which could not be explained, understood, or which resisted neat narration and thematic domestication. Where were the moments that the story could not close around itself, or which parts of its telling were relegated to the footnote, the cutting floor, or the garbage pail? In a sense, we were following John Caputo's example, whose radical hermeneutics (1987; 2000) positioned him as a "supplementary clerk", collecting the "scraps" of "experience that

---

[8] The reference here is of course to the oft quoted distinction of Wilhelm Dilthey's (1989/1883), of a human science (*geisteswissenschaften*) seeking understanding (*verstehen*), as opposed to a natural science (*naturwissenschaften*) seeking explanation (*erklaren*).

[9] Philosophically, the obvious inspiration here is to Derrida (for example, 1978/1976; 1998/1967), but closer to a psychological home, patently also Sigmund Freud.

are excluded, neglected, or allergic to the systems that already exist" (Hall, 2015: 66). One such data "scrap" was a fleeting and rather puzzling event mentioned first in the court transcripts of the perpetrators' trial (Supreme Court, 1986).

In the executing heat of the moment, Nombulelo's killers did something strange: they threw sand on her face so that it did not burn. In the linear, rational logic of the court, the advocate for the State meticulously led the audience through a chronology of events, attempting to make evidentiary causal and motivational connections with which to explain the act, appropriate blame/responsibility, such that just and fair punishment could be apportioned. Upon listing this action, though – the perpetrators throwing sand on the face of the burning victim – the advocate for the state runs into trouble eliciting explanatory answers, and he swiftly moves on. Later, in his summation, Justice Kannemeyer returns to the event, noting that "Number 3 accused … ordered him [State Witness] to throw sand over the head of the deceased to prevent that portion of her body from burning. This he did, though it is not clear what the purpose of this operation was" (Supreme Court of South Africa, 1986: 170). And thus the act was destined to pass into oblivion, a footnote in the court's record, a data scrap outside of the story's thrust, and wholly incidental to its meaning. Perhaps even less because it was incidental to meaning than because it had *no* meaning by the gavel of reason and explanation.

Except that this act insinuated itself in us, in all the senses of the word's etymology, which is also to say its unconscious. The perpetrators, for all their ability to articulate the event in political and socio-historical terms, nonetheless stumbled and struggled as we pressed them to this moment of murder. Meaningfully in itself, they resorted to their first language, *isiXhosa*, seeking a description and response there which they delivered in a manner we struggled to characterize – quiet resignation, haunted persecution, or awed reverence? All, or none of those? We could not decide. As for what they said, pressed to the disaster[10] of the moment, they haltingly settled on "*isikizi*" and "*into engathethekiyo*".

"*No [hayi] yayingekho into ndandiyifila, qha ke net into endandiyifila njena yayingamasikizi nangona siyenza lento but yayingamasikizi* because *ukubulawa komntu yabona*?" (No there was nothing that I felt, only/except that I felt it was *scary* (gruesome). Although we were doing it, it was *scary* (horrible); it was *scary* (abominable) because it was a killing of a person you see?") (Mbuqe, 2010, pp. 158-159). The difficulty with translation rears its head here, as it must: there is no "really

---

10   We are powerfully drawn to the literal notion of the disaster as dis (ill) + astrum (star) – an "ill star"; to have lost one's guiding star such that one wanders without guidance in the black of night.

right" or corresponding English word for *isikizi*, the closest being "scary", "gruesome", "horrible", "abomination". It is an abomination and a kind of dread, an expectation of something disastrous about to happen, not to you directly or materially even, but nonetheless that something is about to happen that will haunt you forever. It is not that "there was nothing that I felt," but that what I felt was nothing of this world, nothing that lends itself to this world and this word. It is something like looking out your window, seeing your child in the front yard playing with a ball, when it bounces into the street as a truck which the child does not see approaches down the hill – this is the moment of *isikizi*, the dread of something that might happen, that hasn't happened yet, that does not happen to you, even as it does, and even as it always and forever will. *Amasikizi* comes from elsewhere – an unspeakable and untranslatable word for what is unspeakable and cannot be worded. The English word abomination (*ab homine*: away from man/human being) contains this notion of an omen from an unworldly or otherworldly realm. Moreover, it is not just that it was "horrible", but also that horror had overcome/overtaken one. P3 uses both these senses of the word, of the event being *amasikizi* and of him "having" *amasikizi*, being possessed by it. Relatedly, P2 responds with the phrase *into engathethekiyo* – "something unspeakable" or "something extraordinary". The moment of the disaster is what you cannot bear to talk about, as well as what language cannot bear. The plural/state of *ama*sikizi possesses one in a singular (*isi*kizi) way, to and from a place where there is no language or speech (*into engathethekiyo*); only the unthinking, "meaningless" act of throwing sand on her face so that it does not burn.

It is here, then, that the order of our research changed. As we intimated at the beginning of this section, even with a robust methodology such as hermeneutic semiology, it was still that we proceeded to the text in order to read, interpret, and sniff out a meaning. To the analogy of what is present to the eye and sight, we add the reach of the hand and grasping – to seize and apprehend the phenomenon by our power, by overpowering it; to bend the texts to our will, and to show it the force of our ability and energy – in other words, a violence. As befits the "responsible" researcher, we approached the texts with a research question, agenda, and procedure, motivated by the presumption both that an understanding truth was to be had, as well as – thruth be told – the broad shape of that truth.

Not until this undisciplined scrap of data presented itself, not until the perpetrators threw sand on Nombulelo Dilato's face, did we finally face up to seeing her face. The niggling sense that "something" was missing from our research, the good and excellent of our scholarship notwithstanding, was realized in meeting with a ghost. For all our interest in her death, Nombulelo Dilato was nowhere present, really, or to the extent that she was, she was a mere catalyst, variable, or tool for others to explain themselves

with, or for us to understand "political violence" by. Ultimately though, she was wholly ignored, and her cries silenced – which is to say, we all killed her again; until she spoke to us by showing her face, and by singling us out to mark her, heed her, and listen to her. We set out to "understand" political violence, but never asked the one person who could tell us in a singular way about that violence. What and how is it, then, for the scholar to give countenance to the dead and to her whose dying is "like a calling out to me"? (Levinas, 1998a/1974: 104).

The order of our research and our research's order

Our re-search, etymologically to search *again* (quite literally to go around the circle anew [re + circus/circare]), was now to do so by a wholly/(holy) different marching order. Nombulelo Dilato's challenge was for our research, and for us as researchers, to address her, directly, in the vocative, by her proper name, and by the order – and ordination, Levinas (1969/1961) would say – of a singular response.

We have referenced Emmanuel Levinas on a few occasions, now, and whereas any attempt to "explain" or "summarize" his complex and radical philosophy would be sheer folly, we do appeal to the wisdom of the fool, at least with respect to some context for Levinas's conception of "the face", which has such obvious resonance with our study. The "I", Levinas says, operates in the world as an egology – the alterity of the world and objects in the world is eradicated by the "I"s subsumption and consumption, by its working over of the world in labor, possession, knowledge or enjoyment. As such, the world serves the needs of a totalizing, ontologizing I. For Levinas, however, this emphasis is all wrong: the truth is that for all our attention on (ontological) need, it is in (metaphysical) desire that we find the first word of philosophy, indeed of all knowing and of subjectivity itself. Where need is a movement of interiority, of an ego, desire is a movement outside oneself, where truth is the property of the other, and where "the desired", like goodness or love, does not fulfill the desire, but deepens it. It is in the other and the face of the other that this metaphysical desire is concretized; it is in the inability of the I to absorb or possess the other's alterity, as one does food or drink, or as one labors to transform the world to our need or enjoyment, that one catches sight of the transcendent (or infinity) which is the absolutely other.

It is a common misconception to think of Levinas's use of the face or "visage" as an actual face, as in the presence of another person. What is concretized in the actual encounter with another, however, escapes phenomenality altogether – it is the primordial ethical call of the face of which the first word is obligation. The relation with the face is, consequently and in the first instance, not a spatial one at all, but an ethical one. Inasmuch as the face speaks, it is to express a demand and command – it is to lodge an appeal within which my response is my responsibility. If, now, the

ethical command of the face is "thou shalt not kill", the fact of our case, violence, and the world is that murder happens all too regularly. The point is, though, that "murder exercises a power over what escapes power" (Levinas, 1969/1961: 198) – that is, the face is a sensible datum which, as such, is exposed to my power, but which cannot be appropriated or totalized in knowledge. The face refuses the economy of comprehension – even as it appears in sensibility, its meaning can never be exhausted, or turned into a content as can a tree or a piece of bread. It remains totally transcendent and infinitely foreign. Murder, now, is "not to dominate but to annihilate; it is to renounce comprehension absolutely" (Levinas, 1969/1961: 198). In a very real sense, the other is the only being I can want to kill because it is an independent existent whose alterity is absolutely beyond my power.

Our research, now, no longer proceeded from a question posed to the text, as much as a response to being deposed by the dead's singular s/election of me, of us, to "… say the loneliness of those who thought themselves dying at the same time as Justice" (Levinas, 1996: 120). Edith Wyschogrod addresses the historian in particular, but her words are to be taken seriously by any ethical scholar who recognises in the face(s) of the dead that research is a "responsibility mandated by another who is absent, cannot speak for herself, one whose actual face the historian may never see, yet to whom 'giving countenance' becomes a task" (1998: xii).

Violence desires mastery, a grasp of the other to the ends and agency of my will and purpose. This is also how we use the term to reference explanation and understanding as violence: as researchers, we reduce the alterity of the other to a law, concept, or thought whose content s/he has become. This is also Levinas's (1969/1961) *j'accuse* for all of western philosophy, of a totalizing ontology that dismisses the transcendent infinity of the other as radically other. The other, however, is what cannot be mastered, and it is precisely the absolute defenseless and naked face that cannot be killed, even in killing. Put differently, "the ethical exigency is not an ontological necessity" (Levinas, 1985: 87), and whereas the transcendent meaning of the face is the "thou shalt not kill", that prohibition does not render murder impossible. Yet, whereas the expression of the face "does not defy the feebleness of my powers, but my ability for power" (Levinas, 1969/1961: 198), it is also the site of an ethical resistance, the powerless power of the destitute by which one is claimed, obligated and obliged. In the *isikizi* moment of their realization of just this fact, the perpetrators respond by throwing sand on her face, recognizing (*re-cognoscere*, "learning anew/again") that there is no mastery in their violence and that, in fact, they are the ones being touched, called, and claimed. And so too for us, as researchers: the study is not so much ours to grasp in understanding, than to *be* grasped in responsibility.

The participants all remarked in one way or another that they agreed to speak to us because they wanted to "set the record straight", that they "regretted" not being "given the opportunity" to "face" Nombulelo's family at the TRC hearings, or to "explain" themselves, or seek forgiveness, or tell the "truth" of their actions. This desire is of course an impossible, yearning fantasy. There is no way, whether by the sentence of the court, the amnesty and pardon of the political, or the research truth of the scholar, that they would have settled their "debt to society", be "productive citizens", "atoned", told a "truth" to set them free, or be absolved in forgiveness. To be sure, the court can adjudicate culpability, and assign a sentence, but culpability is not responsibility. Culpability chains the person to an act, and a behavior; responsibility, on the o/ther hand, chains the person to an O/other and the transcendence of infinity. The TRC, likewise, could offer truth and even facilitate reconciliation, but not forgiveness: the only person who can forgive them to the measure of their desire, is Nombulelo Dilato. For them, as for us, Nombulelo Dilato's face prompts the non-structural structure of a response that is straightaway ethical, and which challenges our cognizing task to something beyond essence, as something otherwise than being (Levinas, 1998a/1974).

If, now, we've argued for a wholly (holy) different beginning (again), an ethical and metaphysical origin prior to any beginning – if that is the marching order for our research, what is its step, or how are we to step? It is impossible to answer such a question definitively; conscious access to an otherwise than being always already renders it being otherwise – we only have access to a shared, lawful language of the ontological. Yet, and at the same time, there are steps we took, which we could share – not as recipe or directive, as much as testimony and confession. And, its thematised organization below notwithstanding, it all really proceeds from the ethical order of the other, not altogether unlike Derrida's lyrical likening of Levinas's thought to the "… infinite insistence of waves on a beach: return and repetition, always, of the same wave against the same shore, in which, however, as each return recapitulates itself, it also infinitely renews and enriches itself" (Derrida, 1978/1967, p. 312).

The research step, or, Gradiva's footfall
Research as Witness and Testimony
Laubscher (2010a) provides a fuller account of an "hauntological" scholarship, premised on witness and testimony, but suffice it to restate here that to advocate such a thinking is for the researchers to ask less what the data (experience) means, than how it is to be acknowledged. This does not mean an end to scholarship as it does a different kind of truth; in truth, such an ethical metaphysic founds (knowing) truth. A problem that calls for knowing begins in proximity, and "… the order of meaning … is precisely what comes to us from the inter-human relationship, so that the Face … is the beginning of intelligibility" (Levinas, 1998b: 103). Having seen Nombulelo, speaking *to*,

of, and even *for* her, is to bear witness, and to offer testimony. To bear witness is to suffer (*sub* + *ferre*: to bear/carry from below) truth; it is to carry a singular responsibility, "*to bear the solitude* of a responsibility, and *to bear the responsibility* precisely, of that solitude" (Felman & Laub, 1992: 3). The witness is a haunted subject, carrying the other in him or her, being marked and bearing the mark of "having seen, and having borne witness, which is also to be born as witness" (Laubscher, 2010a: 57).

Is it not now that the participants' plea to "get the story straight", and the pressure for them to tell, is also Nombulelo speaking in and through them; for them to tell of her presence in absence – "as though an order slipped into my consciousness like a thief, smuggled itself in" (Levinas, 1998: 13). In short, to testify, which is to respond now to the haunting other in me, to the other who sees me, and demands a response, is to provide a singular account, as participant and as reseacher; it is to offer (and lest we forget, "offer" departs from the same etymological port as "suffer": *ob-* + *ferre*, hence to bring or present before an other our load, our suffering) an account that could not have been anyone else's, demanding as it does a signatory response that is not, in the first instance, of understanding, but of witness testifying in "a mode of responding … that exceeds our epistemological determination and becomes an ethical involvement" (Hatley, 2000: 2-3).

Research that says "yes"
The reference here is firstly to Levinas' response before the call of the other, "… as if this call came rightfully to find you, you and no one else … an appeal whose only trace is found now in your … your own response. Yes?" (Douglas, 2011: 23). By example, as in a marriage vow, we say yes to another in the affirmative commitment to a relational responsibility; saying "yes" to the question "do you take this man/woman", is a response that simultaneously affirms and indeed performs, a responsibility. To say yes to the other is to be hospitable to his or her call, needs, and demand.

But it is also to say yes to surprise – to the incalculable seizure (sur-prise) that is outside of our agency, as in the unanticipated knock on the door of our homes, or our borders. It is, in the Levinasian researcher's register, the welcome mat outside a door that conveys a hospitable openness to the surprise of who shows up, and to a denucleited knowing, which is also an unknowing.

Research that unsays and can say unknowing
As researchers and experts, clinicians and professors, we rely on a body of expert knowledge with which we assume to know, or by which we believe we *can* know. Explicitly or implicity, we frame our task and responsibility to a certain (scientific) (objective) truth, a generalized law which is our contribution to humanity for the belief that it betters, inoculates, or otherwise assists in an upward developmental trajectory

to humankind. It is apparent, we trust, that our notion of truth differs from this egoic adventure whereby the "… knowing being lets the known being manifest itself" (Levinas, 1969/1961: 42), almost always by a conceptual and theoretical third term "which is itself not a being" and by which "the encounter of the same with the other is deadened" (42). Our view is that all truth, all knowledge, proceeds from the ethical call, which is a calling into question of the "same by the other … as the ethics that accomplishes the critical essence of knowledge" (43). This is true in all cases, but perhaps particularly so for trauma, violence, and suffering. "The language of pain, screams and groans, crying and sobbing, a language of blood and tears, is an address from the victim that exceeds intelligibility" (Hall, 2015: 101). The research "data", now, is not a text to be read and explained, but an encounter with an other whose tears calls for a singular I to respond – not as an ego, but as an I that signs, in a deictic and anaphoric research which does not presume to know the unnaemable as much as it promises to name the dead, in my name, by my (counter)signature. Again, we are not proposing a truth in opposition to "reason" or "knowing" –our very writing here would condemn such a position *eo ipso* – but that truth as "modality of relation" in fact "ensure(s) its fundamental aspiration, the respect for being illuminating the intellect" (Levinas, 1992: 64). Our "knowing" has to be open to its own betrayal, and to an "unknowing" which acknowledges the scandal of our impossible task: to describe the indescribable, represent the unrepresentable, and speak the unspeakable.

As scholars we must speak, we must posit a truth: echoing Judith Butler (2004), it is not that we give up speech or abandon representation, but that we use representation to reveal the failure of representation: "There is something unrepresentable that we nevertheless seek to represent, and that paradox must be retained in the representation we give" (Butler, 2004: 144). We have to "unsay" our work, for example by "stretching" language to its limits and to reveal its limits, by a critique that continuously calls into question, and by the realization that whereas meaning is made in presence, to give meaning to presence "is an event irreducible to evidence" (Levinas, 1969: 66).

In *Otherwise than being* (1998a/1974), Levinas distinguishes between the *Saying* and the *Said*, where the Said is textuality (propositions about the world and truth, for example), but the Saying "is antecedent to the very signs it assembles" (Laubscher, 2010b: 60), "speaking"/testifying as it does to the exposure and proximity to the other. Yet, whereas the saying can never be fully present in the Said, and exceeds every Said, it is only through the Said that we have access to it as a trace, and a mark. "It is not a theme but can only be discussed in terms of themes" (Davis, 1997: 76). As researchers and scholars attuned to such an "intrigue of Saying", which is also an "intrigue of responsibility", the task is a testimony of an unfurling unsaying, "… a saying that must also be unsaid … in order to thus extract the *otherwise than being*

from the said (which) already comes to signify only a *being otherwise*" (Levinas, 1998a/1974: 7).

Shortly after recounting the murder of Nombulelo Dilato in her account of the TRC, Antjie Krog writes that "I stammer. I freeze. I am without language" (Krog, 1998: 55). But she writes a poem, the very first in the book, and one of only a handful: "dare I sit in this grape dark /during this return journey where my body is overcome/ by grief my heart coagulate resigned // write I- a blue slit against this all …" (Krog, 1998: 53). Poetry may well be a prime example of unsaying and of the saying in the said. The academic language of the psychological researcher interested in political violence may well disallow poetry as such, or in our voice, but it should allow us to point to it, quote it, and present it as the "data" it fundamentally also is. Indeed, *how* the researcher follows the saying cannot be calculated, nor prescribed; neither can we rest assured by some measure of its achievement here, even if we quote poetry. But we can pledge to say yes-yes.

Research that says yes-yes, that is, promises
Earlier we noted hospitality as the yes to what comes; to that inaugural yes, we now add Derrida's (1992) promissory yes as active countersignature. If the first yes is to acknowledge the other's call, the second yes (and every other thereafter) is in the order of a pledge and a promise, which is also to say the opening of a future (Laubscher, 2010b). Earlier, we used the marriage vow to illustrate the "yes" that inaugurates a certain relational responsibility. That public yes, however, is only the first of a series of affirmations to the vow. In order for the marriage to work, and the promise to be fulfilled, we have to say yes to each other every day of our lives together. It is a tenous and precarious affirmation, to be sure, by the very structural nature of betrayal as constitutive of the promise – it is only because it is not guaranteed, only because I may not deliver, that it is a promise, and not fact. The "second yes is an answer to the first … (and) … depends upon the promise to remember and the memory of the promise" (Laubscher, 2010: 378). This is the continuing responsibility, activism even, to say and unsay, and for our research to be the expression of a promise and a pledge, even a vow. The order of our responsibility has changed by this promise: for our response to be our responsibility, whom we are responsible to, as researchers and scholars, whom we address our research to, changes from the impersonal commitment to truth or law, and from existence to existents[11], even though they are dead or not yet.

Research that listens to presence otherwise, and an otherwise than presence
The latter phrase – an otherwise than presence – is in a certain sense another way

---

[11]   The allusion here is to Levinas' early text, Existence and Existents (2017/1947), which responds quite particularly to reverse the Heideggerian primacy of Being (Existence) over beings (existents).

of restating the call of the other from elsewhere, and of specters whose "presence" cannot be tamed by presence. But in addition to the "presence" of an absent wind on one's cheeks, there is also the caress of a lover which is a touch but not a grasp. Our research also needs to cultivate an ability to listen for presence otherwise, such that we can for example listen to the presence of sensibility, affectivity, the body, space and place, or the other than human. Whereas we have not reported on it here, for example, Mbuqe (2010) powerfully listens to Colesberg, the town, and the space of the Karoo, not merely as an incidental place where Nombulelo Dilato is killed, as if she could have been killed anywhere else, but of Colesberg as a witness, if not participant, by its very spatiality and circuits of relationality.

Endings, which is to say ellipses …

A quote by Archbishop Desmond Tutu introduced this paper, as it did Mbuqe & Laubscher (2019): "we are bound up in a delicate network of interdependence because as we say in our African idiom a person is a person through other persons." The inspiration for the quote is a timeless Xhosa proverb, *umntu ngumntu ngabantu,* a fundamental statement of humanity and what it is to be human. Beyond the often saccharine and cliched use of this Ubuntu (a distilled shorthand for *Umntu ngumntu ngabantu)*, the proverb's structure reveals more; *ngu-* means "it is," and adding *–mntu* changes it to "he or she is". As such, both the fact of "is-ness", as it were, and that *one* is, is to be announced by *nga-*, a preposition which signals "by means of, through, with, by, about, and concerning"; *Ngabantu* –– it is by means of, through, and by an other person that one becomes/is a person. This declaration of *unobuntu*, of one who has humanity, is never something one can bestow on oneself, but always the gift of an other in relation. It is straightaway ethical, and an obligation that is asymmetrical inasmuch as it is the other person who takes precedence. One's very subjectivity is given by an/other person. The similarities between this seemingly ageless African sense+ability and the philosophy of Levinas is apparent. That a person depends on an/other person for their humanity and personhood is what Tutu (1999) and this common isiXhosa saying references, and Levinas theorizes. It is a claim on all of us, all of us who have now witnessed, and are called to testify, to respond and bear responsibility in an egoically denucleited research which is as straightaway ethical in its response as its responsibility.

In the end, *all* our "data points" – the courts, the TRC, Antjie Krog's text, the interviewees – struggled in some way or other to find a place for responsibility, a responsible truth. The court's search for "truth and justice", the TRC's desire for "truth and reconciliation", Krog's literary decription of "truth and guilt", and the interviewees's wish for "truth and forgiveness", all must now concede that "truth" is the claim of the face of the other to whom a response and an apostrophizing address is due.

Revisiting the question about political violence which prompted our scholarly journey now left us at a very different place than the one we arrived at in Mbuqe & Laubscher (2019). In short, there is no truth, or meaning, to violence, at least not in the sense of a law or hermeneutic essence. In fact, if there is a truth to violence, it is that it disturbs all truth, unsettles language, and points at the unspeakable, the unknowable, the uncanny, and the elsewhere of an other and an otherwise. As such, it calls for a singular response – in our case at the absolute least to say Nombulelo Dilato's name, and to do so as researchers and scholars who, "before saying 'Thus it was'" are also able to "… pronounce the words 'It *ought* not have been thus" (Wyschgrod, 1998: xvii).

As we were finalizing this paper, the bulk of it already written, we went back to some of the data, in the way perhaps that one takes a last look around the house one is about to leave, and before one locks up. To another sur-prize, we came across another wayside data scrap, in keeping with an earlier analogy, which we did not "do" anything with, but now called out to us from a different place of seeing. Across every single data point we've perused, there is only one instance (the TRC hearings) where the following was uttered, in a nondescript sentence, without reference to any question or directive – and without any followup whatsoever from the commissioners. It is a sentence, if not fact, which was never returned to again, or responded to in any way. "She was burnt while she was pregnant" (TRC, 1999). It will be our continuing task, by the sur-prize of this "data scrap", to also say yes, and yes-yes, to a nameless, unborn child.

> "*If he loves justice at least, the "scholar" of the future, the "intellectual" of tomorrow, should learn it and from the ghost. He should learn to live by learning not how to make conversation with the ghost but how to talk with him, with her, how to let them speak or how to give them back speech, even if it is in oneself, in the other, in the other in oneself: they are always there, specters, even if they do not exist, even if they are no longer, even if they are not yet*" (Derrida, 1994: 176)

References

Butler, J (2004) **Precarious life: The powers of mourning and violence**. New York, NY: Verso.

Caputo, J D (1987) **Radical hermeneutics: Repetition, deconstruction, and the hermeneutic project.** Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Caputo, J D (2000) **More radical hermeneutics**. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Davis, C (1997) **Levinas: An introduction**. South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

Derrida, J (1976) **Of Grammatology**. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkings University Press (1967-French).

Derrida, J (1978) **Writing and difference**. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press (1967-French)

Derrida, J (1992) Ulysses Gramophone, in Attridge,D (ed) (1992) **Acts of Literature**. New York: Routledge.

Derrida, J (1994) **Specters of Marx**. New York: Routledge (1993-French).

Dilthey, W (1989) **Introduction to the human sciences**. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press (1883-German).

Douglas, H (2011) **Love & Arms: Violence and justification after Levinas.** Pittsburgh, PA: Trivium Publications.

Felman, S & Laub, D (1992) **Testimony: Crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis, and history**. New York: Routledge.

Foster, D, Haupt, P & De Beer, M (2005) **The theatre of violence: Narratives of protagonists in the South African conflict.** Cape Town: HSRC Press.

Foster, D (2009) Confessions, apologies and perpetrators, In Goboda-Madikizela, P & Van Der Merwe, C (Eds) (2009) **Memory, narrative and forgiveness**. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Fromm, E (1976) **Escape from freedom**. New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston (1941).

Goboda-Madikizela, P (2002) Remorse, forgiveness, and rehumanization: Stories from South Africa. **Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 42(1),** 7-32.

Goboda-Madikizela, P (2003) **A human being died that night: A South Africa story of forgiveness**. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Hall, T (2015) **Trauma at the limit: Bearing witness to the impossible of survivor testimony**,Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA, USA.

Hatley, J (2000) **Suffering witness. The quandary of responsibility after the irreparable**. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Kraft, R N (2014) **Violent accounts: Understanding the psychology of perpetrators through South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.** New York, NY: New York University Press.

Krog, A (2000) **Country of my skull: Guilt, sorrow, and the limits of forgiveness in the new South Africa.** New York: Three Rivers Press.

Laubscher, L (2010a) Working with the Apartheid archive: Or, of witness and testimony. **Psychology in Society (PINS), 40**, 49-63.

Laubscher, L (2010b) Facing the apartheid archive, or, of archons and researchers. **South African Journal of Psychology, 40(4)**, 370-381.

Levinas, E (1969) **Totality and infinity: An essay on exteriority**. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press (1961-French).

Levias, E (1978) **Existence and existents**.Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press (1947-French).

Levinas, E (1985) **Ethics and infinity**. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press (1982).

Levinas, E (1996) Nameless, **In Proper Names**. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Levinas, E (1998a) **Otherwise than Being**. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press (1974-French)

Levinas, E (1998b) **Entre nous: On thinking-of-the-other**. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Lingis, A (1987) Translators Introduction, **In Collected Philosophical Papers: Emmanuel Levinas**. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.

Litman, R & Paluck, E (2015) The cycle of violence: Understanding individual participation in collective violence. **Advances in Political Psychology, 36** (suppl. 1), 79-99.

Mbuqe, S. (2010). **Political violence in South Africa: A case study of 'necklacing' in Colesberg,** Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA, USA.

Mbuqe, S., & Laubscher, L. (2019) **Political violence in South Africa: A case study of 'Necklacing' in Colesberg**. Manuscript submitted for publication.

Rauschenbach, M, Staerklé, C & Scalia, D (2016) Accused for involvement in collective violence: The discursive reconstruction of agency and identity by perpetrators of international crimes. **Political Psychology, 37(2)**, 219-235.

Ricoeur, P (1992) **Oneself as another**. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Silverman, H J (1994) **Textualities**. New York: Routledge.

Supreme Court of South Africa (1986) **"*Case number CC755/86*." Vol. 1-2**, 1-213.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1999) **Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report (Vols. 1-5)**. Basingstoke: Macmillan Reference Limited.

Tutu, D M (1999*) **No future without forgiveness**. New York: An Image Book.

Wyschogrod, E (1998) **An ethics of remembering**. Chicago, Il: University of Chicago Press.